

Voluntary Organisations Disability Group Representation to the Disability UK Survey

February 2021

Introduction

VODG welcomes the government's commitment to creating a National Disability Strategy for Disabled People. The strategy presents an opportunity for the government to remove existing barriers faced by disabled people in many areas of their lives and embed progressive policies across all government departments to support disabled people to live full and rewarding lives, and not 'just receive a service'. It is crucial that the strategy is truly cross departmental and places value on a broad range of outcomes for disabled people.

This cross departmental focus must be supported by system leadership to ensure that the full potential of cross-departmental working, problem solving and solutions, is realised. The role of Disability Minister should therefore sit in the Cabinet and have a cross government remit to ensure the development and implementation of person-centred policies that support and empower disabled people across the entire life course – throughout childhood, into and throughout adulthood and into older age. Such policies must be strongly interconnected across all relevant departments. When the opportunity arises, active consideration should be given to appointing a disabled person to the role, and for the role to closely draw on the lived experience of disabled people themselves.

VODG has been consistent in raising awareness of the significant impact the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had on disabled people and services. With a new strategy and advocacy from the Disability Unit there is an opportunity to address long-standing and enduring systemic issues that have led to barriers and obstacles for many disabled people and their families as well as the organisations and services that support them.

The hallmark of a fair and equitable society includes fully meeting people's needs and enabling disabled people to have full choice and control over their lives, and to be included in society. VODG believes the new strategy must lead to:

- A significant shift in the status of disabled people in society in order to tackle inherent discrimination.
- Disability issues being on par and equal to non-disability issues in the development and implementation of government policies
- A greater stronger recognition of the role of values based voluntary sector services in supporting disabled people.

We further believe that improvements in the following three areas can help achieve these outcomes:

1. Changing perceptions

VODG is concerned that perceptions of disability and disabled people remain unchallenged and there needs to be a significant shift in public and societal attitudes towards disability. There a number of ways the government, through this strategy, can help change negative and unhelpful perceptions, including:

- **Ensure disability inclusion in education and in the workforce**

England's educational system needs to be more responsive to the needs of disabled students and move away from a one-size-fits-all approach which can disadvantage those who learn differently or require additional support. Furthermore, the Access to Work scheme was extended in 2020 to support people with a disability working from home or in the workplace, a more long-term, wide-ranging approach is needed.

- **Ensure disability inclusive policies**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic shone a bright light on how disability inclusive policies are often missing from government responses. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, disability services have been overlooked in the government's COVID-19 policy response. This has been most evident in the implementation of guidance and policy around access to personal protective equipment (PPE), COVID-19 testing, and more recently the government's COVID-19 vaccination programme. It is imperative this strategy moves us towards more disability inclusive policies.

- **Disability hate crime**

Research conducted in 2020 indicates that reports of disability hate crimes continue to rise but few cases make it to court. This National Strategy for Disabled People must advocate for stronger legislation in this area and for The Disability Unit work closely with the justice system to improve the systems in place to prevent and prosecute disability hate crime.

2. Progressive policy development and implementation

The National Strategy for Disabled People must ensure government policy is fully inclusive and considerate of disabled people and the organisations and services that support them.

- **Life transitions**

Through this strategy, the government has an opportunity to review, improve and implement policies that support and empower disabled people across the entire life course. For example, current government policy focuses on employment as a determinant of health (while good for some disabled people, it is not for all). Further to this, for young disabled people moving into adulthood, the focus is on

employment and overlooks, and therefore disregards, potential policy opportunities around alternative options such as community roles.

- **End the reliance on long-stay inpatient units for people with autism, learning disabilities, and mental health conditions**

This strategy must push for the legislation and funding required to protect the thousands of people currently detained in long-stay NHS-funded care and move to provide them with comprehensive, effective and safe provision of care in the community.

- **Social care must be a key tenant of the strategy**

For many disabled people, social care provides support to live fulfilling and independent lives. The increased costs associated in dealing with the pandemic, alongside the long-standing underinvestment in the sector by central government, means many of the vital care and support services that enable people to live fulfilling and independent lives are under threat, and this will have a direct impact on the lives of disabled people as well as knock-on effect on other public services. The strategy must advocate for long-term financial sustainability for the sector as well as full-scale system reform.

3. Recognising the role of the voluntary sector

Disability services have their roots in the voluntary sector. Voluntary sector organisations are values-based, not-for-profit, and often go above and beyond service delivery while contributing to local communities. It is essential that voluntary sector disability organisations can continue to thrive and carry out the innovative work for which they are recognised so that disabled people can lead fulfilling lives. This strategy must press the government to invest in the voluntary sector financially and developing progressive policies, including:

- **Encouragement of relational partnering between local government and the voluntary sector**

In order to ensure the voluntary sector can thrive in the coming years, the government needs to invest in supporting local authorities to strengthen local partnerships and collaborative working with the voluntary sector via improved commissioning practices such as collusive tendering and relational partnerships.

- **Drawing upon the voluntary sector as a solution to improving outcomes in public services**

One such example is NHS England and NHS Improvement's work to re-provide care for disabled people, and those suffering ill-health, out of expensive long-stay hospitals and into their own homes supporting by local community services. By partnering with the voluntary sector to build community provision and move people out of long-stay hospitals, the government can move away from expensive and outdated forms of care and save public funds.

- **Tackling health inequalities among disabled people**

Many voluntary sector providers of care and support can provide a bridge between social care and health and therefore help facilitate access to services for disabled people. The coronavirus pandemic continues to highlight the health inequalities that exist among disabled people compared to non-disabled people and therefore this strategy should include a plan to work with the Department of Health and Social Care and its agencies on reducing such inequalities.

-ENDS-

For more information or to arrange a further a discussion with VODG or our members, please contact research.policy@vodg.org.uk