

Inclusion Gloucestershire & Barnwood Trust Disability Benefits Consultation 2025

Executive Summary

Introduction

In March 2025, the Government published a green paper, Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working, detailing 22 proposed changes to the benefits system for disabled people.

Inclusion Gloucestershire and Barnwood Trust worked together to give people in Gloucestershire an accessible way to feed their views into the Government consultation and to have a voice on this issue.

Five questions were co-produced with Experts by Lived Experience. These were used in an online survey distributed through organisations working with and/or led by disabled people in the county. They were also used in eight focus groups led by these organisations. 38 individuals responded to the survey, and 52 individuals participated in a focus group.

Themes identified from these responses are presented in this report; a summary is below.

Summary of overall findings

We asked people about the impact of specific changes to PIP and the health element of Universal Credit, and the support people would require if the changes went ahead.

Overwhelmingly, people highlighted the negative impact the changes would have. The negative impacts people spoke about most frequently are summarised below.

Negative impact on the community of disabled people

- People anticipated that the changes would cause disabled people significant anxiety and stress.
- They expressed concern for those in the system who would have little or no support.
- It was highlighted that there would be some disabled people who fall through the gaps of this new system, especially if they do not have other support.

Negative impact on mental health and wellbeing

- People highlighted how these changes would:

- reduce their quality of life;
 - worsen their physical health;
 - restrict them from gaining skills or confidence;
 - create social isolation and further alienate them from their community.
- The word “cruel” was used repeatedly.

Negative impact on finances

- People expressed concern for the future and the increased risk of poverty.
- The negative impact on individuals’ financial situations, and those of their family members, was highlighted.
- It was identified disabled people would not be able to afford:
 - Rent
 - Food
 - Medication
 - Carers
 - Therapy
 - Transport

Support with work

In response to being asked what support would be needed to be able to begin working, if the proposed changes went ahead, people highlighted:

- Support needs related to work included support in obtaining work and support in gaining the skills needed for employment.
- People also described adjustments employers would need to make for work to be accessible, such as being able to work from home, having more flexible hours, and employers making workplace adjustments.

Need for greater disability awareness

- It was highlighted that employers need to have more awareness and understanding of the experiences of disabled people.
- People also expressed a wish for assessors in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to have greater disability awareness.
- And, for the Government to consider the lives of disabled people before making changes.

A summary of the key themes identified in the responses to each of the five co-produced questions is provided below.

Question 1

Question: “If you (or someone you know) stopped receiving PIP, what would you need to make you feel supported?”.

Financial support

- The need for more comprehensive financial support was highlighted.
- People expressed a need for specific financial support to:
 - pay rent or housing costs;
 - purchase food;
 - afford health care;
 - access support, such as mental health support;
 - acquire mobility aids (or other specialised equipment);
 - and afford transport.

Support from services

- People said that support from services would need to be easier to access and free.
- Examples of support the respondents said they would need from services include:
 - a care or support worker;
 - access to a care facility;
 - specialised support services;
 - financial advice;
 - and mental health support.

Negative impact on finances

- Financial impact was mentioned frequently.
- It was highlighted that Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is often used to meet the additional costs associated with being disabled. This could be:
 - paying for medical care;
 - mobility aids or equipment;
 - therapy or physiotherapy.
- This could also be paying for opportunities to reduce isolation, such as meeting friends or engaging with the community.

Negative impact on wellbeing and mental health

- There was a perception that there would be people who would fall through the gaps of this new system and suffer because of it.
- It was anticipated that the changes would lead to people feeling worthless and that the government does not care about them.
- It was expressed that losing PIP would create a loss of personal identity, self-worth and increased social isolation.

Negative impact on quality of life

- A higher quality of life could include the ability to access activities that make people feel happy and improve their wellbeing, such as meeting up with friends and engaging with the community.
- Respondents highlighted that these opportunities could become completely inaccessible due to financial constraints.

Question 2

Question: “If the age for claiming PIP and the health element of Universal Credit is changed to 22 years old, what might the impact be for you (or someone you know)?”.

Negative impact on the community of disabled people

- People expressed concern that this change would increase young people’s dependence on their families or on the ‘system’.
- People worried that a delay of young people’s independence would increase social exclusion and impact on their mental health.

Negative impact on finances

- There was concern that there will be a financial impact on young people losing PIP or on families supporting young people without PIP.
- Young people would need to stay with their families for longer, increasing the financial strain on a family.
- There were concerns around young people going into poverty, becoming homeless and not being able to afford to go into education or training.

Negative impact on quality of life

- There was a concern that greater reliance on family would lead to young people foregoing important milestones that others their age would be experiencing.
- Participants expressed concern that, without the support of PIP, young people would no longer feel able to attend higher education or support themselves to gain skills for their long-term future.

Negative impact on wellbeing and mental health

- Respondents expressed concern about the mental health impact on young people who need support and would no longer be eligible to receive that support.
- The mental health impact would be compounded by other concerns mentioned above, such as the financial implications and reduced quality of life.

Question 3

Question: “If you (or someone you know) had to do more Work Capability re-Assessments (WCA), what might the personal impact be?”.

Negative impact on wellbeing and mental health

- Most respondents expressed that Work Capability Assessments had a negative impact on their wellbeing.
- This was either in relation to the possibility of more frequent assessments or having the assessment in general.
- The assessments were not viewed as being compassionate or conducted with empathy, and it was highlighted that they can lead to people feeling invalidated and degraded.
- People stated that these assessments have already given them extreme stress and anxiety.
- Many respondents expressed confusion and frustration about why multiple assessments would be needed if someone has a lifelong, chronic disability.

Negative impact on the community of disabled people

- People expressed that assessments should recognise that a person's disability can have different types and severities of impact on their lives at different times.
- The way someone appears during an assessment is not necessarily reflective of the full range of their day to day experience.
- If someone has a good day and is able to do more, that does not mean they need less support in life.
- People also stated that the system is confusing and not supportive for those trying to access care.

Question 4

Question: "If you (or someone you know) would like to begin working, what would you need to feel supported to work? Support could mean financial, emotional, social, or physical support".

Support with work

- Respondents explained that they would feel supported if they knew they could immediately

access benefits again, without having to wait or be re-assessed, if the job did not work out.

- Respondents also mentioned that they would need more flexibility in their work, specifically around hours required to work and the ability to work from home.

Need for greater disability awareness

- Many people expressed a wish to work and a strong desire to do something valuable with their time.
- It was highlighted that work needs to be achievable and allow people to succeed.
- People discussed the need for suitable opportunities for disabled people, especially regarding jobs that require qualifications, which many disabled people do not have the same opportunities to acquire as non-disabled people.
- Running congruent to the conversation around different types of support needed was the acknowledgement that disabled people should not be consistently expected to know about all the support they require.

Other forms of support

People described other forms of support they would need, such as:

- Accessible transport to and from work
- A personal assistant
- A work coach
- Access to training programmes

Question 5

Question: “Is there anything else you would like to say about the plans to change disability-related benefits?”

Negative impact on the community of disabled people

- Many individuals expressed concern for the wider community of disabled people who would be negatively affected by the proposed changes, as well as the potential impact on themselves.
- Some people focused on the effect this would have on the families of disabled people and carers, including the huge financial impact of supporting their loved ones.

- There were also questions around why disabled people were only being consulted now, and why decisions are not being made in conjunction with the people who would be affected.

Negative impact on wellbeing and mental health

- It was highlighted again that these changes would cause significant stress, anxiety and poor mental health.
- Many people explicitly stated that these changes would be “cruel”, but even more so, as the current system is already felt to be cruel.
- People expressed feeling that the proposed changes were not fair and that marginalised communities were being targeted.

Overall negative impact

- Many people indicated that they were upset and confused by the proposals.
- Some responses were focused on worry and concern for safety and the risk of vulnerability.
- There was concern that being so dependent on other people, even more so than previously, would create more opportunities to be taken advantage of.

- People also felt that these changes would have the opposite effect to the Government's expressed intentions. If the goal is to increase disabled people's ability to work, many people expressed that they believed this would do the opposite.
- People felt that these changes would make it even harder for people to ask for support, and would increase the vulnerability of a group of people who are already vulnerable.