

Breaking Down Barriers: Improving Disabled Political Representation & Participation across the United Kingdom



ABOUT THE DISABILITY POLICY CENTRE

The Disability Policy Centre is an independent not-for-profit think tank, the first of its kind in the United Kingdom. We are dedicated to the development and advancement of policy, ensuring that accessibility is at the heart of legislation. The Disability Policy Centre firmly believes that through collaboration we can make an impact.

Our vision is simple, that by developing practical solutions that deliver real-world results, we will change the lives of disabled people for good. We are committed to the improvement of public services and policy reform, working hard to find practical solutions to secure these changes.

The Disability Policy Centre's mission is to develop the policy solutions that break down barriers for disabled people in every aspect of our society. We collaborate with others and lead the thinking to ensure that nobody is held back from achieving their potential. We are proactive in the drive for improved accessibility and representation for the 1 in 5 disabled people, or people living with a long term health condition, in the United Kingdom.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Celia Hensman

Celia has multiple disabilities including Loeys-Dietz Syndrome, Marfans, POTS and most significantly she lives with a permanent central line in her chest receiving daily blood infusions and complete artificial nutrition. She has never known life without having her disability, and consequently from a young age she has been an active disability rights campaigner.

Celia is an experienced political campaigner on disabled representation, inclusion, and accessibility. She has previously worked as a communication and campaign manager, policy researcher, and disability ambassador. She is a diversity and inclusion specialist consultant, drawing on her own experiences and challenges of living with a disability.

Chloe Schendel-Wilson

Chloe has been working with young people with learning disabilities since she was a teenager, volunteering with the YMCA since the summer that she completed her GCSEs. Working with them right up to today, she now sits on the YMCA East Surrey's Trustee Board.

She has spent the past five years working as a political advisor across both local and national Government. Most recently she led the Outreach Team at Conservative Campaign Headquarters, advising both Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament as the organisational expert on equality and diversity.

OUR STORY

Celia and Chloe met one another whilst campaigning to increase disabled representation in local and national Government. Through their work, Celia and Chloe became aware of the lack of involvement that disabled people had in policy discussions, and the lack of consideration for disability in the formation of legislation. Together they decided that change needed to happen, and The Disability Policy Centre was formed.

Celia and Chloe came together to form two sides of one coin, using their personal experiences to drive forward the fight for the rights of both disabled people and carers across the United Kingdom.

THANKS

The Disability Policy Centre is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that relies on the generosity of its donors, partners and collaborators to execute our work.

Our research department is supported by the generosity of our network, and we would like to thank these individuals, whose generous support has facilitated this paper.

Thank you also goes to all of those who took the time to take part in our research, and all of our partners who have supported us in this journey so far.

ENDORSEMENTS

Chloe Smith MP, Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work

"I am pleased to see the Disability Policy Centre break new ground as a think tank, and produce thought-provoking work like this.

We have already said in the Government's National Disability Strategy that we want to support disabled people holding or standing for public office. To me, representation and participation are crucial.

I look forward to many more contributions from the DPC that can help break down barriers and improve everyday life for disabled people."

The Rt Hon Lord David Blunkett

"I'd like to congratulate the Disability Policy Centre for highlighting the disparity between the number of those with declared disabilities or long-term health conditions, the representation in the House of Commons and, to a lesser extent, the House of Lords and Local Government, which would reflect lived experience and inform both policy and provide a voice in shaping the political agenda.

The recommendations in this report are reminiscent of those that came out of the Speaker's Commission 12 years ago, on which I served. Initially (and this highlights the level of the challenge), this Commission on Equality of Opportunity - in entering and taking part in public life - did not include the issue of "disability"! But the final report was very much focused on access, support, visibility and recognition and, therefore, the practical measures that can be taken to set aside obstacles and overcome barriers.

Having experienced all of those in my very early years in the political arena, I know that we have moved on, but nowhere near far enough! Ironically, the House of Lords have more men and women willing to declare their defined

disability (and I'm not talking about getting older here), than in the House of Commons. Highlighting the continuing fear which goes all the way back to why President Franklin D. Roosevelt himself did not declare his disability, because of concerns about how this might be seen, within his peer group as well as the public reaction, and what might be a detrimental impact.

Having overcome this myself, I'm painfully aware that it is necessary to go the extra mile to ensure that you work on equal terms. And, if you have the capability, the get up and go and the sheer bloody-minded tenacity, you can do even better.

What this report illustrates is the clear need to constantly return to the issues, to surveying and highlighting the stark statistics, to challenge everyone, disabled or otherwise, to do better. To ensure, in short, that issues relating to equality when it comes to disability, are ones for all of us - not just those directly affected.

As the Vision Foundation highlighted last year, attitudes need to change quite dramatically. Employers in general are very wary of interviewing someone with a disability, and the public as a whole, while sympathetic, are still way behind the times in terms of the facilities available, the support systems that exist and the achievements of people with disabilities in all fields of life.

The solutions highlighted by the disability policy centre are frankly not rocket science. In other words, they are not "asking too much". By not investing in practical and necessary measures, engaging and changing attitudes, we lose not only an essential voice and perspective, but great talent and the fulfilment of a desire to serve, an ambition to do well and, of course, an example to others."

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Rightly given the name 'The Mother of All Parliaments', the United Kingdom is home to one of the oldest democracies in the world. The concept of modern Parliamentary Government was itself developed in the Kingdom of England in 1688. The current Cabinet of Her Majesty's Government and the current Parliament of the United Kingdom is the most diverse in Britain's history. However disabled people are still alarmingly absent, disabled people, despite being one of the largest minority groups of the UK, have for too long been shockingly under-represented throughout our political system, at both a local and national level. Disabled people make up one in five of the working-age adults in this country. However, only 8 out of 650 Members of Parliament have declared themselves disabled - just 1.23%. In Local Government, this number is 16.1%. Although this number sounds much higher, it is still nearly 700 Councillors short of being accurately representative of the general population.

The Disability Policy Centre has conducted the following research because we firmly believe that as a country and a society, we can do better. In 21st Century Britain, it is no longer enough for decisions to be made around tables that do not seat elected representatives reflecting the country that they serve. With pressing issues such as the cost of living, finding a solution for adult-social care, and with discussions on the future of work exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unacceptable for decisions to be made about the lives of disabled people that do not include their voices shaping these decisions.

Much in line with the 'Social Model of Disability', the findings of this report conclude that the under-representation of disabled people in political life is often a product of the environments in which people are working. Whether that is in the local council chamber or the political party fundraisers, stereotyping, poor planning and inaccessible campaign techniques are often cutting disabled people off from political engagement at the very first rung of the ladder. In our research conducted with disabled Councillors, Members of

Parliament and party-political activists, The Disability Policy Centre found that there are simple and effective solutions, highlighted in this paper, that can be enacted by both Political Parties and the Government to increase the representation of disabled people at all levels of public and political life.

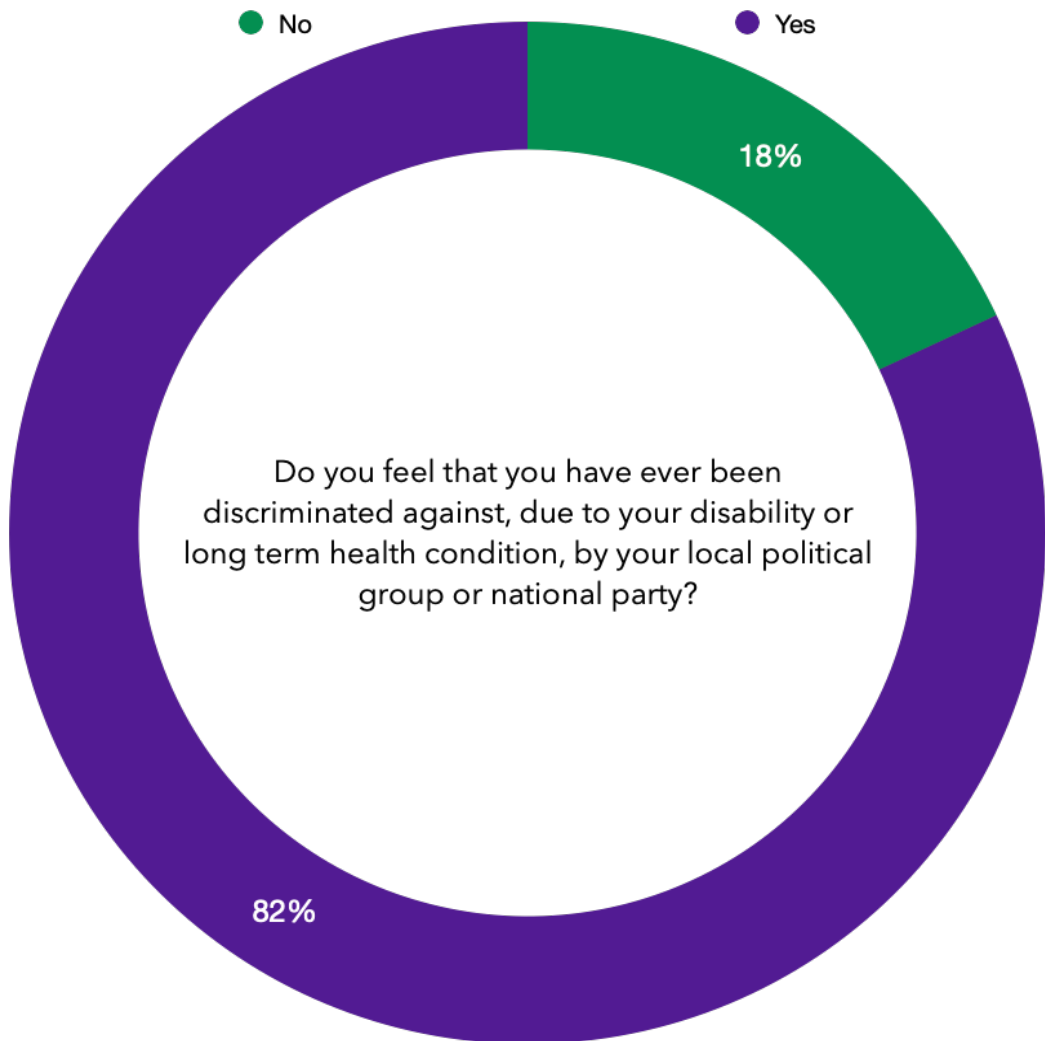
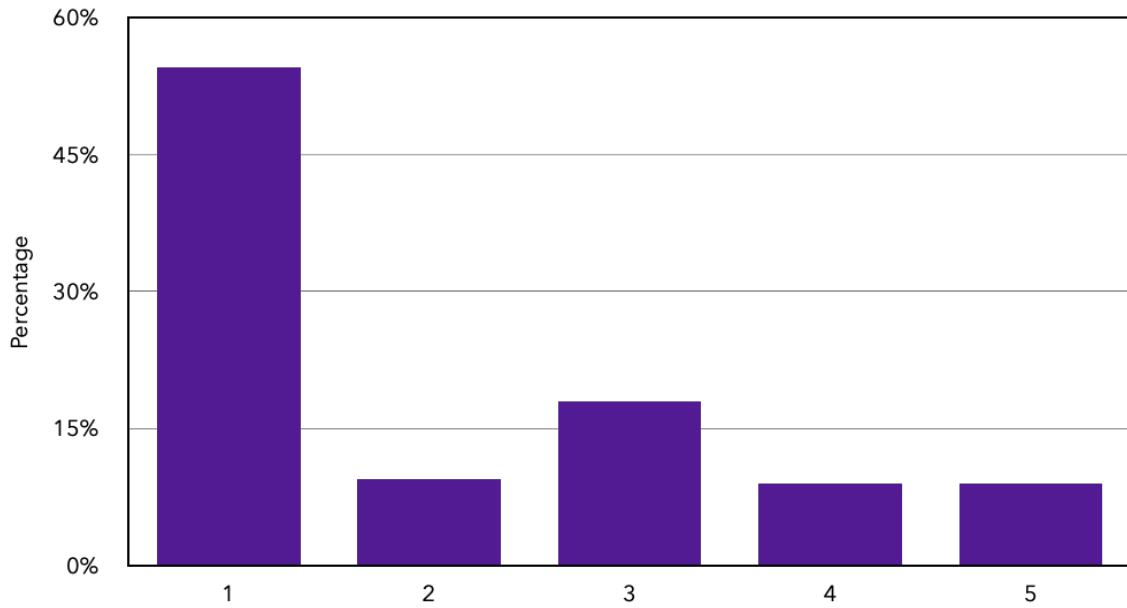
KEY FINDINGS

Research conducted by The Disability Policy Centre found that:

- 82% of disabled people, and those with long term health conditions who were interviewed state that they became initially engaged in politics as a direct result of their disability.
- 100% of those interviewed believe that political parties do not do enough to ensure those with disabilities or long-term health conditions have the same opportunities as those without.
- 100% believe that the Government is not doing enough to plug the gap of the extra financial implications that are burdened onto disabled people who wish to seek election at a local or national level.
- 72% of disabled people, and those with long term health conditions, engaged and participating in politics as a Councillors, activists or Member of Parliament, state that they do not feel comfortable declaring their disability to their political organisation for fear of discrimination.

(Alt-Text: The first graph shows a bar graph with columns numbered 1 through to 5 relating to comfortability to disclose disability. 1; 54.5%, 2; 9.5%, 3; 18%, 4; 9% 5; 9%. The second graph is a doughnut graph which shows the figures stipulated in the key findings of 82% of disabled people, and those with long term health conditions who were interviewed state that they became initially engaged in politics as a direct result of their disability.)

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all, and 5 being completely, how comfortable do you feel to disclose your disability to your local political group or national party?



RECOMMENDATIONS

To tackle the under-representation of disabled people and see a real and tangible shift in the makeup of our political system, The Disability Policy Centre recommends the following recommendations for political parties, local and national Government.

SET A: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

1. Use the Houses of Parliament Restoration and Renewal Program to conduct an extensive review into the accessibility of Parliament for disabled people. Implement any recommendations in full, to ensure that Parliament is accessible for anyone who wishes to seek elected office, visit or be employed in any capacity.
2. Conduct an extensive review into the accessibility of Local Authority buildings across the United Kingdom. Work with local authorities to ensure that services are to a high standard and completely accessible for disabled people.
3. Reinststate a formal funding scheme for Disabled Candidates.
4. Political parties to report annually to The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work on what measures they are putting into place to break down barriers for disabled people within the organisation.

SET B: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

1. Encourage party staff, elected representatives and local association leaders to undertake reviews into how to include and promote disabled party members within their structures. As part of this process, it is recommended that training is implemented for staff and volunteers, to highlight how to break down barriers for disabled people in the organisation.

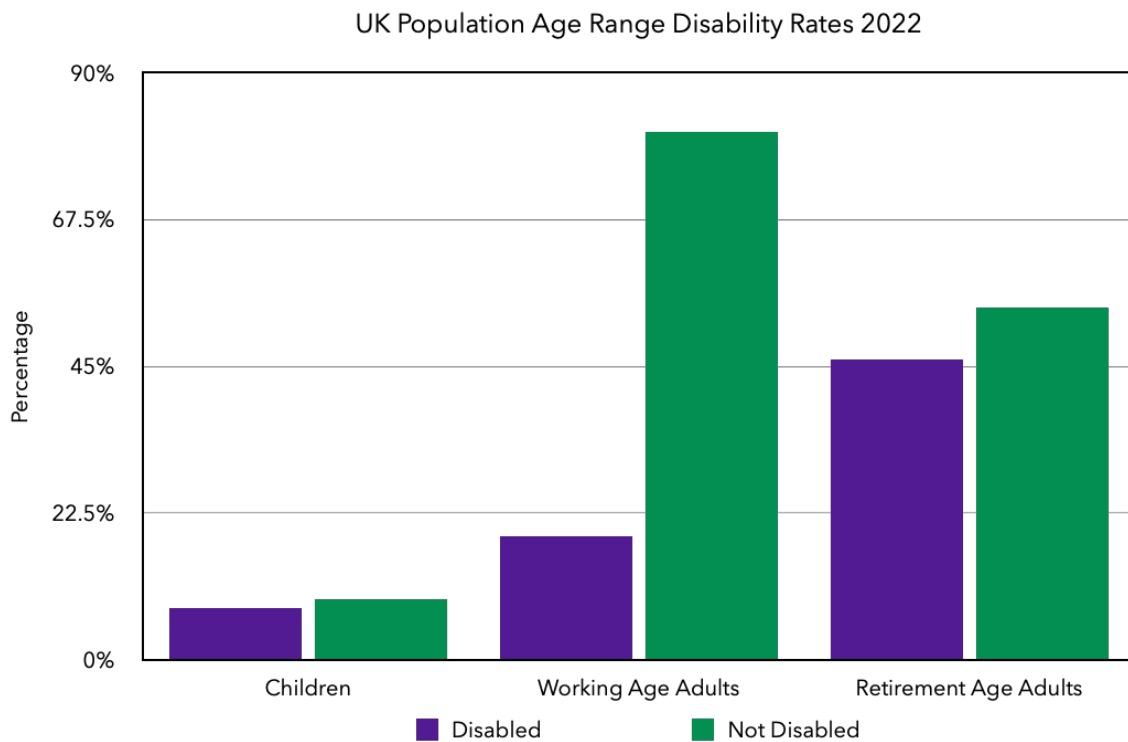
2. Widespread & Sustained Commitment to the Disability Confident Employer Scheme

3. Political parties must acknowledge that current campaigning techniques are not viable for everyone, and actively promote accessible campaigning methods for their members. These techniques must not be viewed as being less credible than traditional campaigning methods.

4. Political parties must conduct immediate reviews into their candidate selection processes for elected representatives at both a local and Parliamentary level, ensuring that all barriers to engagement and participation have been removed where possible.

INTRODUCTION

Disability, under the 2010 Equality Act is defined as ‘a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term effect on your ability to do normal activities’¹. Current statistical data estimates that one in five people in the United Kingdom are disabled or have a long-term health condition. 20% of the working-age adults in the United Kingdom currently identify as disabled,² 8% of children in the UK are disabled and 46% of retirement age adults are disabled.



(Alt-Text: Image shows a bar graph displaying UK population age range disability rates 2022, statistics are stipulated within the paragraph above.)

Throughout this report, the use of the word ‘disabled’ or ‘disability’ refers to those who personally identify in this manner. This is important to note as the actual statistics are likely to be higher than stated, due to those who choose not to identify as being disabled. With actual numbers likely to be higher, the scale

¹ Equality Act 2010

² Scope Equality for Disabled People *The Disability Price Tag 2019 Policy Report* (2019)

of the issue of underrepresentation is even greater than anticipated, and the need for action therefore all the more imperative.

THE MEDICAL AND SOCIAL MODELS OF DISABILITY

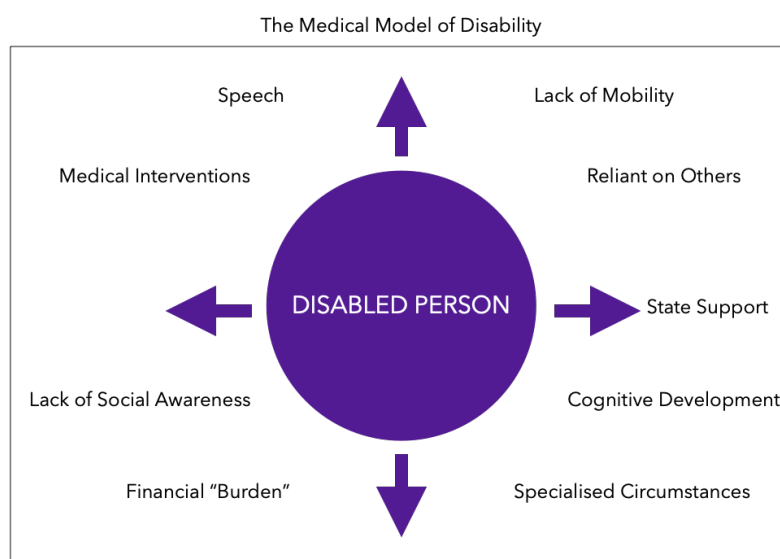
The following study has been commissioned, researched, written and published in its entirety by The Disability Policy Centre. The reader is also to be aware that the following report has been written in line with the Social Model of Disability and not the Medical Model of Disability³.

This is due to the fact that The Medical Model of Disability places first focus on a disability itself, and states that an individual's disability is because of an inability to participate and engage fully within society⁴.

The Social Model of Disability however dictates that the inaccessibility of the social environment is the cause of any inability to participate and engage, not the disability itself.

Society itself must therefore take responsibility, to adapt and allow for disabled people to flourish. The Social Model also emphasises the talents, aspirations, intelligence and

skills of disabled persons and does not adhere to negative stereotypes laid out within the Medical Model, which places sole focus on the impairments and limitations of disabled persons.



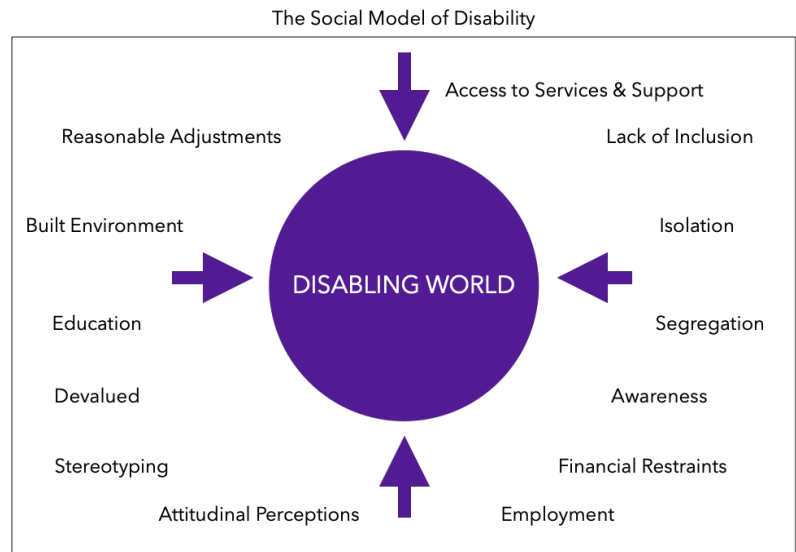
³ Inclusion London, 'The Social Model of Disability' (*InclusionLondon*) <www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/disability-in-london/social-model/the-social-model-of-disability-and-the-cultural-model-of-deafness/>

⁴ Scope, 'Social Model of Disability' (*Scope Equality for Disabled People*) <www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability/>

The Social Model, which emerged in the United Kingdom in the 1980's, at its core empathises the potential societal and economic contributions of disabled people and the need for society to foster an inclusive, accessible and diverse community.

The Social Model promotes that disabled people are

prevented from engagement and participation as a direct result of inaccessible environments, and not solely as a consequence of the medical limitations of their disability. This is the model that The Disability Policy Centre has adopted for the purpose of this paper, and as a guiding philosophy for the organisation.



(Alt-Text: Images show two visual demonstrations of the Medical Model of Disability on the left and the Social Model of Disability on the right. The left graph has a circle in the centre with arrows pointing away from it which reads disabled person, the words around the arrows are; lack of motility, reliant on others, benefits, cognitive development, specialised circumstances, financial burden, lack of social awareness, medical interventions and speech. The right graph has a circle in the centre with arrows pointing towards it which reads disabling world, the words around the arrows are; access to services and support, lack of inclusion, isolation, segregation, awareness, financial restraints, employment, attitudinal perceptions, stereotyping, devalued, education, built environment and reasonable adjustments.)

Throughout this report the term elected representative is adopted, referring to an individual who is in office or holds position, for example as a Local Councillor, Police and Crime Commissioner or Member of Parliament. The reader is to be made aware at the initial stages, that there does not exist accurate and conclusive publicised data relating to the number of disabled representatives in

the UK, at either a local or Parliamentary level⁵. This is because it is up to an individual to declare themselves as to whether they are disabled. As this report will explore, many candidates interviewed in The Disability Policy Centre's research expressed that they were less likely to disclose their disability to a political party or political group for fear of discrimination and therefore a reduced opportunity at electoral success. As demonstration of this, since the 2019 General Election a number of Members of Parliament have come forward to openly disclose their personal experiences with neurodiversity. Therefore, in the instance where this report references the number of disabled elected representatives, due to the lack of accurate and authoritative empirical statistics, it refers to the number of elected representatives who themselves have publicly shared their identification of being disabled.

The Disability Policy Centre recognises non-visible, long-term health conditions, mental health conditions, visible disabilities and neurodiversity with equal validity and qualification under the identification of disability, in line with The Equality Act 2010.

REPRESENTATION IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

At the time of this paper's publication, there are currently 650 Members of Parliament (MPs). There are, however, only 8 Members of Parliament who have declared themselves to be disabled. That is a percentage of 1.23%, compared to 20% of the population of the United Kingdom. The Local Government Association (LGA) National Census of Local Authority Councillors in 2018 estimates that 16.1% of Councillors identified as having a disability or long-term health condition⁶. That number is still almost 700 Councillors off of being 20%.

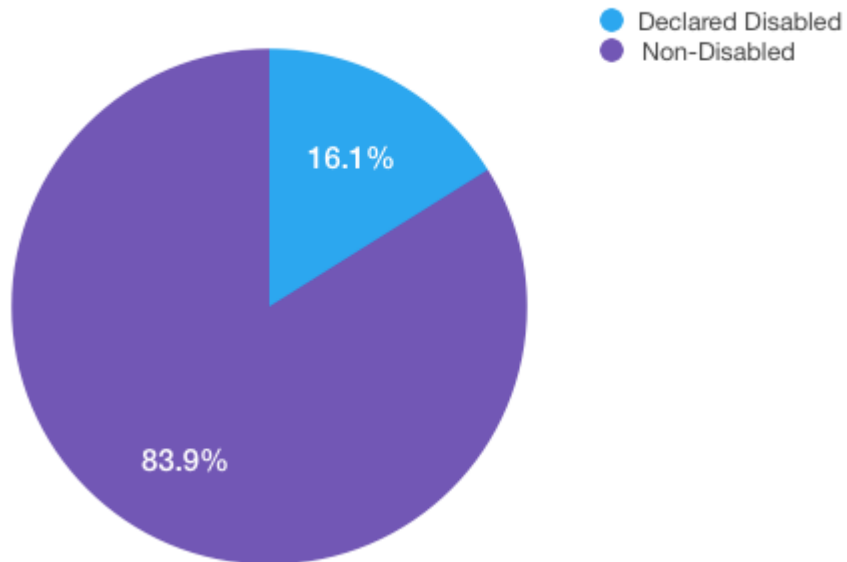
(Alt-Text: Images show 3 pie charts graphs displaying UK elected Councillors disability statistics 2022 and UK elected Members of Parliament declared

⁵ Disability Talk 'Only A Handful of Disabled MP's in our new Parliament' *Disability Talk*

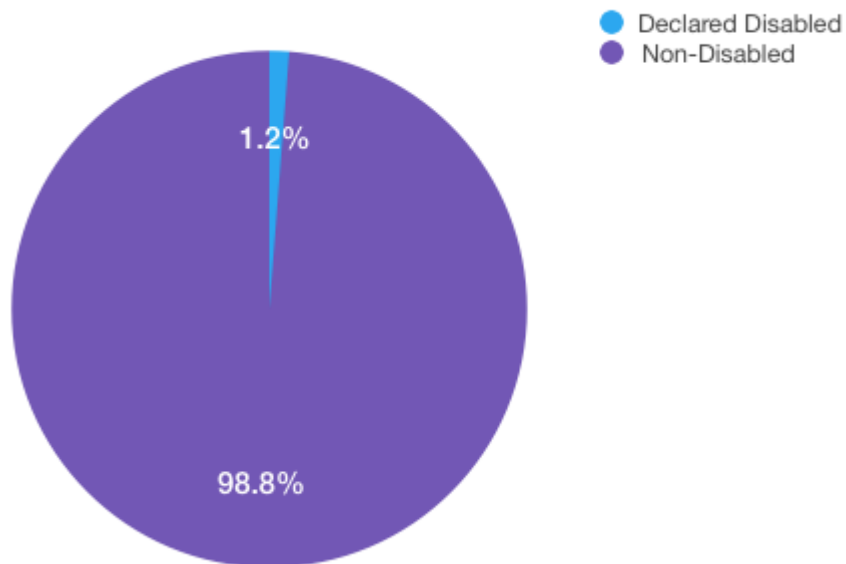
⁶ Local Government Association *National census of local authority Councillors 2018* (2019)

disabilities 2022, and population of the United Kingdom disability rates, statistics are stipulated within the paragraph above.)

Elected Councillors in the United Kingdom⁷

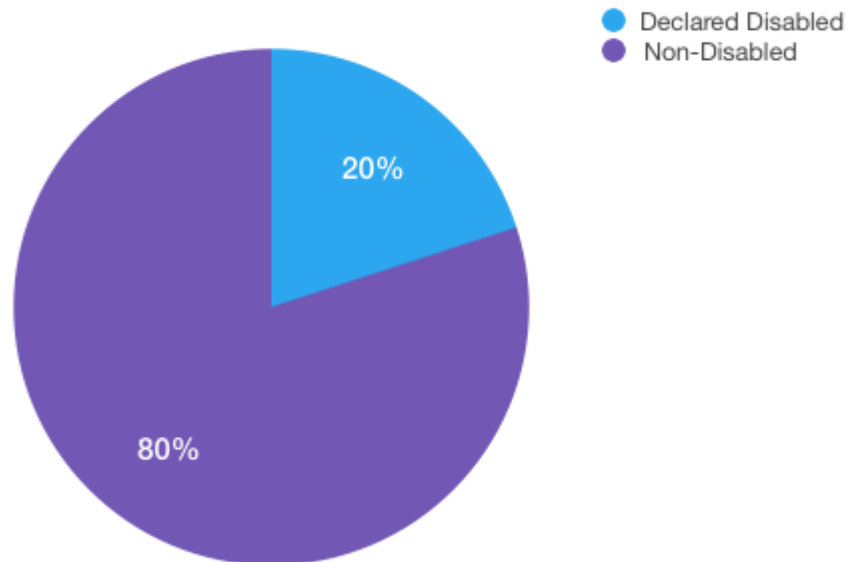


Elected Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom



⁷ Local Government Association *National census of local authority councillors 2018* (2019)

Population of the United Kingdom



A HISTORY OF DISABILITY & THE DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The ostracisation of disabled people from society is traceable back to the dawn of civilisation, with biblical extracts and Roman philosophers describing the prohibition of disabled people from marrying, having children or integrating in society. Disability was viewed as a sign of genetic weakness, a symbol of lack of authority, intelligence, power and influence, both disabled children and their parents were ousted from societal participation, described as defective and a burden to civilisation. Multiple biblical and philosophical academic writings also reference illness and disability as punishment for failure to obey religion or society.

As civilisation began to develop and expand between the 1100's and the 1500s, so came with it outbreaks of disease, illness and genetic conditions. Disabled and illness struck adults and children were removed from their homes and quarantined with other individuals in housing for the 'incapacitated'. The ostracisation of disabled people from society prevailed as normality, hidden

away and left to deteriorate in abhorrent living conditions. Throughout the early centuries of the United Kingdom all 'afflictions' whether physical, neurological or disease born were viewed to be contagious. Often disability was thought to be so contagious individuals would not touch, share food with or enter the same room as disabled people, they were confined to their homes or institutions. The outbreak of leprosy across Europe bears reference to early examples of the segregation of disabled people. Disabled people were viewed as symbols of societal 'failures', living demonstrations of the need for societal progression.

The Renaissance period of the 1300's cemented societal infatuations in Europe with beauty, both physically and beauty as an ability to conform to gender-based roles. Disabled people were ousted even further from society, for failure to conform to these norms. English law permitted the discrimination of disabled people, categorisation between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' allowed for the prevention of assistance, employment and financial responsibilities.

The mediaeval period of the 1400's and the following 1500's saw a further regression of disabled rights and societal perceptions. Disabled people, especially women were viewed as witches, with mediaeval doctors performing purification rituals on the brain and skull to allow for the removal of 'evil'. Disability is still viewed as religious purgatory punishment or the presence of the devil in a soul. In these early stages of formalised society in the United Kingdom, the disabled rights movement was practically non-existent, with few philosophers, academics and medical professionals championing the societal reintroduction of disabled people.

The Industrial Revolution in the 1700's saw the extensive urbanisation of the United Kingdom. With this came the increased prevalence of asylums, workhouses and disability institutions. The rights of disabled people are even further regressed, for disabled people and people with health conditions who were previously fortunate enough to remain at home, were no longer able to

seek shelter in their own abodes, urbanisation saw the lack of privacy and the increased focus of group societal participation capabilities. Those who were deemed to be unproductive for the economy were removed, those unable to work and contribute to society were institutionalised, subjected to horrific treatment, starved, experimented on and abandoned. Disabled people were deemed invaluable and unable to contribute to society, society therefore treated them with disrespect and contempt.

As the industrial revolution began to slow, in the 1800's specific 'schools' for the 'handicapped' were introduced, for disabled people who were viewed as a 'threat' to advancing society. The institutionalisation of disabled people was for life, children were sent never to return to their families, subjected to horrific treatments, experiments and unacceptable care. The institutionalisation of disabled people at this time was predominately used for those with 'visible differences', however in the early 1900's the increased focus on 'mental deficiencies', 'insanity', 'imbeciles' and those who were morally defect, meant the increased incarceration of those with neurological and mental health conditions. Despite the existence of a few medical professionals and academics, disabled rights and the treatment of disabled people was still regressing, there is little and slow progression for the securement of disabled rights in the UK. Disabled people were isolated from society, prevented from participation and marriage, both medical and isolation sterilisation practices were also used.

The first and second World Wars in the first half of the 1900's were pivotal in instigating the increased pace of the progression of disability legislative protection and the disabled rights social movement. Injured and unwell servicemen returning from war received care and attention from both the medical and social system. For one of the first times, disabled people were shown effort to care, rehabilitate and cure, as opposed to institutionalisation where disabled people were left to die often in pain and subjected to experimental treatments and continued sedations. Despite the beginning of the shift of perceptions towards disabled people, stereotyping and the

misconceptions of disabilities prevailed with the use of asylums and institutions still rife.

The 1940s were a moment of victory for the disability rights movement, with the introduction of the Disability Employment Act, and disabled health initiatives, the pace of disabled rights progression began to increase. In 1948 the National Health Service was introduced, disabled people and their families, previously ostracised from society, had increased opportunity to seek medical assistance and treatments. The families of disabled children had increased access to awareness around disability and treatments. The fear of disability lessened, and institutionalisation decreased as parents of disabled and ill children had a better understanding of care and the potentiality of disabled people, the health disparity gap began to close. This introduction of a welfare state saw the beginnings of protection for disabled people. 1948 also saw the birth of the Paralympic Games, for one of the first times, the talents, potential and participation of disabled people was highlighted on a mass scale. Despite the landmark events of 1948, stereotyping and the view that disabled people were an economic and social burden upon society were still prevalent.

The 1900's were a catalyst for the development of the disability rights social movement, with the foundation of charities, organisations and Governmental sectors actively campaigning for progression. Previous passivities of the movement were broken and for one of the first times both disabled and non-disabled people engaged together to campaign for advancement of protections, highlighting the importance of care, accessibility, inequality and social misconceptions. Because of the work of these campaign, in the late 1970s and 1980's the Social Model of disability was placed at the forefront of direct action. The previous Medical Model of disability placed first focus on the disability, and the effect that a disability has on an individual's inability to participate and engage fully within society. The Social Model of disability dictates that under no circumstance is derogatory, offensive or unpleasant language or terms are to be used in relation to disabled people. The model also recognises the talents, aspirations, intelligence and skills of disabled persons

and does not adhere to archaic stereotypes of the Medical Model which places sole focus on the impairments and limitations of disabled persons. The Social Model 1980's at its core empathises the potential societal and economic contributions of disabled people and the need for society to foster an inclusive, accessible and diverse community. The Social Model promotes that disabled people are prevented from engagement and participation as a result of societal environments and lack of accessibility, and not as a sole consequence of their disability, awareness and acceptability begins. This social movement of disability was pivotal in the abolition of institutions and asylums, with the consequential Jay Report highlighting the need for care in the community. The United Kingdom saw a sharp increase in the number of smaller organisations caring for their communities, with NHS local support provisions and more readily accessible community nursing. Throughout the later stages of the 1980's through to today, the United Kingdom has introduced a number of legislative protections for disabled people including The Equality Act and has adopted a number of International directives such as The United Nations Convention. The pace of such adoptions is increasing, with greater care, diligence and attention for the rights and access of disabled people.

Today in the 2020's, disabled people of the United Kingdom have better access to medical support, legislative protections, active disability rights campaigners, charities and organisations, all moving towards the advancement of accessibility, equality and inclusion. As a nation we have come a long way from institutionalisation, asylums and abhorrent medical practises, with communal recognition of the abominable previous treatments of disabled people. However, the advancement of disabled rights is still in its relative infancy, with the introduction of substantial progressive measures only spanning across the last century. Despite operating within a significantly improved environment, the United Kingdom still has an important and vital journey ahead to ensure the removal of the archaic intrinsic accessibility barriers, stereotyping and misconceptions of disabled people that have existed since the dawn of civilisation.

METHODOLOGY

The Disability Policy Centre has conducted a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, combined with conducting interviews, roundtables and surveys in order to produce evidence for the following review. Material that has been collected through both the initial stages of analysis, and throughout the report have included information written and commissioned by Government departments, political parties, academics, third sector organisations and other individuals. The study began with an extensive review of existing literature in order to gather statistics and quantifying data to paint a picture of the landscape relating to disability.

The Disability Policy Centre also extensively reviewed existing information produced by independent disability organisations such as Scope, The Business Disability Forum, Purple and Mind. The Disability Policy Centre in the formation of this publication, have also directly consulted with a number of individuals external to political participation, including disability researchers, policy analysts, diversity and inclusion specialists and accessibility development architects. These individuals were either disabled themselves or were individuals without disabilities with the expertise and experience of working within political representation and diversity fields. The empirical evidence provided throughout this report demonstrates clearly to the reader the current statistics relating to disability and disabled representation. Before the commencement of this paper's recommendations, an introduction to the policies, legislation and protection measures which are current or have previously been in place to address the representation of disabled people have been presented.

The following study included a series of interviews and roundtables with political activists, candidates, Councillors, party affiliated disability groups and both current and former Members of Parliament. Invitations to participation included devolved nations. All of the individuals who participated in the interviews disclosed that they are disabled or have a long-term health condition, or in a few incidences the interviewee was a carer or specifically

worked in a relevant field whilst maintaining political activism. The names of those who have contributed to the following paper have been omitted to protect anonymity. This enabled The Disability Policy Centre to conduct interviews and roundtables which fostered an environment where an individual felt they were able to speak openly and honestly about their past experiences and beliefs, without fear of political repercussion.

The questions asked of participants ensured the receipt of first-hand accounts, examples, lived experiences, the collection of statistical data, and key information relating to the issue at hand, these questions are attached to the Appendixes of this paper, for the reader to clearly visualise the questions which were asked of our interviewees. All of those who participated within contributing to this paper were pre-informed of the research being undertaken, the general theme of the interview questions and that their answers were to provide; “an opportunity for policy makers and the sector to come together to discuss how we can increase the number of disabled elected representatives and the importance of doing so”.

Those who were interviewed have not been categorised by disability or long-term health condition type as many of those interviewed had multiple conditions or chose not to disclose the nature of their disability; those interviewed represent a wide spectrum of conditions. In the same style as the interviews, the survey was conducted in a semi-structured nature, for the reasons cited above.

This report identifies that disabled representation in politics must be analysed at two key levels: in areas that are able to be influenced by Central Government, and latterly within political parties themselves. These two key areas were then further examined in the stages of political participation: voting in elections, initial participation and activism, pursuing candidacy at a local and national level and holding political office. The following paper is an independent, non-party affiliated review. As part of the research conducted by The Disability Policy

Centre, affiliated groups, activists, candidates, office holders and former office holders were invited to participate from across the political spectrum.

Some of the political parties represented in this research are The Conservative Party, The Labour Party, The Liberal Democrats and The Scottish National Party. All questions asked were centred around the general theme of the paper. However, each group interviewed were also asked specific questions relating to their level of experience. For example, local political activists were asked questions centred around the barriers to political involvement, and Members of Parliament were asked questions centred around the barriers within both their journey to, and occupation of political office.

Due to the prevalence of COVID-19 at the time of this research, and the recognition that the majority of those interviewed are 'vulnerable', in accordance with Government guidelines, bar a few specific incidences, all interviews, roundtables and discussions were conducted virtually. The Disability Policy Centre ensured that the accessibility requirements of those contributing to the following paper were adhered to, therefore the circumstances of each interview may have differed, for example a British Sign Language interpreter being present, however the semi-structured nature of the interview and question basis remained consistent, to ensure the reliability and control of data collected.

As well as conducting interviews, roundtables and analysing literature, The Disability Policy Centre, in the formation of this paper also conducted a survey for those who were unable to participate in our roundtables or interviews. This was conducted anonymously, to ensure that there was an environment fostered where an individual felt they were able to speak openly and honestly about their past experiences. The reader is at this point directed to the Appendix to see the full list of questions asked.

Participants for the survey were either recruited via the individual's direct contact with the Disability Policy Centre or following a social media

advertisement requesting the completion of the survey. Before participating in the survey, individuals were made aware that their answers may be used within this report, however any answers which may be able to identify a particular individual would not be used. All interviewees and those who participated in roundtables gave consent to participate and their answers to be used within the following paper, all of those surveyed consented to their anonymous answers being used within the following paper.

THE STORY SO FAR

PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT

Political engagement refers to a person's attention, stimulus and mindfulness of political and current affairs. Political participation refers to a person's contribution, association and involvement with political activity⁸. Political engagement and political participation work in conjunction with one another, with their existences dependent on one another. Participation and engagement take a variety of forms from voting in elections, online activism, campaigning, political party membership, political donations and standing as a candidate themselves.

Political engagement is predominately measured in a statistical manner, through voting turnouts at elections and membership of political parties. Since 2001 voter turnout at general elections in the United Kingdom was steadily increasing, however the 2019 general election saw a slight dip in national turnout at 67.3%, a decrease of 1.5% compared to 2017's 68.8%. The 2019 general election however remains the second-highest general election turnout since 1997⁹. Similarly, membership of political parties is steadily increasing, with 1.7% of the national electorate in 2019 compared to 0.8% in 2013¹⁰. The projected trend of a rise in national political engagement over the last decade has largely been accredited to Brexit (a 72.2% referendum, turnout¹¹) and the Scottish Independence Referendum (a 84.6% referendum turnout¹²). Voting turnouts for local elections are typically much lower. The 2018 Council elections saw a turnout out of 35% compared to 2014's 36.2%¹³. There does not exist reliable empirical data relating to the number of disabled people who vote, or the

⁸ Bournemouth University, 'Understanding political engagement' (*bournemouth.ac*) <www.bournemouth.ac.uk/research/projects/understanding-political-engagement>

⁹ Elise Uberoi *Turnout at Elections* (House of Commons Library, Number 8060, 2021)

¹⁰ Phillip Loft, Noel Dempsey, Lukas Audickas, 'Membership of UK political parties' *House of Commons Library* (9 August 2019)

¹¹ The Electoral Commission, 'Results and turnout at the EU referendum' (*The Electoral Commission*) <www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum>

¹² The Electoral Commission *Scottish Independence Referendum - Report on the referendum held on 18 September 2014* (2014)

¹³ The Electoral Commission, 'Results and turnout at the 2018 May England local elections' (*The Electoral Commission*) <www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/england-local-council-elections/results-and-turnout-2018-may-england-local-elections>

percentage of those that did vote having a disability or long-term health condition.

However numerous recognised authoritative studies, recommendations and guidelines have been published, such as The Electoral Commissions 'Accessibility of Elections' and the Cabinet Office 2018 Call for Evidence: Access to Elections,¹⁴ which stipulate the plethora of challenges faced by those with disabilities in being able to vote. These include; accessibility of election forms, limited voting options, polling station rules, manifesto accessibility restrictions and lack of voting support¹⁵. These voting accessibility barriers faced by people with disabilities or long-term health conditions logically will contribute to lower numbers of disabled people voting than are registered to vote.

As previously stated, examination of current Members of Parliament and Councillors does not provide accurate and reliable data as to the exact number of disabled office holders due to the right as to whether an individual wishes to publicly disclose their disability. Empirical evidence does however stipulate that there is currently (as of 2022) only 8, 1.23% of MP's are disabled, compared to the estimated 130 that would make Parliament accurately reflective of the percentage of the general population who is disabled. As of 2018, only 16.1% of Councillors identified as having a disability or long-term health condition¹⁶. An increase of roughly 700 (3.9%) individuals who identify as having a disability or long-term health condition would be required for accurate representation of local office holders.

Political participation and engagement are also measured through public opinion. The Hansard Audit of Political Engagement is one example of how public opinion is used as a measure of national political engagement¹⁷. Opinion based evidence relating to disabled persons engagement and participation in politics is scarce, therefore, as laid out within the methodology of this paper, The Disability Policy Centre has conducted independent research into the sentiments of voters. The repeatedly present disability barriers discovered from

¹⁴ Cabinet Office *Call for Evidence: Access to Elections - Government Response* (August 2018)

¹⁵ The Electoral Commission, 'Accessibility of elections' (*The Electoral Commission*)

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/changing-electoral-law/accessibility-elections

¹⁶ Local Government Association *National census of local authority councillors 2018* (2019)

¹⁷ Hansard Society *Audit of Political Engagement 16 - The 2019 Report* (2019)

the research of this paper concludes that disabled people are not unwilling to engage but accessibility barriers are preventing engagement. These included; inaccessibility of voting, inaccessible built environments, inaccessible events, inaccessible campaigning materials such as manifestos and inaccessible methods of communication. These engagement barriers are henceforth obstructing disabled persons participation, which consequently prevents an increase in disabled representation.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

The Government Digital Service (GDS) highlights that the definition of the term accessibility is widely encompassing of a plethora of situations, 'accessibility means that people can do what they need to do in a similar amount of time and effort as someone that does not have a disability'. Ergo, a prevention of accessibility, either directly or indirectly, is a disability barrier.

The Council of Ontario Universities segments disability barriers into five key areas; attitudinal, organisational and systematic, architectural and physical, information and communications, and technology¹⁸. Attitudinal barriers are stereotypes, perceptions, presumptions, misconceptions and pre-conceived notions of disabilities and their consequences which contribute to the discrimination of disabled people.

Typically, attitudinal barriers are born from a lack of awareness and understanding. Throughout the research conducted by The Disability Policy Centre for the purpose of this paper, individuals with neurological conditions such as autism, dyspraxia and dyslexia repeatedly stated that they experienced discrimination as a result of misconceptions of their conditions, leading to exclusion from participation. Disabled individuals not declaring their disability or speaking openly about their disability for fear of discrimination or penalisation in political life was consistently heard throughout our research.

¹⁸ Council of Ontario Universities *Understanding Barriers to Accessibility* (2013)

Organisational and systematic barriers are practices, legislation, policies, actions and strategies that either indirectly or directly discriminate disabled persons from participation. Our research for this paper found the most predominant methods of campaigning and activism to prevent the participation of disabled persons with physical mobility differences. Emphasis is placed upon physical 'door-step interaction'. Local party associations rely heavily upon the delivery of literature and canvassing during an election period. Typically, individuals unable to physically participate in these two activities feel that this has inhibited their opportunities to be an election candidate.

Architectural and physical barriers refer to the physical accessibility of the built environment that prevent the participation of disabled persons. The Disability Policy Centre's consultation with local political activists unearthed that an alarming number of local political party workspaces are either not accessible by wheelchair, do not have handrails up the stairs, accessible bathrooms and so forth. Alongside this, events are very often held in locations without consideration of accessibility for disabled party members.

Information and communications barriers relate to the 'sending and receiving of information', where disability has failed to be considered. For example, some examples of positive disability action showed a number of local political groups ensuring that political literature was also available online as well as physical formats. However, many online formats were incompatible with screen readers and other such assistive and accessible technologies. This meant that those with visual impairments and learning disabilities were therefore automatically excluded from being able to access these sources of political information.

Technology barriers tie closely to information and communication accessibility barriers, and comment on technological platforms or devices being unusable by a disabled audience. For example, the research conducted by The Disability Policy Centre unearthed that online events advertised through ticketing websites by the majority of political parties do not meet basic accessibility

requirements¹⁹. Social media videos posted are not always subtitled, and images posted on social media do not always include 'Alt-Text', so that they can be read by screen readers.

The intrinsic financial barriers to disabled people include the fact that there are additional costs to campaigning, such as paying for scribes and BSL interpreters, potentially increased costs for transportation, or needing accessible formats of literature. The extra costs of this can often be a deterrent for smaller political groups, who are voluntary organisations relying on donations. Centralised Government support is therefore crucial in order to overcome these barriers. Other barriers include the implications for those on Universal Credit who may be unable to take part in a required number of hours of volunteering, increased strain on the allocation of PIP allowances, or are faced with other challenges that result with their agreement with the DWP.

A demonstrable example of political positive action to remove disability barriers was the instigation, of the now removed, Access to Elected Office Fund and EnAble Fund, which have been explored further in the 'Recommendations' of this paper.

THE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

The equality of opportunity rhetoric is central to the increase of disabled representation at every level of political involvement. The rhetoric, in relation to the question posed by this paper, stipulates that all individuals, disabled or people without disabilities are entitled to participate, contribute and engage in the same manner, through the creation of opportunity that does not have or create barriers to disabled people. Equality of opportunity, in line with the 2010 Equality's Act premise of positive action and active intervention, requires the removal of material which may pose barriers to participation, contribution and engagement for disabled people. Equality of opportunity secures fair competition, to ensure that individuals are able to compete and participate at

¹⁹ Council of Ontario Universities *Understanding Barriers to Accessibility* (2013)

the same level without the existence of unfair advantage, unfair treatment, accessibility barriers or discrimination.

Encompassed within the equality of opportunity rhetoric is equality of process, perception and autonomy. A disabled person must be perceived as equal value, worth, talent and ability as a person without a disability. A disabled person must be treated in the same non-discriminatory manner and receive fair treatment, process and management as a person without a disability. The removal of barriers to increase political disabled representation is achieved through active intervention, promotion and action both centrally and throughout political organisations, as stipulated through the following policy papers recommendations, and explored throughout the research findings.

The Journal of Political Philosophy summarises the equality of opportunity rhetoric as “equalising where people end up rather than where or how they begin,” regardless of disability (beginning), an individual is entitled to the same political opportunities (ending), through the removal of equality of opportunity barriers such as financial implications, perceptions and accessibility barriers²⁰. The purpose of this paper is therefore to ensure an enforcement of opportunity through the removal of disability barriers stipulated within this policy paper's recommendations. Therefore, where this paper references the concept of opportunity, the equality of opportunity rhetoric is being inferred.

THE PROVISION OF THE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

The Access to Work Scheme is a grant, advice and communications scheme for those with physical conditions, mental health conditions and those with disabilities. The Access to work scheme offers three primary services; ‘a grant to help pay for practical support with your work, advice about managing your mental health at work, and money to pay for communication support at job interviews²¹. For example, grants can help to pay for interpreters, vehicle

²⁰ Robert Goodwin, ‘The Journal Political Philosophy’ [1993] ISSN 1467-9760

²¹ Gov.uk, ‘Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition’ (Gov.uk) <www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

adaptations and support workers. This scheme is inclusive of individual's homes as workplaces, is not means tested and does not affect other benefits received. The Access to Work scheme is a potentially vital component for non-voluntary elected office holders, as disabled people are able to receive assistance for the additional financial restraints associated with being disabled, preserving the equality of opportunity and increasing accessibility.

In 2021 the Government published The National Disability Strategy, which 'sees departments and agencies in every corner of Government setting out how they will do their bit to bring about the practical and lasting change that will make a material difference to the lives of disabled people right across our country²².' The National Disability Strategy was an open commitment by the Government to ensure the improvement of the lives of disabled people, breaking down barriers and providing greater fairness of opportunity across an expanse of areas including education, housing and employment. The strategy promises to create a platform for longer term ambitions 'to put disabled people at the heart of Government policy and service delivery'. This Strategy is relevant to note as it is a self-declaration of Government commitment to the enforcement of equality of opportunity, empowerment, accessibility and fairness. The National Disability Strategy has received mixed feedback from disability charities, organisations and businesses as to its promises to commitment and the basis of evidence used for its design. The National Disability Strategy (2021) and its commitments to the advancement of accessibility and inclusion are emphasised before the commencement of recommendation stipulations. As previously stated, the Strategy was an open commitment to 'ensure fairness and equality – empower(ing) disabled people by promoting fairness and equality of opportunities, outcomes and experiences²³'. With this open commitment through the Strategy, the Government must demonstrate that they are following through on these dedications. The recommendations provided by The Disability Policy Centre have been formulated through extensive review and

²² Department for Work and Pensions *The National Disability Strategy* (CP 512, July 2021)

²³ Department for Work and Pensions *The National Disability Strategy* (CP 512, July 2021)

analysis of disability barriers and their potential prevention through the following recommendation's instalment.

There have also previously existed financial assistance provisions to disabled candidates; The Access to Elected Fund and The EnAble Fund. The Access to Elected Office Fund provided grants between £250-£40,000, which were available to those seeking election for UK Parliament, Local Government and the Greater London Authority, as well as Mayoral, Police Crime and Commissioner, and Parish and Town Council candidates who were disabled. The grants provided were to cover the additional costs to ensure the covering of the additional costs incurred as a direct result of an individual's disability such as Assistive Technology, interpreters and any other reasonable adjustments needed. The Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund ran from 2012 to 2015. The Access to Elected Office Fund pilot scheme ended in 2015 and the interim EnAble Fund was established. The EnAble Fund, in the same vein covered the additional financial costs for a disabled candidate, under the remit of The Local Government Association. The EnAble Fund ran from 2018 to 2020.

A commitment by successive Governments to the provision of equality of opportunity is cemented within the rights and protections for disabled people, legislative commitments for the securement of equal rights and representation.

RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

The Equality Act 2010 stipulates that under no circumstance is an individual to be placed at a disadvantage, treated unfavourably or discriminated against due to actions with reason relating to their disability, this may be trifold in its existence; direct discrimination, indirect discrimination or failure to make reasonable adjustments.

Direct discrimination occurs where an individual is treated unfavourably by another due to their disability, indirect discrimination occurs where an individual is treated unfavourably by another due to the current circumstances

impacted negatively on a disabled person. Both indirect and direct discrimination are illegal unless proportionate objective demonstration can be shown. For example, the prevention of a disabled persons participation due to a threat to safety or life. Reasonable adjustments require another to ensure that a disabled person is able to access employment, services and education through the adjustment of typical methods. As a result of the legal requirement for reasonable adjustments, political parties are intrinsically by law required to provide the necessary means for activists, members, candidates and officeholders to be able to participate fully in political life.

The Equality Act is legally binding in its stipulations for the binding rights and entitlements of disabled people and those with long term health conditions. The Equality Act is legally binding to all 'Associations', Political parties, Local Authorities, political associations and groups have a responsibility to ensure the enactment of its premises. Reasonable adjustments require these associations to ensure reasonable adjustments are met. Positive action means that a disabled person should not have to make a reasonable adjustment request, action must be preemptive and proactive as opposed to reactive. The premise of positive action, ensures that all bodies, bound by the Equality Act, foster an environment to encourage disabled persons participation. As a result of the Equality Act, political parties, are prohibited from exercising discrimination to a disabled individual, either nationally or locally, directly or indirectly.

As a further enhancement of the 2010 Equalities Act, in 2011 the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) came into force²⁴. The PSED stipulates that public bodies must operate in a manner that actively prevents discrimination, enhances opportunities and encourages relationships between communities²⁵. This is achieved through three compulsory duties; 'removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their characteristics, meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people, and encouraging people from protected groups to participate in

²⁴ Equality and Human Rights Commission, 'Public Sector Equality Duty' (*EqualityHumanRights*, 2021) <www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty>

²⁵ Every Vote Counts, 'Your Role' (*everyvotecounts*) <www.everyvotecounts.org.uk/information-for-politicians/your-role/>

public life or other activities where their participation is disproportionately low²⁶.' Once again, stipulated within legally binding legislation is the requirement for both Local Authorities and Central Government to encourage the participation of disabled people and henceforth increase representation.

As well as the 2010 Equality Act, Article 3 of The First Protocol of The European Convention on Human Rights 'Right to Free Elections' is applicable²⁷. Article 3 entitles a UK citizen with the right to free elections, the right to vote and the right to stand. Under current electoral commission guidelines, the absence of disability or long-term health condition is noted in the 'Qualifications for Standing for Election'²⁸. Any disabled person with a disability or long-term health condition has the legal right to stand as a candidate for elected office. It is worth noting at this point that despite the United Kingdom's repeal of European Union membership, this does not prevent UK eligibility to submit a case to The European Court of Human Rights, due to the legal separation of these two entities. It is worth noting however that a future repeal of the Human Rights Act may render these Court decisions unbinding with them serving only as an advisory decision. This legislation is relevant to this report as it is cemented by acknowledgement that there is legislative protection ensuring that a disabled person cannot be prevented from standing for election, or that an individual is permitted to be discriminated against centrally or locally from political participation or candidacy, due to their disability. The research conducted for the purpose of this paper, therefore stipulates that despite legal discrimination prevention, why disabled people are underrepresented.

The European Court of Human Rights is not the only piece of international policy relevant to this study. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified by the UK in 2009. Article 29 of the Convention bares specific reference to disabled participation, opportunity and

²⁶ Equality and Human Rights Commission, 'Public Sector Equality Duty' (*EqualityHumanRights*, 2021) <www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty>

²⁷ European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as amended by Protocols Nos. 11 and 14, 4 November 1950, ETS 5, available at: <www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3b04.html> [accessed 19 January 2022]

²⁸ The Electoral Commission, *Local elections in England May 2022 - Guidance for Candidates and Agents - Part 1 of 6 - Can You Stand for Election* (2018)

rights within political and public life²⁹. These are laid out in three sections: 'political rights of disabled people', 'accessibility of the voting system' and 'participation in political and public life'. The ratification of this Convention was a clear commitment by the Government of the United Kingdom to increase disabled political participation. Article 29 clearly stipulates the duty of the state to secure the political rights of disabled people, allowing for the opportunity of election on equal basis to others³⁰. Section 322 laid out the following commitment by the Government; 'extra support for disabled people who want to become Members of Parliament, Councillors or other elected officials, work with political parties, disability organisations and other quality stakeholders to develop proposals and work up a strategy which will aim to break down barriers'³¹.

As previously stipulated within the previously mentioned definition of disability, mental health conditions, such as bipolar, schizophrenia and psychosis operate within the perimeters of having a 'disabled identity', should the individual so choose to identify in this manner. Due to this, the reader is to be aware of The Electoral Administration Act 2006, which stipulates that should an individual be subject to 'legal incapacity to vote by reason of his mental state' the right to vote, and political participation is removed. This is significant to note when considering disabled political participation, that a number of individuals, legally classed as disabled may be unable to participate, engage and vote. For the purposes of this paper therefore, when addressing the need for greater participation, engagement and involvement of disabled people, this paper is baring reference to disability barriers to those who are legally able to participate and are unable to do so.

In conjunction with the Electoral Administration Act, The Mental Health Act, also bares significant importance³². Previously, The Mental Health Act 1983

²⁹ Every Vote Counts, 'Your Role' ([everyvotecounts](http://everyvotecounts.org.uk/information-for-politicians/your-role/)) <www.everyvotecounts.org.uk/information-for-politicians/your-role/>

³⁰ UK Parliament, 'Lords Chamber: People with Disabilities Standing for Elected Office' (*Hansard*, volume 811, 22 March 2021) <www.hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-03-22/debates/CO227B54-68E1-41D8-8921-A4DF9E8D1D04/PeopleWithDisabilitiesStandingForElectedOffice>

³¹ Office for Disability Issues, *UK Initial Report On the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2011)

³² Care Quality Commission *Voting Rights for Detained Patients* (2008)

prevented any individual who had been previously sectioned for a period of longer than 6 months to stand, vote or politically participate. The Representation of People Act in 2000 however overruled this provision in 1983, permitting patients detained under The Mental Health Act, and prisoners remanded in hospital, to be able to register their voting interest, this does not include those who have been detained as a consequence of criminal undertakings. The Mental Health Act has since been amended (2007) to reflect this change. This previous enforcement of removal of voting rights for this with mental health conditions is significant to note, as it highlights to the reader the stigma, public perception and political regard for significant mental health conditions. This previous prevention of the right to participation must be taken into consideration when examining statistical evidence from this time, as figures for participation may be lower due to legal prevention rather than unwillingness to participate.

Before its amendment, the 1983 Mental Health Act was a symbol of common law perception of mental health conditions. Individuals were viewed as incapable of autonomy, with democratic human rights being removed, such as; the right to vote, marry and own property. As the reader will be alerted to in the recommendations and notable themes of this paper, disability perceptions, stereotypes and awareness are a core factor in the under representation of disabled people in politics. Destitute policy such as these, and others, such as the The Disability Equality Duty 2006, are relevant to note for the purpose of this study, as demonstration of previous policy, which had a significant impact of the negative perceptions on disabled persons, perceptions, as demonstrated throughout this report is a still rampant and significant cause of the shortage of disabled representation³³.

As demonstrated above, there exists an extensive, legally binding and authoritative network of legal protection for disabled people, cementing their rights to participation and engagement in politics, including pursuing candidacy for political office. Despite these legislative protective factors,

³³ University and College Union *Disability Equality Duty* (UNP 9358/300, 2007)

including reasonable adjustments and positive action, it is clear that political disabled representation is low. This paper's recommendations provide guidance as to how this issue is to be corrected.

WHAT DO POLITICAL PARTIES CURRENTLY DO?

Despite fundamental philosophical differences between political parties, each strives to provide equality of opportunity, fairness and justice for all, so that each and every person across our country has the ability to flourish and fulfil their potential. When it comes to providing equality of opportunity for disabled people within the organisation, many of the main parties have taken steps to increase representation and demonstrate a willingness to ensure the reduction of barriers to accessibility in public life.

There exist a number of disability groups across the political spectrum within each political party, each tackling internal disability affairs; Disability Labour, The Conservative Disability Group, The Liberal Democrat Disability Association, The SNP Disabled Group and The Green Party Disability Group. Each works internally as a 'critical friend', ensuring that each party is striving to put in the right mechanisms in place that can allow disabled people to advance through the party structures. The Liberal Democrat Disability Association, for example, works to 'encourage the Party to ensure that anyone who has a disability is able to take part in the Party, ensure that Party literature is accessible to those with disabilities, and that meetings should be held in places which are accessible for all³⁴.'

An example of positive action taken by all of the main political parties was demonstrated in their manifestos for the 2019 General Election. The manifestos of The Conservative Party, The Labour Party, The Green Party and The Liberal Democrats were all available in accessible versions³⁵. The Conservative Party and Labour both provided Audio, BSL, Large Print, Easy Read and Braille. The

³⁴ The Liberal Democrat Disability Association 'LDDA - The Liberal Democrat Disability Association' (*The Liberal Democrat Disability Association*, 2022) <www.disabilitylibdems.org.uk/en/page/information-about-ldda>

³⁵ Mencap, 'General Election 2019 Easy Read Manifestos' (*Mencap*, 2019) <www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/elections/general-election-2019-easy-read-manifestos>

Liberal Democrats did not appear to provide Braille formats but provided Clear Print and Plain Text. The Green Party provided Easy Read, Audio Summary and BSL Summary. The implication seems to be that smaller parties such as The Green Party are unable to afford the same measures that the larger parties can. This inequity demonstrates further the need for a central funding pot to plug the gap to provide accessibility.

The drive to increase disabled representation is demonstrated through each party's demonstration of willingness and the measures already put into place. For example, the Conservative Party has the Ability2Win scheme to increase representation in public life. The Labour Party have Disability Coordinators in each Constituency Labour Party, and in 2016 by the Liberal Democrat Party introduced a 'voluntary measure to boost diversity amongst candidates and MP's', adopting a motion for 'all-disabled shortlists' offering a 'full range of support' for these candidates³⁶.

Political parties have already begun to implement materials to provide accessible campaigning tools. For example, The Conservative Party 'Being a Conservative Councillor with a Disability: Guidance for Councillors, Candidates and Local Associations' Campaign Toolkit³⁷, and The Disability Labour: Nothing About Us Without Us, Making Campaigning More Accessible A Guide for CLP's (2019)³⁸. These guides express a clear commitment from the respective political parties to work throughout their structures to increase opportunities for disabled people.

To increase financial support, there are a number of select targeted measures in place, for example in 2016, Labour's Oxford East CLP allocated £2,000 of funding to encourage disabled participation, and party supporting constituents to stand for Council office, through skills development, the provision of adjustments and the gaining experience³⁹. The Conservative Councillors Association (CCA)

³⁶ BBC News 'Lib Dem Plan for 'all-disabled' Election Shortlists' *BBC News* (14 March 2016)

³⁷ Conservative Disability Group, *Being a Conservative Councillor with a Disability: Guidance for Councillors, Candidates and Local Associations Campaign Toolkit* (2021)

³⁸ Disability Labour, *Making Campaigning More Accessible A Guide For CLPs* (2019)

³⁹ Hannah Somerville, 'Labour Party calls for people with disabilities to stand for election on Oxford City Council' *Oxford Mail* (24 September 2016)

Bursary Scheme makes available each year five bursaries for 'Councillors from groups who are less well represented amongst our members' included within this is 'Councillors with disabilities'⁴⁰.

However, In order to ensure that someone's disability is not a factor in being held back from political participation, all political parties must go further to implement comprehensive support for their disabled party members.

⁴⁰ Conservative Councillors Association, *CCA Bursary Scheme 2021/22* (2021)

RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The Disability Policy Centre found the need for action from both Government and within political parties, locally and at a national level. To be able to work towards improving the representation of disabled people in political life, the following recommendations have been proposed by The Disability Policy Centre.

The following recommendations all clearly demonstrate that collaborative, practical but urgent action is necessary to ensure the increase of political representation of disabled people. This paper intends to be the start of this conversation.

SET A - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

- 1. Use the Houses of Parliament Restoration and Renewal Program to conduct an extensive review into the accessibility of Parliament for disabled people. Implement any recommendations in full, to ensure that Parliament is accessible for anyone who wishes to seek elected office, visit or be employed in any capacity.**

From the research conducted by The Disability Policy Centre, the accessibility of buildings was a consistent and notable theme, at both a local level in Local Authorities and at a central level in Westminster and Whitehall. The imminent Restoration and Renewal Parliament project, agreed by the Members of Parliament in 2018 expected before the end of the 2020's, must be effectively utilised as an opportunity to improve accessibility implementations for disabled people⁴¹. This is a once in a generation opportunity to enhance the Palace of Westminster for the good of our whole democracy, and it is one not to be missed. An extensive review, with the direct consultation of disabled people of Parliament and all proposed refurbishment proposals, and potential temporary

⁴¹ House of Commons Northern Estate Programme, 'The need for the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster' (*northernestate.uk*) <www.northernestate.uk/the-need/>

moves to alternative locations, must meet and exceed accessibility demands. The current accessibility failings of Parliament is having a detrimental effect on political representation and causing a significant barrier to the participation and engagement of disabled people.

The Disability Policy Centre heard evidence in one-to-one interviews and roundtables from both previous parliamentary candidates as well as current and former Members of Parliament, who raised concern that as a direct consequence of the inaccessibility to parliamentary buildings, disabled people face substantial challenges in partaking and engaging in public meetings, seeking employment, and fundamentally are holding themselves back from putting themselves forward for candidacy due to the potential inability to hold office due to the inaccessibility of Parliament and a perceived unwillingness to accommodate for reasonable adjustments.

The Scottish Parliament Holyrood building's accessibility measures for visitors provide demonstration of how The Houses of Parliament must go further. For example, Holyrood provides a designated BSL team for d/Deaf visitors, quiet rooms, sensory warnings, pick-up and drop-off points, and accessible conference rooms. The Disability Policy Centre therefore urges the conduction of an urgent and extensive review into the accessibility of The Houses of Parliament, utilising the Renewal and Restoration program as an opportunity to amend the inaccessible facilities determined to remove the prevention of participation. These include but are not limited to; increased availability of hearing loops, increased and replaced accessible bathrooms, the accessibility of chambers, the widespread installation of handrails and the accessibility of visitor routes. This review must be undertaken with direct consultation and involvement of disabled people.

As an example, despite the provision of wheelchair accessible tours, these are undertaken across an 'alternative route' and with 'alternative viewing points'⁴²; there are also 'a limited number of wheelchairs available'. Additionally limited

⁴² UK Parliament, 'Accessibility' (*parliament.uk*) <www.parliament.uk/visiting/access/disabled-access/>

accessible bathrooms are limited in their availability and routes are poorly signed⁴³. The Equality Act, stipulates that ‘under no circumstance is an individual to be placed at a disadvantage, treated unfavourably or discriminated against due to actions with reason relating to their disability, this may be trifold in its existence: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination or failure to make reasonable adjustments.’ The Houses of Parliament in its’ Restoration and Renewal Program must examine the effectiveness of its current adherence to the Equality Act.

The accessibility of Parliament must be examined across two areas; those who are visitors and those who work within the building, either as office holders or employees. UK Parliament publishes its accessibility measures to ‘all visitors to UK Parliament’ and the ‘range of facilities to help’ during a Parliamentary visit⁴⁴. These include; induction loops located in key areas such as Westminster Hall and Public Galleries, admittance of guide dogs, the provision of wheelchairs, the provision of BSL, tactile and adjusted length tours, and disability awareness trained staff. The Disability Policy acknowledges and welcomes the accessibility improvements that have been made to Westminster over recent years, however evidence heard during the collection of testimonies for the purpose of this paper, from both visitors of Parliament and disabled elected representatives operating from within Parliament, repeatedly heard that current accessibility measures are the ‘bare minimum’ and must go further.

The current failure to ensure the provision of the correct accessibility measures is both directly and indirectly discriminating against disabled people, a failure to adhere to the Equality Act, Public Sector Equality Duty and Reasonable Adjustments Duty. The building which is the birthplace of disability legislation is failing to adhere to its own commitments of equality for all. Disabled people must have the same right of access, experience and involvement as those without⁴⁵. For those who are employed or hold office within the building, accessibility challenges continue. Despite measures being put into place to

⁴³ Esther Webber, ‘UK parliament ‘shamed’ by lack of accessibility’ *Politico* (15 October 2021)

⁴⁴ UK Parliament, ‘Accessibility’ (*parliament.uk*) <www.parliament.uk/visiting/access/disabled-access/>

⁴⁵ BBC News, ‘Parliament ‘not fit for wheelchairs’, says minister’ *BBC News* (8 January 2015)

improve accessibility, action has been modicum and is deemed unsatisfactory by all of whom were asked in our research. For example, two accessible bathrooms are available, both of which are located by the Central Lobby, meaning that anyone needing to use these facilities must return via a lengthy route, to this side of the building. There do not appear to be any other accessible bathroom provisions anywhere else on the Parliamentary estate.

The existing minimal accessibility measures which have been put into place focus heavily on external visitors to the built environment and are also failing to accommodate the needs of disabled electives and their Parliamentary staffers. The Disability Policy Centre heard evidence that although there has been the provision of some accessibility measures, such as the implementation of ramps, these ramps are not signed specifically for wheelchair users as many of the ramps are too steep for wheelchair users to use and therefore unsuitable. Unfortunately there are a plethora of examples where the failure of accessibility in The Houses of Parliament is directly demonstrable; unusable ramps, limited accessible bathrooms, limited handrails, the lack of self-opening doors, limited availability of lifts, wheelchair spacing only available for backbenchers, the inaccessibility of the despatch box and no hearing loop for d/Deaf Members of Parliament⁴⁶. A clear demonstration of the inadequacy of current accessibility measures.

The Disability Policy Centre recognises that The Houses of Parliament and some other Government buildings are Grade I listed buildings and are therefore limited in their development capabilities. However, previous construction work such as the building of lifts and accessible bathrooms, and the impending refurbishment demonstrates that the potential for development to improve accessibility is available. The Disability Policy Centre wishes to emphasise that in the consideration of the accessibility of buildings, accessibility implementations must encompass the diversity and range of disabilities and must not be insular

⁴⁶ John Pring, 'New Commons chamber will include frontbench wheelchair spaces for first time' *Disability News Service* (16 May 2019)

in accessibility accommodations⁴⁷. The Parliament Restoration and Renewal Program must therefore explore all options to improve accessibility, and also examine the new assistive and accessible technologies such as tipping and swivelling seating in chambers.

Disabled people are being prevented from directly engaging with Parliamentary activities, viewings and meetings, are discouraged from visiting and fundamentally are less likely to be visualising themselves as elected representatives, as logistically they cannot or are greatly challenged to operate within Parliament. The Women and Equalities Committee requested inquiry review entitled 'Building for Equality: Disability and the Built Environment' (2017) echoes these sentiments⁴⁸. Parliament, the beating heart of legislation, must be accessible and inclusive of whom it represents. The Disability Policy Centre heard direct evidence from a previous wheelchair- using Parliamentary candidate, who withdrew from candidacy as they were unable to 'physically be able to do their job to the best of their ability as a result of avoidable accessibility barriers⁴⁹'. As a public building, a building in which occupation lies with public authority and is visitable by the public, Parliament as an entity is bound by not only the Equality Act, but also the stipulations of disability legislation such as Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; it is the duty of the state to to secure the political rights of disabled people, allowing for the opportunity of election on equal basis to others⁵⁰.

The Disability Policy Centre urges an immediate and extensive review specifically analysing the accessibility of Parliament, with disabled people at the heart of consultation, to ensure that new development proposals go further than the current minimalist and limited in availability accessibility accommodations. One of the key issues raised by the research conducted for

⁴⁷ John Pring, 'Renovations to Houses of Parliament 'must provide step change in access' *Disability News Service* (8 February 2018)

⁴⁸ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, *Building for Equality: Disability and the Built Environment* (Ninth report of session, HC 631, 19 April 2017)

⁴⁹ UK Parliament, 'Accessibility' (*parliament.uk*) <www.parliament.uk/visiting/access/disabled-access/>

⁵⁰ UK Parliament, 'Lords Chamber: People with Disabilities Standing for Elected Office' (*Hansard*, volume 811, 22 March 2021) <www.hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-03-22/debates/CO227B54-68E1-41D8-8921-A4DF9E8D1D04/PeopleWithDisabilitiesStandingForElectedOffice>

the purpose of this paper, was that current accessibility measures, such as designated seats for mobility devices, only allow for a small number of disabled people at one time. As previously stipulated, the House of Commons that was representative of the United Kingdom would see roughly 130 disabled Members of Parliament. Accessibility measures must be designed and implemented for the future, with consideration of the potential increase in disabled representatives, it cannot be limited to only ensure the inclusion of a limited number of disabled people. The Parliamentary refurbishments must lead by example and set the precedent for accessibility, this is achieved through a review of current failings and direct consultation with disabled people for amendments⁵¹.

This proposed review by The Disability Policy Centre is an essential instrument for the generation of disability accessibility, inclusion, participation and opportunity. It is a purposeful and an effective tool for opening up our democracy to every member of our United Kingdom - so that each and every person in this country feels represented by our political system.

To be successful, the Restoration and Renewal Program for Parliament must ensure that the building is accessible to all. The Restoration and Renewal accessibility implementations must be designed in an anticipatory manner in preparation for the increase of disabled House members, to ensure the longevity of disabled inclusion. Parliament and democracy must be open to all who choose to participate.

2. Conduct an extensive review into the accessibility of Local Authority buildings across the United Kingdom. Work with Local Authorities to ensure that services are to a high standard and completely accessible for disabled people.

⁵¹ John Pring, 'New Commons chamber will include frontbench wheelchair spaces for first time' *Disability News Service* (16 May 2019)

Local Government is the cornerstone of our democracy and of our local communities, and the decisions made in the council chamber have an impact on all of our lives. From being responsible for Adult Social Care, to implementing ECHP plans for SEND students, this is particularly true for disabled people. It is therefore imperative that local authorities are accessible for all who need to access their services, no matter what form that may take.

As previously stipulated, the accessibility of public buildings was a consistent and notable theme in the research conducted by The Disability Policy Centre for this paper. Throughout the interviews conducted by The Disability Policy Centre with activists, current and former Councillors and current and former Members of Parliament, the inaccessibility of Local Authority offices was a point of contention continuously raised.

Many had experiences of where accessibility was not a priority, and this was a problem for those using council services or participating in public meetings. This was also a barrier for those seeking elected office, with current and former Councillors raising the fact that when they were elected, there were often not the correct measures put into place to ensure that their role as Councillors could be fulfilled.

One example was a North East England City Council that excluded two disabled Councillors from attending a crucial Council vote due to the inaccessibility of the building. Ironically, the vote was on City accessibility proposals⁵².

Another example that The Disability Policy Centre heard was a Councillor that was elected to a council that had no assistive technology or equipment for its staff. It was only in raising this in an official capacity that the technology was able to change, making the working environment more accessible for disabled people. Without it, nothing would have been done. This example stresses the

⁵² Chloe Laversuch 'Calls for council apology over bid to exclude councillors from disabled access debate' *The Press* (17 July 2021)

importance of local democracy being representative and breaking down barriers for disabled people to enter public life.

The Disability Policy Centre heard evidence from both current and former Councillors that the accessibility of Council buildings was a 'major cause for concern' in not only the initial engagement of disabled individuals but also in the retention of this engagement due to the prevention of participation. As explored further in the 'Recommendations' A Study by The Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation found that 2 in 5 Local Council Homepages 'failed the basic tests for accessibility'⁵³.

The Disability Policy Centre recommends that each Local Authority should conduct a review into how accessible its services are for disabled people, from the built environment to online services. The Disability Policy Centre calls on the Government to conduct a review into the accessibility of the built environment of public buildings, and for Local Authorities themselves to review the accessibility of both the environment and their services. Disability and accessibility must be a key point of consideration in the development of new and existing properties and the development of services across each Local Authority.

As publicly used premises, Council built environments must adhere to the United Kingdom's disability protection legislations. This was stipulated in the 2013 The Local Government Association published their disability guide 'Make A Difference. Be A Councillor. A Guide For Disabled People'⁵⁴.

Featured within this guide is advice for Councils and potential Councillors in regard to accessibility reasonable adjustments; 'Councils are required by the Equality Act to make "reasonable adjustments" to accommodate the needs of disabled Councillors, who would otherwise be placed at a disadvantage compared to a non-disabled Councillors. It is an "anticipatory duty" meaning

⁵³ Central Digital and Data Office 'Understanding Accessibility Requirements for Public Sector Bodies' (Gov.uk, 9 May 2018) <www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>

⁵⁴ Local Government Association, *Make A Difference. Be A Councillor. A Guide For Disabled People* (2013)

that Councils must think in advance about the needs of disabled people and make reasonable adjustments.’

Despite the existence of binding legislation and Local Government Association advisory publishing accessibility demands are not being met.

The Disability Policy Centre therefore calls for this recommendation to be actioned with immediate effect.

3. Reinstate a formal funding scheme for disabled candidates.

The Scope ‘Disability Price Tag Report’ (2019) ascertained that, on average, as a direct consequence of their disability, disabled people face extra costs of £583 per month, with on average these costs being equivalent to half of their income. Furthermore 1 in 5 disabled people face extra costs of more than £1,000 per month⁵⁵. These additional financial costs, associated with being disabled or having a long-term health condition, rise even higher for those seeking elected office, creating a barrier to candidacy and therefore preventing the rise of disabled people being fairly represented in our democracy. A House of Lords Debate in March 2021 on ‘People with Disabilities Standing for Elected Office’ echoes the sentiments of The Disability Policy Centre with repeated recognition, from cross-party elected officials of the ‘financial costs associated with standing for elected office⁵⁶’. 100% of those who attended roundtables and interviews hosted by The Disability Policy Centre, for the purpose of this paper, responded that it was non-negotiably vital that a grant funding system must be reinstated.

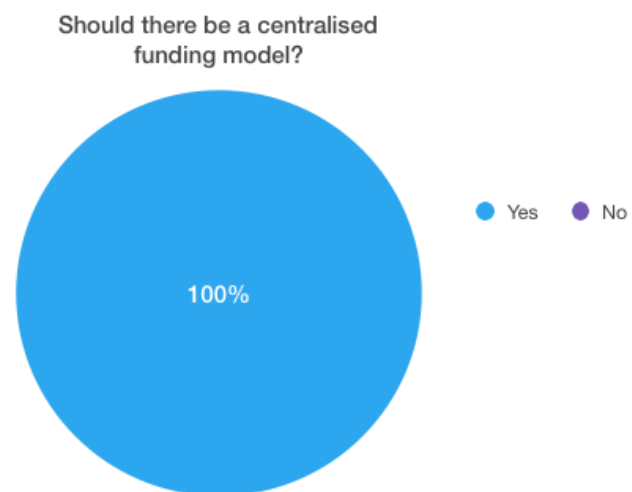
The previous centralised action taken in order to break down this barrier to candidacy for those seeking elected office has been in the form of grants, The Access to Elected Office Fund and later the EnAble Fund. These formal funding

⁵⁵ Scope Equality for Disabled People *The Disability Price Tag 2019 Policy Report* (2019)

⁵⁶ UK Parliament, ‘Lords Chamber: People with Disabilities Standing for Elected Office’ (*Hansard*, volume 811, 22 March 2021) <www.hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-03-22/debates/C0227B54-68E1-41D8-8921-A4DF9E8D1D04/PeopleWithDisabilitiesStandingForElectedOffice>

programmes have since been removed, and there currently does not exist a centralised financial support framework scheme for disabled candidates in England. There are individual schemes in each party, for example the Conservative Councillors Association Bursary Scheme. These party exclusive schemes however are limited in their availability, limited in the quantity of financial support available and not available to candidates from smaller political parties or independents. Current provisions are not substantial enough to affect the number of disabled electives.

(Alt-Text: Image below shows a pie chart displaying the argument for a centralised grant funding scheme, statistics are stipulated within the paragraph above.)



The Access to Elected Office Fund pilot scheme provided grants between £250-£40,000, which was available to those seeking election for UK Parliament, Local

Government, the Greater London Authority, Mayoral, Police Crime and Commissioner, and Parish and Town Councils. Eligibility for the grant stated an individual must satisfy the following criteria; be eligible to stand for election, proof of disability, be supported by a political party or independent referee and be involved in civic, community or relevant activities⁵⁷. The grants provided by the Fund were to ensure the covering of the additional costs incurred as a direct result of an individual's disability such as; reasonable adjustments, assistive technology and interpreters. The Disability Policy Centre, in conversation with previous recipients of funding, heard how the provisions that it enabled ensured they were able to participate on an equal playing field with other candidates, a clear levelling up of their opportunities. The grants of The Access to Elected Office Fund were not to cover the general costs of

⁵⁷ Gov.uk, 'Access to Elected Office Fund' (GOV.UK) <www.gov.uk/access-to-elected-office-fund>

campaigning, such as the cost of leaflets and deliveries⁵⁸. In the three years that the Fund ran between 2012 and 2015, 67 candidates were supported, totalling £418,734⁵⁹. The grants aimed to break down the financial barriers preventing disabled people from seeking elected office, by providing financial assistance to cover these additional costs, ensuring the enforcement of the Public Sector Equality Duty and Reasonable Adjustments duty, 'which requires public authorities to consider how their policies of actions affect disabled people and their access to goods and services⁶⁰'.

The 'Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund 2012 to 2015' Report by The Government Equalities Office and Digital Outreach Ltd stated that the funding provided 'made a real difference in enabling them (disabled people) to stand for election' and that 'demand increased as knowledge of the Fund spread⁶¹'. The Access to Elected Office Fund pilot scheme ended in 2015 and the interim EnAble Fund was established.

The EnAble Fund, in the same spirit as The Access to Elected Office fund, covered the 'additional financial costs associated with a disability, that would otherwise prevent someone from seeking elected office⁶²'. The EnAble Fund totalled £250,000 from the Government Equalities Office, administered by Disability Rights UK on behalf of the Local Government Association, of those who received funding, 45% were elected⁶³. The EnAble fund ran from 3rd December 2018 to May 2020 and provided grants to cover the costs of reasonable adjustments such as transportation, scribes, Assistive-Tech and British Sign Language interpreters⁶⁴.

⁵⁸ Gov.uk, 'Access to Elected Office Fund' (GOV.UK) <www.gov.uk/access-to-elected-office-fund>

⁵⁹ Disability Rights UK, 'All-Party Parliamentary Group for Disability inquiry into access to elected office in the UK' (Disability Rights UK, 17 May 2021) <www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2021/may/all-party-parliamentary-group-disability-inquiry-access-elected-office-uk>

⁶⁰ Disability Rights UK, 'All-Party Parliamentary Group for Disability inquiry into access to elected office in the UK' (Disability Rights UK, 17 May 2021) <www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2021/may/all-party-parliamentary-group-disability-inquiry-access-elected-office-uk>

⁶¹ Government Equalities Office And Digital Outreach Ltd, *Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund 2012 to 2015* (RR820, 2018)

⁶² Disability Rights UK, 'DR UK statement on the Enable fund' (*Disability Rights UK*, 3 April 2020) <www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2020/april/dr-uk-statement-enable-fund>

⁶³ Sarah Cox, 'Report reveals barriers to elected office for disabled people' *Goldsmiths University of London* (3 August 2021)

⁶⁴ Frances Ryan, 'Why are so few disabled candidates standing for parliament?' *The Guardian* (24 May 2017)

Both the EnAble Fund and The Access to Elected Office Fund ensured the removal of unfair advantage to candidates without disabilities and led the way in ensuring equality of opportunity for disabled individuals seeking election. Unlike the Access to Elected Office Fund, the EnAble Fund was only to those under the 'remit of the Local Government Association⁶⁵'. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the scheduled Council elections for 2020 were delayed until May 2021, the contract for the the supply of the EnAble Fund was not extended to encompass this move. The EnAble Fund ensured financial support was granted to those encompassed by the Local Government Association, however since 2015 no financial support has been available for candidates for Parliamentary elections in England.

The recommended Access to Elected Office Fund (England) must work in partnership with Access to Elected Office Fund (Scotland⁶⁶) and Access to Elected Office Fund (Wales⁶⁷) which are still operational. Disabled candidates in England are being significantly disadvantaged from participation because of their geographical location. Government must ensure the fairness of opportunity across candidates, from all political parties, a sentiment being practised by our devolved nations.

The EnAble fund, on the surface, appeared as a reduction in financial support for disabled candidates from the previous Access to Elected Office Fund. This is because funding was available only to Local Government candidates. Government's intention behind this pared-back disabled funding scheme was to encourage political parties themselves to plug the financial gaps for any reasonable adjustments, however as demonstrated it did not have the desired effect. This attempted policy also placed unfair disadvantage for those in smaller political organisations or independent candidates who are not able to afford necessary adjustments. Such funding allocations are unable to be cast by

⁶⁵ Disability Rights UK, 'EnAble Fund' (*Disability Rights UK*) <www.disabilityrightsuk.org/enablefund>

⁶⁶ Inclusion Scotland, 'Access to Elected Office Fund is open for Local Council elections 2022' (*Inclusion Scotland Disabled People's Organisation*) <www.inclusionScotland.org/home-page-news/access-to-elected-office-fund-recruiting-new-members-of-decision-panel>

⁶⁷ Disability Wales Anabledd Cymru, 'Access to Elected Office Fund Wales' (*Disability Wales Anabledd Cymru*) <www.disabilitywales.org/projects/access-to-elected-office-fund-wales/>

smaller organisations or independents. Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; it is the duty of the state to to secure the political rights of disabled people, allowing for the opportunity of election on equal basis to others⁶⁸. The Government must demonstrate adherence to this ratification and must take responsibility for the current lack of disabled political representation. These financial implications cannot fall to the LGA or local political group offices, as this increases the current postcode lottery gap of services and ability to obtain reasonable adjustments, and places individuals from smaller political parties and independents at an automatic disadvantage. The Disability Policy Centre recognises the intended benefits of the EnAble Fund but because of the reasons stipulated, recommends the reintroduction of the Access to Elected Office Fund to ensure disabled representation is increased at all levels of political office and is not limited to Local Governments.

The inherently unfair financial implications of standing for elected office, which would otherwise not be encountered if it was not for being disabled, cannot be allowed to fall upon the candidate. There must exist a mechanism of financial support available for disabled applicants. A fundamental issue with placing the financial implications onto a candidate, to cover the potential costs of reasonable adjustments and other financially related necessities such as the provision of assistive tech and interpreters, places this candidate at a significant campaigning disadvantage, due to election expenditure restrictions⁶⁹.

Election spending is capped, reported and monitored precisely to ensure fairness of election, thus meaning that a disabled candidate with additional expenses is unable to spend as much on their campaign; this fairness of election is utterly undermined. The Electoral Commission Local Elections Guide Part 3: Spending and Donations Local Elections England 2022, states that

⁶⁸ UK Parliament, 'Lords Chamber: People with Disabilities Standing for Elected Office' (*Hansard*, volume 811, 22 March 2021) <www.hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-03-22/debates/C0227B54-68E1-41D8-8921-A4DF9E8D1D04/PeopleWithDisabilitiesStandingForElectedOffice>

⁶⁹ The Electoral Commission, 'Guidance and resources that you need if you are a candidate or agent at a local government election in England' (*The Electoral Commission*) <www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/local-elections-england>

'candidate spending includes any expenses incurred, whether on goods, services, property or facilities, for the purposes of the candidate's election during the regulated period,' there is a 'spending limit for the regulated period at £806⁷⁰.' BSL interpreter fees are a typically high expenditure. To provide BSL interpretation at a hustings, with a minimum hourly fee of £15 per hour, excluding travel costs, take a significant cost away from permitted funding⁷¹. Additionally, The Electoral Commission 2019 UK Parliamentary General Election Candidate Spending Regulations offer similar restrictions with the 'spending limit for candidates depending on the constituency they are standing in. The spending limit is calculated based on the number of eligible voters in a constituency⁷².' Although higher spending limits, the campaign area covered, and intensity of campaigning is also significantly higher. The price of a Roger Pen, a wireless microphone 'enabling clients to hear and understand more speech in loud noise and over distance' is roughly £600⁷³. By placing the responsibility of financial implications onto the candidate, election campaigning potentials are dampened, resulting in an increased unlikelihood of election success, and an increased unlikelihood that they will be selected as a candidate, a fundamental barrier to disabled representation.

The Disability Policy Centre is aware of questions of effectiveness of the management and method of administration of The Access to Elected Office Fund pilot scheme, as laid out within the Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund 2012 to 2015 Report by: Government Equalities Office And Digital Outreach Ltd⁷⁴. However, The Disability Policy Centre heard direct evidence from elected office holders who had been recipients of the Access to Elected Office Fund, who highlighted the benefits in easing the financial constraints they faced. It has to be considered that if the financial burden falls upon the taxpayer, the funding available must only be used in incidents where a financial

⁷⁰ The Electoral Commission, *Local elections in England May 2022 - Guidance for Candidates and Agents - Part 3 of 6 – Spending and donations* (2018)

⁷¹ NHS 'Notes on meeting the cost of meeting individuals' needs' *NHS England* (2022)

⁷² The Electoral Commission, '2019 UK Parliamentary general election candidate spending' (*The Electoral Commission*) <www.electoralcommission.org.uk/2019-candidate-spending>

⁷³ Phonak NHS, 'Roger Pen - Assistive Listening Device' (*Phonak NHS*, 2022) <www.phonaknhs.co.uk/assistive-device/roger-pen/>

⁷⁴ Government Equalities Office And Digital Outreach Ltd, *Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund 2012 to 2015* (RR820, 2018)

implication is faced as a direct result of a disability that would otherwise not be faced by another candidate without a disability. For example, funding must not be used to hire individuals to deliver literature; a candidate must make use of their local party delivery networks, if they are unable to deliver literature themselves.

In the 2019 General Election Party Manifestos, Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Green Party all called for the reintroduction of a funding mechanism to support disabled candidates seeking office. This highlights the significance and prevalence of financial implications in the prevention of the increase of political disabled representation⁷⁵. The Disability Policy Centre therefore recommends the need to reinstate a formal funding scheme for disabled candidates, to ensure that the financial constraints of disabled people seeking elected office are broken down to improve political disabled representation. Such recommendation is premised that direct consultation with disabled people must occur, with adjustment of the original pilot scheme mechanisms for greater effectiveness of distribution.

4. Political parties to report annually to The Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work, on what measures are being put into place to break down barriers for disabled people within the organisation.

Responsibility is the duty of political parties to proactively implement accessibility and inclusivity measures. Political parties are responsible both to their members and wider society to ensure better representation. This responsibility to secure increased representation creates accountability. Accountability differs from responsibility and refers to the consequences of accessibility and inclusivity measures. Political parties are held accountable for the effectiveness of these implementations. Accountability therefore fosters an environment where the effectiveness of action is examined, in its implementation, management and supporting organisation policies.

⁷⁵ Jasmine Andersson, 'General election 2019: Here's what each party manifesto offers for people with disabilities' *iNews* (2 December 2019)

Annual reporting by political parties to the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, of action that is being taken within the party to break down barriers within the party-political structures will ensure both responsibility and accountability for increasing disabled representation by political parties and the Government.

The survey conducted for the purpose of this paper discovered that 82% of disabled people surveyed were motivated to participate in politics as a direct consequence of their disability. Annual reporting on what measures each party is doing to prevent disabled people from being held back in the organisation ensures that political parties demonstrate a clear and defined commitment to tackling underrepresentation. Through acknowledging and reporting reasonable adjustments that are being put into place, political parties will be able to share best practice and move the dial on improving under-representation.

Annual reporting will also ensure that disability, accessibility and inclusion is moved further into the centre of conversation, prioritising disability related issues, creating awareness, the collaboration of new innovative ideas, as well as the wider adoption of assistive technologies, all of which have a beneficial effect on the improvement of political disabled representation.

The National Disability Strategy (2021) is also important to note. As previously stated in this paper, the Strategy was an open commitment to ‘ensure fairness and equality – we will empower disabled people by promoting fairness and equality of opportunities, outcomes and experiences⁷⁶’. The Strategy also promises ‘to deliver the truly transpirational change across Government and society that we want to see⁷⁷’.

⁷⁶ Department for Work and Pensions *The National Disability Strategy* (CP 512, July 2021)

⁷⁷ Department for Work and Pensions *The National Disability Strategy* (CP 512, July 2021)

The Government in their own words through the strategy have promised to ‘deliver joined up responses – we will work across organisational boundaries and improve data and evidence to better understand and respond to complex issues that affect disabled people’. Annual reporting by political parties on their progression is a key and vital component of achieving the objectives of the National Disability Strategy in this area. The introduction of this recommendation divides the responsibility to increase disabled representation between both the Government and political parties, who must both demonstrate clear and defined commitment to making a genuine difference.

SET B - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

1. Encourage party staff, elected representatives and local association leaders to undertake reviews into how to include and promote disabled party members within their structures. As part of this process, it is recommended that training is implemented for staff and volunteers, to highlight how to break down barriers for disabled people in the organisation.

Throughout the research conducted for the following paper by The Disability Policy Centre, a central key theme was extrapolated, consistent across the political organisation levels. The most predominant barrier in the increase of political disabled representation were misconceptions, stereotyping, lack of understanding and typecasting of disabled people. This barrier was consistently heard during the interviews and roundtables conducted for the purpose of this paper, as one of the greatest barriers to the participation of disabled people.

The Disability Policy Centre heard repeated examples of disabled people unable to progress through the candidate recruitment process, both at a local level and a Parliamentary level, due to preconceived notions of their ability and how it may or may not impact on someone’s ability as both a candidate and an elected representative.

Political organisations operate under the remit of the 2010 Equality Act and are therefore bound to the adherence of its requirements. To give disabled activists confidence that the political party they are choosing is doing what it can to create a level playing field, and to ensure that political parties have removed any structural barriers that stop disabled people progressing, The Disability Policy Centre recommends that political parties immediately undertake reviews into how to include and promote disabled party members within their structures. This will include training on practical ways to include disabled members, as well as the relevant legislation and reasonable adjustments that can be undertaken.

Considering that stereotyping and misconceptions are a barrier to disabled people being elected by local parties, due to the talents, skills and expertise of disabled people are being overshadowed by preconceived notions of inability due to disability; the first purpose of the training would be to create awareness for disabilities and long term health conditions, ensuring that the correct practises, operations, interventions and conducts are put in place to protect and encourage disabled people.

Greater understanding of the manifestation of direct and indirect discrimination allows for political organisations to implement measures of prevention and resolution. Training should be undertaken as well to support both local and national parties to understand their obligations through the 2010 Equality Act, and to be given examples of reasonable adjustments that should be put into place for disabled people. Greater understanding allows for political organisations to implement measures that create a level playing field as much as possible. Ensuring that in each political organisation, success is dependent upon talent, and not on a perceived notion of someone's ability or disability.

Practical strategies should be put into place to both manage and measure accessibility barriers, driving inclusive environments and creating models of best practice. Effective measures ensure the creating of accessible

environments, driving forward the generation of confidence that there are not unnecessary barriers that hold people back from being selected and elected⁷⁸.

Disabled people are also more likely to become aware of their rights and protections, if they feel that they are being discriminated against, or if an organisation is failing to provide reasonable adjustments. Appropriate strategies are therefore instrumental in the identification and removal of barriers to participation.

The Disability Policy Centre recognises that political organisations are membership organisations, and do not operate in the same manner as conventional businesses. The quantity of those being paid employees of the organisation being relatively small comparable to the number of active volunteers, who also hold official positions within the organisation. For example, within local political parties, typically there are only one or two paid employees but expansive networks of voluntary activists. It is therefore important that any strategy to improve the engagement and retention of disabled activists includes the voluntary parties, such as local Group Chairs, Branch Chairs and Officers.

Local political associations have many important and authoritative powers, such as the ability to run selection panels to choose candidates, including their Members of Parliament. It is therefore imperative that political parties review how they ensure the individuals that hold these offices are able to support and empower disabled people who wish to progress through the organisation.

Political organisations already possess existing systems of training and educational tools such as The Labour Campaign Technology⁷⁹ and The Conservative Campaign Toolkit⁸⁰, the mechanisms of implementation of training are already available. An example of where this has already been done

⁷⁸ Caroline Casey, 'Do Your D&I Efforts Include People with Disabilities?' *Harvard Business Review* (19 March 2020)

⁷⁹ Labour, 'Activist Area: Tools For Activists' (*The Labour Party*, 2022) <www.labour.org.uk/members/activist-area/tools-for-activists/>

⁸⁰ Conservative Disability Group, *Being a Conservative Councillor with a Disability: Guidance for Councillors, Candidates and Local Associations Campaign Toolkit* (2021)

is the guide 'Becoming a Conservative Councillor with a Disability'. However, to be improved, this needs to be rolled out as virtual or physical training to local association activists, elected representatives and volunteers.

The Disability Policy Centre interviewed a number of political activists with Parliamentary ambitions who identify as autistic. Each of these individuals stated that preconceived negative stereotypical judgements of autism led to their inability to progress through the candidacy process. Each of these individuals, when asked, responded that an increased awareness and education of autism by the selection panel, they perceived, would have increased their likelihood of being selected.

Through more open dialogue about disability, and the barriers within each level of the political parties, structures and stereotypes can be dismantled in order to pave the way for the next generation of disabled politicians.

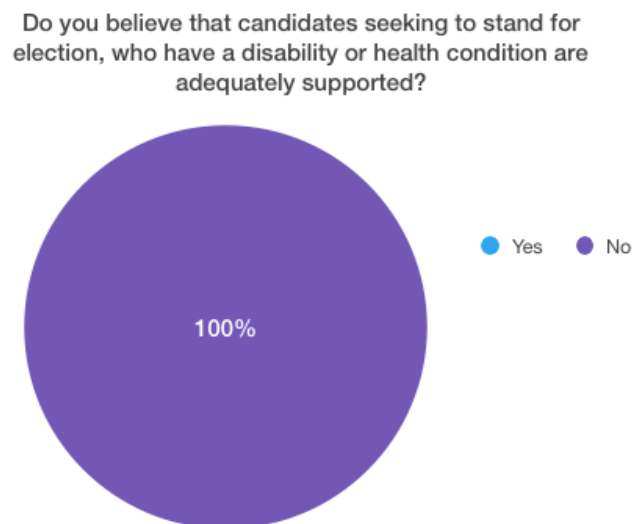
2. Widespread & sustained commitment to the Disability Confident Employer Scheme.

The research conducted by The Disability Policy Centre on disabled representation in politics found that a significant barrier to the increase of representation is lack of confidence, trust and commitment in political organisations, by disabled members, to provide support, reasonable adjustments and assistance where needed. Of those surveyed 100% stipulated that they felt that their political parties did not do enough to support disabled party members. The Disability Confident Employer Scheme provides the means, opportunity, guidance, encouragement and motivation to aid in the elimination of the internal systematic and cultural disability barriers. The Scheme has a consequential positive effect on disabled representation as confidence, trust, best practice and mechanisms of support are built. Political parties, both centrally and across local groups, must adopt better inclusive practices and highlight the skills and talents of disabled people. A subscription to The Disability Confident Scheme must be encouraged centrally and across local

associations of political party infrastructures would be a step in the right direction to support this.

(Alt-Text: Image shows a pie chart displaying the question, do you believe that candidates and those seeking to stand for election, who have a disability or long-term health condition are adequately supported? Statistics are stipulated within the paragraph above.)

The Disability Confident Employer Scheme is a voluntary scheme in which organisations formally demonstrate their promise to fulfil specific commitments to their employees and representatives. The scheme ensures the formal commitment to accessibility, inclusive recruitment, retention of disabled employees, reasonable adjustments, support and development⁸¹. This is achieved through a plethora of categories including employment, work experience, apprentices, trainees, placements and voluntary activists. For example, Disability Equality Scotland offers a Scottish Government funding internship programme offering young disabled graduates internships within Scottish Parliament with MSP's, supported by their associated political organisation. These interns are offered 'experience of parliamentary business' and is 'a fantastic opportunity to experience it (elected office holder) firsthand, and to gain general skills and experience that should help with the future⁸²'. The Disability Confident Employer Scheme is formatted into three levels, with progression to each level obtained through the fulfilment of each level's commitments, and demonstration of continued



⁸¹ Citizens Advice, 'Disability Confident: Guidance For Applicants' (Citizens Advice, 2022)

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/job-and-voluntary-opportunities/citizens-advice-job-opportunities/disability-confident/disability-confident-guidance-for-applicants/

⁸² Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living, 'Scottish Parliamentary Internships for Young Disabled Graduates' (Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living, 30 January 2014) www.lothiancil.org.uk/scottish-parliamentary-internships-for-young-disabled-graduates/

disability confidence development. Level one awards 'Committed' status, level two awards 'Employer' status and level three awards 'Leader' status⁸³.

'Committed' Status is the first level of achievement in The Disability Confident Employer Scheme and stipulates that an organisation is signing up the commitments of the scheme and begin to identify the issues and areas of improvement to make a difference to the lives of disabled people within their organisation. 'Employer' Status is the second level of achievement in The Disability Confident Employer Scheme and stipulates that through a process of formal self-assessment reporting, against the statements of the scheme, an organisation must demonstrate; identification of areas of improvement, evidence of best practice, and indication of onwards development. 'Leader' Status is the highest level of achievement in The Disability Confident Employer Scheme and stipulates that an organisation is acting as a champion of accessibility, inclusivity and best practice. Scheme leaders demonstrate evidence of best policy, positive action and proactive operations. To qualify for 'Leader' status, an organisation is externally independently scrutinised on their past actions and procedures for continued commitment. The Disability Confident Employer Scheme provides organisations with the guidance, resources and network of support necessary to ensure the correct and sustained implementation of changes which benefit the lives and environment of disabled people within the organisation.

The Disability Confident Employer Scheme is multifaceted in its benefits and contributions to the increase of disabled representation. Firstly, at a core level, the scheme cements organisational commitment to the increase of recruitment and development of disabled employees, through the generation of inclusive and accessible working environments for both mental and physical health. For example, offering training and development, internships and shadowing experiences. A promotion of accessibility and reasonable

⁸³ Remploy, 'Disability Confident' (Remploy, 2022) <www.remploy.co.uk/employers/leadership-and-management/disability-confident>

adjustments is vital demonstration to potential political activists of the appetite for inclusivity⁸⁴.

The scheme ensures that organisations aim to not only increase the number of disabled employees through inclusive and accessible recruitment practice, but also ensure their retention and progression. This ensures that as an organisation, employees, potential candidates and those with managerial authority are drawn from a wider and more diverse pool of talent. 83% of disabled people acquire their disability when they are of 'working age'. It is therefore fundamental that political organisations are supporting and operating best practice for all of their employees, volunteers and activists to ensure the retention of this talent⁸⁵. Political organisations must make greater effort to utilise the talents of disabled people⁸⁶. For example, political organisations have developed a broad and diverse range of campaigning techniques, from doorstep canvassing, social media campaigns, to telephone canvassing, each of which are equally as valuable to a campaign. Disabled activists unable to participate in a particular area of campaigning must not be viewed as undedicated or any less valuable than others and must be actively engaged where they are able to do so. The Disability Confident Employer Scheme ensures attitudinal adjustments of inclusivity and awareness that generates the fostering of this Social Model of Disability attitude.

The benefits of fostering a disability inclusive environment and more disabled employees is multifaceted in its benefits. Firstly, increasing the number of disabled employees ensures that reasonable adjustments, inclusive practice and accessible organisation mechanisms are more widely used and become implemented as standard practice. This paves the way for not only future recruitment of employees but also a natural devolvement of these practices across the facets of the organisation. For example, political organisations operating accessible Parliamentary selection boards are naturally to devolve

⁸⁴ Citizens Advice, 'Disability Confident: Guidance For Applicants' (*Citizens Advice*, 2022) <www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/job-and-voluntary-opportunities/citizens-advice-job-opportunities/disability-confident/disability-confident-guidance-for-applicants/>

⁸⁵ Independent Living, 'Disability Confident scheme – does it work?' *Independent Living* (December 2021)

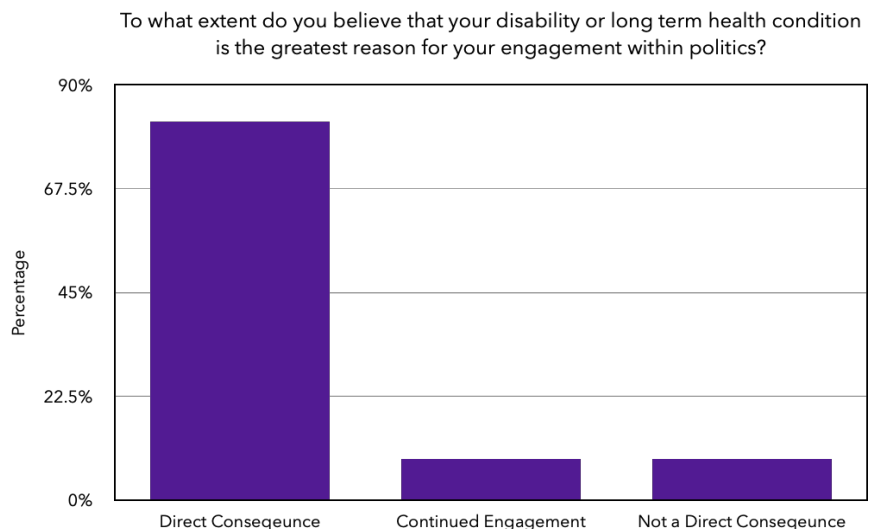
⁸⁶ Disability Confident, *Disability Confident employer Campaign* (HM Government, September 2017)

these practices to local selection panels. This therefore increases disabled representation as disability barriers such as intrinsic misconceptions and stereotyping are broken down.

Secondly, disabled people at the heart of the management of an organisation would instigate a cultural shift and a change in perspective and ideas of the leadership. The Disability Policy Centre heard evidence from both Local and Parliamentary electives that the selection process and candidacy interviews were a manifestation of cumulative disability barriers such as perceptions and the lack of willingness of an organisation to promote alternative accessible methods of campaigning. As a consequence potential organisation candidates were not progressing through the selection process. With disabled people more involved with organisational management, being directly consulted and ensuring the adoption of best practices, an unconscious implementation of accessibility, inclusion and removal of disability barriers is generated. This consequently paves the way for increased disabled participation and representation, both within political parties and those in elected office.

The Disability Policy Centre highlights that it is imperative that in organisational work to tackle discrimination, accessibility and inclusivity, disabled people remain at the heart of consultation and instigation. Political organisations must also therefore be representative of their membership and the people in which they represent. By an organisation demonstrating their own internal mechanisms towards respecting and increasing diversity, there will be a greater confidence, trust and willingness to participate by those who feel that the present environments create barriers for them. The Disability Policy Centre heard evidence of how 82% of those surveyed who are disabled, initially engaged in politics as a direct result of their disability, and of the remaining 18%, 9% continue to stay engaged in politics as a direct result of their disability and consequential lived experiences. This highlights the potential resources and candidates that a political party has if correct measures of accessibility, awareness and inclusivity are put into practice.

(Alt-Text: Bar chart with question 'To what extent do you believe that your disability or long term health condition is the greatest reason for your engagement within politics?' Statistics are stipulated within the paragraph above.)



Evidence obtained by The Disability Policy Centre also found that 100% of those surveyed stated that they did not believe that their political party does enough to ensure disabled people, and those with long term health conditions, have the same opportunities as those who are not. Interview responses to this data echoed this sentiment, with individuals saying that they were less likely to contribute or participate in activities or selection processes. Increased participation opportunities such as experience, training and development programmes logically contribute to the increased engagement of disabled people, increasing disabled representation. Political parties therefore must demonstrate their internal and external engagement with disability inclusivity in order to engage potential activists and future candidates.

The Disability Confident Employer Scheme, which is voluntary, generates increased confidence, trust and sentiment of support from disabled people, if implemented effectively and with the direct consultation of disabled people. This voluntary participation in the scheme demonstrates an attitude for an inclusive working environment, which generates confidence and trust between its disabled employees, volunteers and activists and the organisation, encouraging accessibility and adaptations and increasing the appetite and ability to participate.

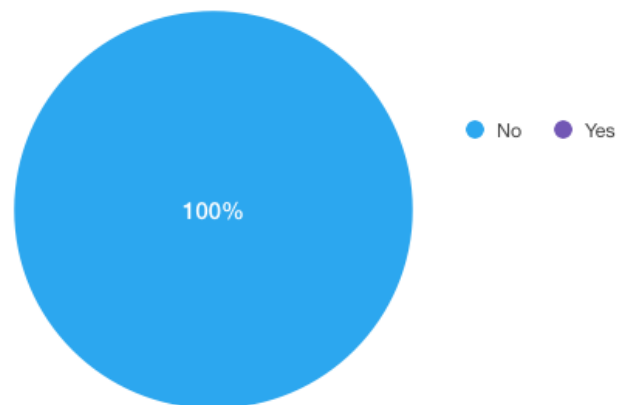
The Scottish One in Five Campaign, the campaign to encourage, empower and increase political participation amongst disabled people in Scotland, echoes these sentiments, stating that it is vital organisations ‘increase the awareness and understanding of issues affecting disabled people’ and strive ‘to include and empower⁸⁷.’ The Disability Confident Scheme provides a vehicle for these means, and accountability to do so.

During the interviews conducted by The Disability Policy Centre, all of the disabled activists stated that they were more likely to seek support and training, participate in more activities and be more likely to declare their disability to an organisation which openly demonstrated its willingness to make internal policies and practises more inclusive. Representation of disabled people will increase as more disabled individuals are obtaining the correct support, guidance and adjustments that they may require. The Disability Confident Employer Scheme ensures the adjustment of behaviours, attitudes and internal cultures, moving an organisation

closer to the Social Model of disability; focusing on the skills, talents and potential of disabled people as opposed to current systematic focus on the inabilities of disabilities⁸⁸. The Scheme ensures the adoption of best practices, better management, increased opportunities, increased awareness and removal of systematic internal barriers. A

widespread and sustained commitment to the scheme will ensure the projection of party willingness for inclusion, acceptance, awareness and appetite for accessibility, whilst also ensuring the implementation of measures to achieve these ambitions.

Do you believe that political parties currently do enough to ensure that those with disabilities or long term health conditions have the same political opportunities as those without?



(Alt-Text: Image shows a pie chart displaying the question ‘Do you believe that political parties currently do enough to ensure those with disabilities or long

⁸⁷ OneinFive Scotland ‘The One in Five Campaign’ (OneinFive, 2022) <www.oneinfive.scot/home>

⁸⁸ HM Government, ‘Disability Confident Campaign’ (Gov.uk, 2022) <www.disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk>

*term health conditions have the same political opportunities as those without?
Answer is 100% 'No' and 0% 'Yes')*

The scheme generates sustainable long-term commitment to the improvement of accessibility and disability inclusion. In order to progress to the next stage of the scheme, an organisation must demonstrate their current and future commitment to positive action. As a consequence, therefore this award progression structure stimulates further action, long term commitment and dedication to inclusion and accessibility. Scheme awards are given for a period of two years, meaning that in order to retain accreditation, an organisation must demonstrate continued positive action and engagement.

An example of positive action taken is the Scottish Speakers Parliamentary Placement Scheme, which offered paid placements with Members of Parliament in 2019, ensured reservation of 3 of the 13 positions available for disabled candidates⁸⁹. The Disability Confident Employer Scheme ensures the generation of more opportunities for disabled people across the organisation. Through the removal of disability barriers by the promotion of the skills and talents of disabled people and the implementation of best practices and inclusive environments, comes the creation of opportunity for disabled people. As previously stated, adherence to the scheme sets out commitment to the provision of development opportunities such as training, placements, experience and support.

In conclusion therefore, The Disability Policy Centre strongly emphasises that The Disability Confident Employer is a vital tool for Political Organisations who wish to improve the opportunities and representation of disabled people at a local and national level. This scheme is a commitment to ensure that political parties establish the correct mechanisms and policies, through internal reflection of the culture and processes and for a sustained commitment to change, driving accessibility and inclusivity. The adoption of the scheme must

⁸⁹ Government Equalities Office, *Barriers to Elected Office for Disabled People* (2019)

be sustained, widespread and with the intention to progress through its tiered system to 'Leader' status.

Central party leaders must encourage the adoption of the scheme amongst their local parties for widespread implementation. An organisation becomes more attentive of their actions, generating action to dismantle the accessibility barriers obstructing disabled representation. Greater cohesion, awareness and understanding exists between disabled and people without disabilities, removing the fear of discrimination, the barriers to participation and increasing the willingness to engage.

3. Political parties must acknowledge that current campaigning techniques are not viable for everyone, and actively promote accessible campaigning methods for their members. These techniques must not be viewed as being less credible than traditional campaigning methods.

Accessibility is the provision of services, goods, facilities and opportunities in a manner where a disabled person has equal access with similar time and effort as someone who does not have a disability. Accessible campaigning is the installation of strategies which ensure the participation and engagement of disabled people, both as the campaigners and the people who are being campaigned to.

Research conducted by The Disability Policy Centre found that 100% of those interviewed and surveyed, stated that they felt that political parties were not currently doing enough to ensure those with disabilities or long-term health conditions had the same political opportunities as those who aren't disabled.

The promotion of accessible campaigning demonstrates the utilisation of the talents and value of disabled people. This fostered environment will generate engagement and ensure that those candidates who cannot campaign in more traditional methods are not held back by their ability.

Accessible campaigning is vital to ensure that disabled activists are able to participate with equal opportunity as those without disabilities, the talents and skills of disabled people are valuable and must be utilised and perceived as being so. Political organisations must foster the environment that reasonable adjustments are standard practice, to encourage activists to request measures without fear that doing so will prevent them from rejection or hindering future political prospects.

Political campaigning methods are wide and varied, the talents of disabled people must be utilised, and this can easily be done through simple mechanisms that are inclusive of all. The needs of each individual must be heard, accessibility measures should be anticipated and must be a basic practice of the organisation.

A survey conducted for the purpose of this paper found that 72% of disabled people did not feel comfortable declaring their disability to their political organisation for fear of discrimination. Utilising different methods of campaigning therefore allows an individual who chooses not to disclose their disability, the ability to campaign in an accessible manner, without the fear of penalisation.

The first, and often the most obvious example of accessible campaigning, is the acknowledgement that door-to-door canvassing is not always possible for everyone, and alternatives must be put into place, such as telephone canvassing, which is often used by political parties now. It is important to remember that people will not always feel comfortable declaring their disability, so a candidate choosing to campaign via telephone canvassing should not be penalised, or gain 'less credit' than those who cannot campaign door-to-door. Alternative methods that someone can contribute to a team campaign include leading on social media, data entry and other tasks such as compiling literature and delivery rounds.

Local associations must acknowledge that it is about the team, and not just the individual, so being unable to partake in traditional campaign methods is not a barrier to someone becoming an excellent candidate for Local Government or Parliamentary elections.

Another consideration to be given is in campaign literature. It is important that literature is available in accessible formats, such as Large Print, Easy Read and Braille, when requested. As stated previously in this paper, campaign materials for national parties are often now available in BSL and Audio too. The Disability Policy Centre acknowledges the costs involved with this, which is why it recommends that the Government re-introduce financial measures to support disabled candidates. It is recommended that parties ring fence money to ensure that local branches can provide accessible materials for all those who need them.

The accessibility of venues should always be considered, whether these are for official meetings or social events. Ground floor locations are preferable, with the location having accessible parking bays, public transport links and accessible bathrooms. Many ticketing platforms are inaccessible for people who use screen readers, so this needs to be considered by those organising events for party members.

Those who organise doorstep canvassing should also ensure that accessible walk routes are provided, with obstacles such as hills and steps clearly marked out. Parking, public transport points, and bathrooms facilities must be taken into account.

For online content, photos posted on social media should include 'Alt-Text'. These are short written descriptions of images that can be used when the image cannot be viewed. Most social media platforms now and video materials should be subtitled to ensure that individuals with hearing impairments are able to view campaign material.

Political parties have already begun to implement awareness of accessible campaigning practical tools, for example The Conservative Party 'Being a Conservative Councillor with a Disability: Guidance for Councillors, Candidates and Local Associations' Campaign Toolkit⁹⁰, and 'The Disability Labour: Nothing About Us Without Us, Making Campaigning More Accessible A Guide for CLP's (2019)⁹¹. These guides, specified to the philosophies of each party, expressly lay out accessible campaigning techniques covering each method of activism from ensuring the accessibility of literature deliveries, the accessibility of meetings and canvassing.

A common theme relating to the accessibility of receivable information from political organisations, extrapolated during the research conducted by The Disability Policy Centre, was highlighting the necessity for adherence to web-accessibility guidelines by political organisations. Due to the repeated call from disabled individuals for the need for greater digital accessibility, The Disability Policy Centre has included the following guidance for the purpose of this recommendation.

A Study by The Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation found that 2 in 5 Local Council Homepages 'failed the basic tests for accessibility'⁹². If disabled people are unable to access communications, invitations and information, then participation and engagement will inevitably stagnate.

Web-accessibility ensures that content, designs, communication and information are able to be accessed and by all. This is the preemptive use of accessible techniques such as Alt-Text, closed captioning and hashtag capitalisation, with the ability to provide further accessibility if requested. Both local authorities and Central Government must lead by example and set the precedent and standard for accessible communications⁹³.

⁹⁰ Conservative Disability Group, *Being a Conservative Councillor with a Disability: Guidance for Councillors, Candidates and Local Associations Campaign Toolkit* (2021)

⁹¹ Disability Labour, *Making Campaigning More Accessible A Guide For CLPs* (2019)

⁹² Central Digital and Data Office 'Understanding Accessibility Requirements for Public Sector Bodies' (Gov.uk, 9 May 2018) <www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>

⁹³ International Disability Alliance 'Accessibility Campaign - COVID19' (*International Disability Alliance*, 2019) <www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/accessibility-campaign>

The Disability Policy Centre is aware of the cost implications of many of these measures, which is why we have called for central funding reservations to be reinstated.

4. Political parties must conduct immediate reviews into their candidate selection processes, for elected representatives at both a local and Parliamentary level, ensuring that all barriers to engagement and participation have been removed where possible.

The evidence obtained by The Disability Policy Centre cites candidate selection processes as a highly significant barrier to the increase of political disabled representation. The Disability Policy Centre in the formation of this paper ensured that evidence was collected from disabled individuals at every stage of political career progression. This included; current and previous Councillors, current and previous Members of Parliament, individuals who had participated in the candidate process, both successfully and unsuccessfully, and activists with those who were considering candidacy in the future. In each interview, roundtable and survey response candidate selections were highlighted as a significant barrier to the progression of disabled political representation. The Lord Holmes Review (2018) echoes these sentiments, highlighting that current application processes for disabled candidates is a vital element of disabled representation progression⁹⁴. Candidate selections are two-fold in their operation, centrally operated political organisation selection operations and locally operated political organisation selection operations. Despite the existence of different mechanisms of candidate selections, dependent upon the office position election in question, The Disability Policy ascertained the consistency of barriers across the selection process, including; perceptions, the inaccessibility of application forms, the inaccessibility of assessments and 'geographical lotteries of luck' of support.

⁹⁴ Mitzi Waltz & Alice Schippers 'Politically disabled: barriers and facilitating factors affecting people with disabilities in political life within the European Union' [2021], 517-540

Firstly, political organisations must orchestrate a review into centrally operated candidate selection processes with direct consultation with disabled people. Centrally operated selection panels, although they differ slightly in their operations across the political party spectrum, all display identical barriers to the increase of disabled representation. Centrally operated candidate selection processes are typically operated by a central panel, from a designated political party candidates operational department, with applications and assessment structure being consistent from candidate to candidate. Applicants who pass centrally operated selections are placed onto an approved list of candidates for parliamentary elections. The assessment itself is multifaceted in its approach, with various assessment mechanisms to ascertain the suitability of an individual for candidacy.

Firstly, an individual's physical mobility ability is indirectly being assessed. For example, the number of voting intentions collected through doorstep canvassing, the hours committed to campaigning in the previous general election, the time spent delivering literature for the previous election, are all markers of candidate suitability, all of which are inherently discriminatory against disabled people with mobility differences. Candidate selection panels must ensure that accessible campaigning methods are assessed with equal value to traditional methods of campaigning, for example telephone canvassing and support in an association office demonstrates equal candidate commitment to doorstep campaigning. The testing mechanisms' innate characteristics are ensuring that disabled applicants are unable to progress through the application process, limiting the number of disabled people on the approved list and therefore limiting political disabled representation.

The Disability Policy Centre recognises that the candidate assessments that are performed, are simulations of eventualities in which an elected Member of Parliament must execute. These tests must be therefore performed with reasonable adjustments should they be required, where if elected, an individual would be executing these eventualities with their required reasonable adjustments. For example, evidence was heard that a number of parliamentary

candidates were prevented from using cue cards in their speech assessments, despite no such prevention existing once elected, for example in House of Commons debate.

Candidate assessments must not be executed with the prevention of adjustments if such preventions are not commonality outside of the assessment process. The Disability Policy Centre also acknowledges that there must be an element of consistency amongst the judgement of candidates to ensure that those on the approved list reflect the philosophies of the organisation and are suitable representatives in office. However centrally operated candidate departments must ensure that assessment processes are inclusive and accessible in their format. In certain circumstances, the testing must allow for adjustment in mechanisms to ensure fair judgement of disabled candidates. Issue lies not only with the mechanism of testing itself, but also in application to testing, which is typically time sensitive, complex and lengthy in its nature. Reasonable adjustments must be given in circumstances where a candidate has disclosed their disability or long-term health condition and request has been submitted. Evidence obtained by The Disability Policy Centre pertains to the fact that across political parties, despite some demonstration of the implementation of reasonable adjustments, such as the provision of extra time in cognitive assessments, the current provisions of reasonable adjustments are unsatisfactory and must be addressed through an immediate review into centrally operated candidate selection processes.

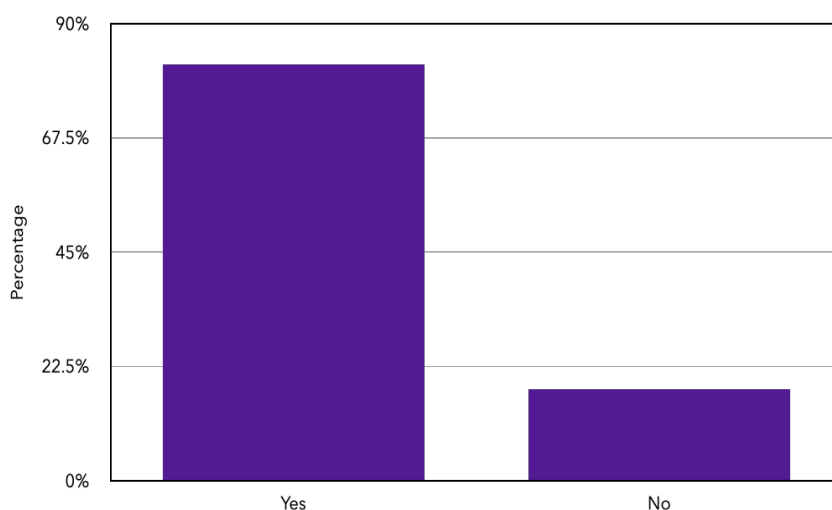
During an election, selection of candidates occurs by both local and central parties. At a central level, approved candidates are drawn up and tested for their suitability for being Parliamentarians. At a local level, the party-political members select a candidate who they believe will best represent their local community in their constituency. In either circumstance, a candidate is chosen from an open list of approved candidates. A significant prevention to the increase of disabled political representation occurs at this moment. The Disability Policy Centre unanimously heard that the candidates being selected are candidates who are 'stereotypical' 'fit the mould' traditional candidates.

With the attitudinal inability to see the potential and talents of disabled people, individuals without disabilities are being consistently selected over disabled individuals, despite aptitude, suitability and commitment to proceedings.

This is occurring for a plethora of motivations, most notably, negative and therefore preventative attitudes of disabilities, focusing on inability rather than the talents and values of disabled people. The Labour Party's 'Breaking Down Barriers - Labour's Manifesto For Disabled People' (2019) specifically highlighted the need for 'accessible selection processes at local, regional and national levels of political office⁹⁵'. The failure to provide reasonable adjustments such as scribes, altered testing markers, accessible assessment buildings and accessible application processes are preventing the progression of disabled aspiring candidates, and reducing application rates for those who have political career aspirations for fear

of prejudice. Centrally operated panels must ensure that if an individual requests or has reasonable adjustments such as extra time, a scribe, a carer or assistive technology, that this is not a reflection of candidate suitability.

Do you feel that you have ever been discriminated against, due to your disability or long term health condition, by your local political group or national party?



(Alt-Text: Images shows a bar graph displaying the question: do you feel that you have ever been discriminated against, due to your disability or long-term health condition, by your local political group or national party? Statistics are stipulated within the paragraph above.)

Of those surveyed, 82% stated that they had experienced discrimination against themselves due to their disability or long-term health condition by their local

⁹⁵ The Labour Party, *Breaking Down Barriers - Labour's Manifesto For Disabled People* (2019)

political group or national party. The Disability Policy Centre wishes to vehemently emphasise that disability is a different ability and not less ability. Candidate assessments must be designed to highlight the talents and capabilities of disabled applicants and not solely highlight actions that are challenged as a direct result of disability and consequently acquitted to the approved list⁹⁶. Whilst conducting this research, The Disability Policy Centre heard multiple examples of d/Deaf candidates being automatically assessed on voting intentions collected by telephone canvassing. All forms of campaigning are equal in value and should be assessed as such.

The Disability Policy Centre in the receipt of the evidence gathered were consistently alerted to the premise of a 'geographical lottery'. As local operating candidacy boards are primarily orchestrated, managed and implemented by local group volunteers, consistency in the implementation of reasonable adjustments, disabled candidate support mechanisms, attitudes and recognition of equality in the value of accessible campaigning significantly differs from location to location. This inconsistency means that particular areas are more inaccessible than others.

A notable theme extrapolated through the research undertaken by The Disability Policy Centre of local selections, was an inherent lack of understanding that some disabilities and long-term health conditions are degenerative or fluctuating in their nature. A decrease in participation from previous activism and engagement levels cannot also always be used as a marker of dedication and candidate suitability. Similarly, a disabled candidate being unable to attend all events and campaigning sessions cannot be used as a marker of commitment. A comprehensive awareness and understanding of disabilities is vital for all individuals acting as panellists. Political parties must put into place the standardisation of candidate selection processes to remove a 'geographical lottery' of support and awareness and ensure that local panels are able to seek advice, defer support and receive adequate inclusion training before the commencement of assessments.

⁹⁶ Government Equalities Office, *Barriers to Elected Office for Disabled People* (2019)

As a result of pre-existing organisational stances closer to the Medical Model of disability, as opposed to the Social Model, The Disability Policy Centre also ascertained that one of the greatest disability barriers during the candidate selection process was stereotyping, perceptions and misconceptions of disabilities, preventing disabled political representation. Candidates perceive that they are being automatically written-off as suitable before completion of assessment. Candidate assessors and relevant candidacy departments must ensure they are aware, inclusive and accommodating of accessibility and reasonable adjustment measures, ensuring the prevention of candidate penalisation. For example, ensuring designated individuals of support for disabled candidates, awareness training for panels, and examination of processes with the direct consultation of disabled people.

Roundtables held by The Disability Policy Centre, for the purpose of this paper, heard that a common misconception of disability was around time and fluctuation. Disabilities and long-term health conditions can fluctuate in severity and affect, on an hourly, daily, weekly basis, meaning an individual's capability and ability to commit in terms of time may differ depending on circumstances at that time. Consistency of time commitment to activist activities and attendances testing markers, must be reflective of this. Political organisations must ensure that centrally operated candidate assessment processes are evaluated and adjusted to ensure the removal of disabled representation prevention.

Political organisations must also ensure their orchestrated review of candidate selections encompasses locally operated candidate selection processes. Similar to centrally operated selection panels, locally operated selection panels, although they differ slightly in their operations across the political party spectrum, all display identical barriers to the increase of disabled representation. The issues highlighted within the examination of centrally operated candidate selection processes also occur throughout localised candidate selection processes. For example, the application to assessment itself

is lengthy, inaccessible in format and often time sensitive in its completion. Barriers of failure to implement reasonable adjustments, stereotypes, assessment without consideration of value for accessible campaigning methods and preconceived notions of ability are prevalent throughout. It is therefore vital that political organisations ensure the examination of both central and local candidate selection processes, with correct consultation and the consequential implementation of accessibility and inclusivity policies. The authority of selection and assessment of candidates devolved to local groups must be executed with an inclusive and accessible environment.

In the evidence gathered for the purpose of this interview, disabled people consistently felt that impartiality was innately within selection processes, operating in a manner where the selection panellists were passing candidates who they felt best 'fit the mould' of an 'ideal candidate,' an attitudinal barrier created due to a lack of awareness, understanding and outdated attitudes.

The Disability Policy Centre emphasises the sentiments of the Members of Parliament who were interviewed for the purpose of this paper, there is no set criteria of who or what it is to be an elected representative, political parties must be cautious as to not fall into the trap of consistency of candidate requirements, which inhibits the increase of representation across all sectors of society. Disabled candidates felt that locally operated selection panels were entrenched with misconception and preconceived notions of the capabilities of those with disabilities, with 'traditional style' candidates being approved and disabled individuals not. In interviews conducted with neurodiverse aspiring candidates, who had previously attempted the selection process, they unanimously stipulated that they had been automatically disregarded as their ability to perform in office had been assessed without an assessment panel taking place, due to preconceived notions of their disability being a barrier to them being a successful Member of Parliament. Disabled candidates feel as though they are having to constantly fight to 'prove' themselves as suitable. Candidate selection panels must see the individual and not their disability.

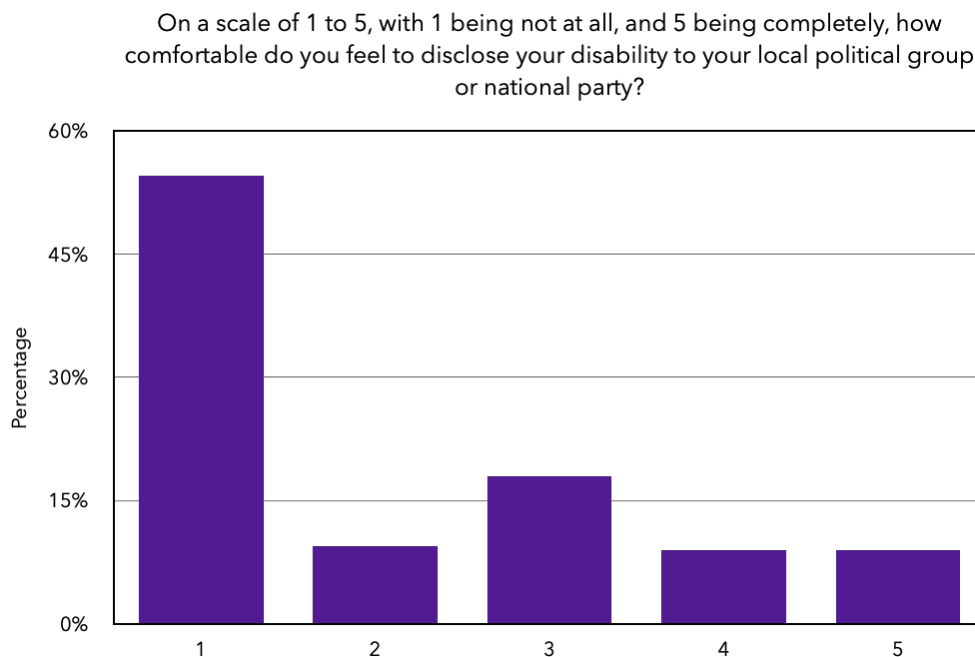
The Government Equalities Office research and analysis on 'Barriers to elected office for disabled people' (2021) echoes the sentiments for the need for an increase in the inclusivity and accessibility of candidate selection barriers as a means to increase disabled political representation⁹⁷. Political parties must ensure that in their immediate review into the processes of candidate selections and candidate assessments, disabled people must be at the heart of review and the implementation of improved accessibility. Political organisations must ensure that any measures implemented and the standard of support available is consistent across the whole of the United Kingdom, and not isolated to particular areas.

Political parties must ensure that the selection processes are fair, with guidelines consistent across local associations. The Disability Policy Centre wishes to emphasise once again, that a disability is not a less ability. A review into candidate selection processes by political organisations will ensure the increase of political disabled representation, due to the identification, and resolution to barriers to participation allowing greater equality of opportunity.

⁹⁷ Government Equalities Office, *Barriers to Elected Office for Disabled People* (2019)

CONCLUSION

The research conducted by The Disability Policy Centre has identified the intrinsic and systematic barriers preventing the increase of disabled political representation, and opportunity for participation and engagement at both a local and national level - whether that is voting in elections or pursuing public office. These systematic barriers include the accessibility of the built environments, lack of awareness and understanding of disabilities, stereotyping, undue financial implications and a lack of internal party support for candidates and members. Each of these barriers to disabled representation were identified throughout each stage of political participation and engagement - from political activism, to pursuing candidacy to holding office.



(Alt-Text: Image shows a bar graph displaying the question, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all, and 5 being completely, how comfortable do you feel to disclose your disability to your local political group or national party. 1: 54.5%, 2: 9.5%, 3: 18%, 4 :9%, 5: 9%)

Each of the recommendations put forward by The Disability Policy Centre, for both Government and political parties, ensure that these accessibility barriers are addressed with remedial action to remove these barriers to participation and engagement. Social progression requires the active increase in

conversation around disability, accessibility and inclusion. It is fundamentally vital that disabled people and those with lived experience are at the centre of consultation, review and policy implementations. This will ensure the effective application of the following recommendations, to break down disability barriers to increase disabled political representation.

72% of those surveyed indicated that they were not comfortable declaring their disability, predominately for the fear of discrimination and automatic penalisation from opportunity. The recommendations stipulated by this paper ensure a retreating social movement by both Government and political organisations from the Medical Model of disability towards the Social Model of disability, fostering an environment that is inclusive, diverse and accessible to ensure the talents, expertise and skills of disabled people are utilised. Across the political spectrum, 100% of those surveyed stated that they did not feel that their political party provided enough support for disabled people with political aspirations. Both Government and political parties must collaborate and take joint responsibility and accountability to ensure that the representation of disabled people increases, operating in a collaborative manner through the recommendations stipulated by this paper.

To ensure the strengthening of the democracy of the United Kingdom, it is essential that both Governments and political parties respond proactively and take decisive action, as recommended in this paper. A political system that was reflective of the United Kingdom would see 122 more disabled Members of Parliament, and nearly 700 more disabled Councillors.

Increasing disabled representation in politics at both a national and local level is necessary to ensure an accurate reflection and representation of our society. Political parties and Government must be proactive in the implementation of this paper's recommendations, to ensure the advancement of the equality of opportunity, progressive and inclusive discussion and the advancement of effective legislation that changes the lives of disabled people. Equality of opportunity, participation and engagement must encompass all disabled

people, across the diversity of disability. Disabled people must be included within legislative dialogue, ensuring reflective representation for the 20% of the population of the United Kingdom who are disabled or living with a long-term health condition.

Government and political parties must cultivate an atmosphere for the eradication of prejudice and discrimination, through the implementation of this paper's recommendations. Accessibility and inclusion policies and actions must be proactive in their nature. Government and political parties must work towards an unconscious mentality of inclusion, with accessibility, support and potentiality of adjustments being at the centre of decision making, at every level of political participation.

Accessibility, participation and engagement opportunities are a right and not a privilege. Government must also ensure that measures allow the increase of representation across the political spectrum; ensuring that the implementation of measures to break down barriers are not solely reserved for those larger, financially stronger organisations. It is imperative that each citizen in our country must feel able to participate in our democratic process, in whichever form they choose. With concerted, collaborative action, this can finally be a reality. The Disability Policy Centre calls for the immediate introduction of the recommendations stipulated by this paper without delay.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A - Cross-Party Political Activists Survey Questions

Introduction Card: Disability Policy Centre Disabled Representation Survey

This survey provides an opportunity for those with disabilities or long-term health conditions in politics to come together and discuss how we can increase the number of disabled elected representatives, and the representation of those with disabilities at all levels of political life.

This survey will be presented to policy makers at the highest level of Government.

Please answer the questions as open and honestly as you feel comfortable in doing so. Please be aware that this survey is anonymous, and the Disability Policy Centre cannot identify you.

By completing this survey you are consenting to the anonymous use of the answers you provide in response to the questions. The Disability Policy Centre will not publish any responses or use any examples gathered which may lead to the identification of the individual, without prior written consent.

1. If you are currently, or have previously been a political activist, whether for a party or independent, what were the greatest barriers to participation that you experienced?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all, and 5 being completely, how comfortable do you feel to disclose your disability to your local political group or national party and why?
3. Do you feel that you have ever been discriminated against, due to your disability or long term health condition, by your local political group or national party? If comfortable, please specify.

4. To what extent do you believe that your disability or long term health condition is the greatest reason for your engagement within politics?
5. Why do you believe that there should be more disabled representation in politics?
6. Do you believe that political parties currently do enough to ensure those with disabilities or long term health conditions have the same political opportunities as those without?
7. If you are currently, or have previously been through the candidate selection process, what were the greatest disability barriers that you experienced?
8. Do you believe that candidates and those seeking to stand for election, who have a disability or long term health condition are adequately supported?
9. If you are currently, or have previously stood in an election, what were the greatest disability barriers that you experienced as a candidate, for example the additional financial implications of having a disability?

Ending Card: Thank you for completing the Disability Policy Centre Survey!

Follow us on Twitter at @DisPolCentre to stay up-to-date on our work!
(Inserted an image of The Disability Policy Centre logo)

Appendix B - Cross-Party Councillor Roundtable Questions

1. What were the greatest disability barriers that you experienced as a candidate and office holder?
2. Do you believe that political parties currently do enough to support and promote disabled candidates?
3. Would you like to see the return of Access to Elected Office funding?
4. What were the greatest disability barriers you experienced as an activist, wanting to progress to become a Council candidate?
5. What accessibility changes were made during your campaign, do you think accessible campaigning should be promoted?

6. Have you ever been discriminated against as a candidate or a Councillor as a direct result of your disability?
7. Do you believe that the accessibility of buildings/the built environment plays a direct part in the lack of disabled representation?
8. Do you think that annual reporting by political parties on their action on disability to create accountability is needed?
9. What were the greatest barriers that you faced during candidate selection as a direct result of your disability, do you believe the candidate selection process is accessible?
10. Why do you believe that we need more political disabled representation?

Appendix C - Cross- Party Member of Parliament Interview Questions

1. What are the greatest disability barriers that you face as an office holder?
2. Do you believe that your political party did enough to support you as a candidate?
3. Would you like to see the return of Access to Elected Office funding, do you believe that it would have helped you?
4. What were the greatest disability barriers you experienced as an activist, with Parliamentary ambitions?
5. What accessibility changes were made during your campaign, do you think accessible campaigning should be promoted?
6. Have you ever been discriminated against as a candidate or a Member of Parliament as a direct result of your disability?
7. Do you believe that the accessibility of buildings plays a direct part in the lack of disabled representation?
8. Do you think that annual reporting by political parties on their action on disability to create accountability is needed?
9. If assistive and accessible technologies were more easily available, do you think this would increase disabled representation?
10. Why do you believe that we need more political disabled representation?

Appendix D - Cross- Party Previous Member of Parliament Interview Questions

1. What were the greatest disability barriers that you faced as an office holder?
2. Do you believe that your political party did enough to support you as a candidate?
3. Would you like to see the return of Access to Elected Office funding, do you believe that it would have helped you?
4. What were the greatest disability barriers you experienced as an activist, with Parliamentary ambitions?
5. What accessibility changes were made during your campaign, do you think accessible campaigning should be promoted?
6. Were you ever discriminated against as a candidate or a Member of Parliament as a direct result of your disability?
7. Do you believe that the accessibility of buildings/the built environment plays a direct part in the lack of disabled representation?
8. Do you think that annual reporting by political parties on their action on disability to create accountability is needed?
9. If assistive and accessible technologies were more easily available, do you think this would increase disabled representation?
10. Why do you believe that we need more political disabled representation?

Appendix E - Cross-Party Party Affiliated Disability Group Questions

1. What are the greatest disability barriers that you hear about from disabled party members?
2. Do you believe that your political party currently does enough to support and promote disabled candidates?
3. Would you like to see the return of Access to Elected Office funding?
4. What are the greatest disability barriers you hear from Council candidates and Councillors, wanting to progress to become a parliamentary candidate?
5. Do you believe that your party's selection process is accessible?
6. Do you believe that your party's selection process treats disabled candidates equally to candidates who don't have a disability?

7. Do you think that annual reporting by political parties on their action on disability to create accountability is needed?
8. If assistive and accessible technologies were more easily available, do you think this would increase disabled representation?
9. Do you believe that the accessibility of buildings/the built environment plays a direct part in the lack of disabled representation?
10. Why do you believe that we need more political disabled representation?

Appendix F - Cross- Party Political Activists Roundtable Questions

1. What are the greatest disability barriers that you experience as a political activist?
2. Do you believe that the accessibility of buildings/the built environment plays a direct part in the lack of disabled representation?
3. Do you think that annual reporting by political organisations on their action on disability to create accountability is needed?
4. Why do you believe that we need more political disabled representation?
5. Would you like to see the return of Access to Elected Office funding?
6. Have you ever been discriminated against as a direct result of your disability?
7. Do you think that your political organisation promotes the use of accessible campaigning methods, and why is it important that political organisations offer campaigning alternatives?
8. Do you believe that political parties currently do enough to support their disabled members and provide effective resources?
9. Do you think that the lack of awareness and understanding of disabilities is contributing to the underrepresentation of disabled people?
10. Would you like to see your political organisation lay out clear commitments to increasing disabled representation?

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ableism: The discrimination of disabled people favouring individuals without disabilities

Accessibility/Accessible: A disabled individual is able to do what they need to do in a similar amount of time and effort as an individual without a disability

A-Tech: Assistive and accessible technologies

BSL: British Sign Language

Central Politics: Central political parties, Government and the central legislature

Constituency: An official specified area of voters

Councillor (Cllr): An individual elected to local Government by their constituency

Direct Discrimination: An individual is treated unfavourably as a direct result of their disability

Disability/Disabled: In accordance with the 2010 Equality Act, a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term negative effect on an individual's ability to perform daily activities

Elected Representative: An individual elected by members of the public to represent them

Indirect Discrimination: An individual is treated unfavourably due to existing circumstances which negatively impact them as a result of their disability

LGA: Local Government Association

Local Politics: Branches of local Government, Associations and local political groups

Member of Parliament (MP): An individual elected to the United Kingdom legislative body (House of Commons) by their constituency

Neurodiversity: Neurological conditions such as autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia

Political Organisation: any organisation participating in political activity, such as political parties, associations and independent political groups

Political Activist: An individual who participates and engages with political activity to bring about political or social change through campaigning

Reasonable Adjustment: In accordance with the 2010 Equality Act, an implemented change that brings about a reduction or removal of unfair disadvantage for a disabled individual

Social Model of Disability: A Social Model which emphasises the potential societal and economic contributions of disabled people and the need for society to foster an inclusive, accessible and diverse community

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