

## **Manifesto for a Movement – Disability**

The Labour party is one of the greatest forces for good this country has ever seen. What we have achieved through the labour movement has dramatically transformed the lives of people across the UK.

My Manifesto for a Movement sets out what I believe is the route back to power for our party. A Labour Party organising, connecting and building in our communities.

One of the community's worst hit by Tory austerity and most in need of a Labour government are people with Disabilities. We know that a decade of austerity has had devastating consequences for many. Whether it is Universal Credit, cuts to social care, council services and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) funding, or their complete lack of a strategy on how Disabled people get equal access to buildings or wider society; they have put Disabled people's rights back by many years.

The UN Rapporteur, Philip Alston's found that the UK government "had made grave and systematic violations against Disabled people". His report outlined the impact for example, he found that half of the 14m in poverty in the UK have a Disabled person in the household.

The Labour Party can transform our country, from one in which many Disabled people face a hostile environment and struggle to access opportunities, to one where every Disabled person fulfils their potential.

This is personal for me. As a child from the age of 10 I was a carer for my mum who has a serious mental health condition. I know through that experience how marginalised people with mental health conditions are.

I now have 2 children with Disabilities: one who is partially sighted and the other who has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Through my children I see the huge problems of accessibility and also the quite complex issues facing those who are neurodivergent or have a hidden Disability.

The biggest priority in my life is to ensure that my children have the best possible future. I don't want their Disabilities to define them because I know what amazing talents and skills they have. I want to live in a country where they can fulfil their potential - and I want that for every Disabled person in this country too.

When I was a trade union representative I went to college and learned British Sign Language so I could provide support for deaf people in their workplaces. This helped me understand a whole new world, in which I could see the very real barriers facing Disabled people but also how access to communication and opportunities could transform lives.

That's why I've been so pleased to have carried out a consultation during this campaign, asking Disabled people themselves about the barriers they face when getting involved in our party, and how we can harness all of the skills and talents of our Disabled members. This manifesto looks to address those issues about how we organise ourselves as a party.

Members have been very generous with their time and given me extremely useful feedback. They have also been honest with me and I know that is not always easy. I thank them for that and I hope that I can repay that trust by working with them to make real meaningful change for Disabled people in our party and in wider society.

By all measures we have gone backwards in terms of disabled people's representation in politics. When I was growing up, David Blunkett was shadow education secretary, a responsibility I now proudly hold myself; this meant we had a very senior member of the shadow cabinet, and after that the Labour cabinet, living with a disability. My colleague Marsha de Cordova is doing a brilliant job holding the government to account from the front bench but less than 1% of MPs self-declare that they have a disability.

Disabled people's needs and experiences not only need to be taken into account, but we must also make sure they have a place at the top table, and at all levels of our party; as the Disabled community have clearly said, there must be nothing about us without us.

So for all these reasons I see the Labour party as the route to transforming the lives of Disabled people. Now as a candidate for the role of Deputy Leader of our party, I want to set out some of the ways I would like to see our party become the most accessible it has ever been.

Angela Rayner

## **Getting our own house in order**

Labour governments formed the NHS and the welfare state that has had such a huge impact on Disabled people's lives. We can be proud that ten years ago Labour introduced the Equality Act 2010 and in government we made great strides in giving Disabled children access to mainstream education.

We must use our time in opposition wisely to get the right internal policies in place and be ready to implement desperately needed change as soon as we get back into government.

Under my Deputy Leadership, Disabled people themselves will take the lead in determining what needs to be done - and I am committed to facilitating that change.

At a time when many Disabled people are being treated so abysmally by successive Tory governments, Disabled people should be able to find a home in the Labour Party. But Disabled members have reported to me that they do face challenges getting involved in the party, while support that should be there often isn't.

When we think about Disabled people in our party we must be extremely clear that we are talking about all Disabled people, those with physical Disabilities and those with mental health or learning Disabilities, those with visible Disabilities and those with hidden Disabilities. We also need to think about how other types of discrimination intersect with the disadvantages Disabled people face, so for example women with Disabilities or Disabled people who are also Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) will face different and layered disadvantages.

So we need to look carefully at how we support those first crucial steps a new member takes with us and make them much easier. That will mean looking at what the Party needs to put in place centrally to support Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs).

Many Disabled members are facing huge financial hardship not only because of the additional living costs which come with a Disability but the active choices made by this government. It is great that there is now a reduced rate for Disabled people to join our party, but it is of little use if nobody knows about it.

We heard cases of people who have not joined because of cost despite this rate being available. People shouldn't have to seek this information out, it should be displayed alongside other membership rates when you join.

I would like to see us reaching out to the many fantastic Disability campaign groups encouraging Disabled activists to get involved in our party.

## **Making everyone welcome**

Many Disabled members have spoken to me about the issues they face when they first join the party. Many of the issues they have described are not only relevant to Disabled members. For many new members, the first contact they received was an invitation to a Constituency Labour Party (CLP) meeting. In some cases the invitation might indicate that the venue is accessible but in others it won't.

As a party we need to reconsider how we communicate with new members. There is some brilliant best practice going on in some of our CLPs: some ensure that all new members get a one to one meeting with an officer of the CLP if they would like one. Some get a personal phone call or email, while other CLPs offer 'buddying' or smaller meetings as a way into the wider CLP. Others will just get the generic message to "come along to a campaign session" or "CLP meeting".

So we would like to see clearer expectations about what communication goes out to new party members when they join us, with standard templates provided to CLPs to help.

## **Accessible venues**

Members generally report finding it difficult to go along to their first party meeting especially when they don't know anyone and don't know the venue. This is of course heightened for many Disabled members; if you have physical access needs or an anxiety disorder this is obviously even harder. We also can't make judgements about who this affects as we need to remember many disabilities are hidden.

CLP meetings are still happening in inaccessible venues. We are the party that introduced the Equality Act and we should be clear that Labour Party meetings should be accessible to everyone. We need a wider view of what an accessible venue is, accounting not just for wheelchair accessibility, but whether those with mental health Disabilities can access the meeting on Zoom, or ensuring good acoustics and a loop system for those with hearing aids, for example.

We must make resources available to CLPs to assist them in hiring truly accessible venues.

One of the suggestions from our consultation was that just saying “accessible venue” often isn’t enough information for Disabled people. People have reported being told a venue was accessible only to find and discovering they can’t use a Disabled toilet because it isn’t big enough for them to manoeuvre their wheelchair.

Disabled people have expertise through experience. There are many Disabled party members who have trained to be able to carry out access audits, we should harness these skills and ask disabled members to assess meeting venues. We do not need to reinvent the wheel and where there is good practice, it should be replicated across the country.

The party centrally should create a checklist for CLPs of factors they need to consider when choosing venues. This information could be shared with members so they have a clearer understanding of how accessible the venue really is. CLP officers should also have a point of advice at the central party where they can seek guidance on this. Some disabled activists also volunteered to provide this sort of support to CLPs, if the party facilitated it.

Attending your first meeting could be off-putting regardless of who you are, but they can be even more challenging for those with Disabilities. Having additional information upfront could help to mitigate some of those challenges, and ensure we get more of our new members active and involved in our party from the start.

## **From the grassroots up**

Many Disabled people said to us that some CLP meetings are particularly challenging for those with mental health conditions. But in truth, our meetings should be as welcoming as they can be for all members. There are a number of actions the party can put in place to help with this.

We need a programme of inclusion training for CLP Chairs and executive officers to ensure they feel able to deal with issues swiftly and decisively. This will obviously help address wider problems of discrimination and other issues too. If these occurrences are severe enough to warrant a formal complaint, we need a complaints procedure which members have faith in that deals with issues quickly and fairly, ensuring the safety of party members - especially potentially vulnerable members.

Many Disabled people described finding their CLP women's forum meetings much more open and welcoming. There are also some great examples of CLPs organising really interesting and accessible events outside of formal CLP meetings.

I outlined the great work done by Lewes CLP, for example, in the first chapter of my Manifesto for a Movement but many CLPs up and down the country are finding imaginative ways to inform their members and build community and campaigning. These are often more accessible because there is a more general discussion, less formal structure or jargon and much more supportive debate. We need to encourage and expand this good practice.

## **A forward thinking party**

I have used Zoom video-conferencing as part of my consultation with Disabled people and have seen the real possibilities that new technology brings with it. Digital democracy is possible, practical and cost effective.

Disability Labour use a similar online format for all of their meetings and have found it increases turn out and engagement. We could review the use of this technology for CLP and other meetings. At the moment those who are unable to attend CLP meetings are excluded from some very important democratic decisions, for example selection meetings and trigger ballots. For some members, those with agoraphobia for example or very severe disabilities, no level of accessibility in a venue will enable them to attend. I still believe these members should be able to participate.

New technology can make this happen, and should be made available for all CLP meetings and possibly other party meetings like the National Executive Committee (NEC) and CLP Execs. We will need to consider whether this requires any rule change. But one of the consequences of the current Coronavirus outbreak is that many organisations will need to seriously engage in new technologies and methods of communication in a way that has never happened before.

If this technology is used more widely it is also possible that more disabled people will feel able to put themselves forward for positions in CLPs and wider party structures.

## **Disability Officers in every constituency**

The CLP Disability Officer role needs revitalisation in some places. We heard reports that some CLPs have Disability officers who do not identify as Disabled themselves. We need

to be clear that the disability rights principle of 'nothing about us without us' must run through our party for genuine representation and equality for Disabled people to become a reality.

The role of Disability Officer in CLPs is really important as they will often be the first person who a Disabled member will speak to; they also have a role in ensuring that many issues affecting Disabled people are raised at CLP meetings and Disabled people are able to self-organise locally. More work should be done on this role, for example a document along the lines of the one produced for Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO) officers by national TULO would be incredibly helpful, especially for new people to the role and for sharing best practice.

### **More than just words**

The issues with accessibility and representation require a genuine investment from our party. I welcome moves towards having a Disability seat on the NEC: that representation and visibility will be really important. However, I also believe the party needs to make a genuine investment in this area of work with a National Disability Officer with specific resources.

I would like to see the role hold responsibility for supporting CLPs with accessibility of meetings, development and training of CLP Disability officers, candidates for elected office have appropriate resources and ensuring Disabled people's access to national conferences. We should encourage applications for this role from disabled people and make it accessible by ensuring reasonable adjustments are seriously available. It is important it is not just a tick box exercise but is a meaningful role that can make real change, with the authority to take action on many of these issues. We can build on the work that Disability Labour have already done in outlining the proposed position.

Disabled members continue to report issues with the overall accessibility of Annual Conference. For example, some CLPs allocate equal funding for each delegate, despite Disabled members having particular additional needs which often require additional resources. This can cause huge anxiety and discomfort for Disabled people having to ask for their colleagues to share “their allocation” with them. Clear guidance from the central party could address this.

Much work has been done over the last few years to improve the accessibility of the conference centre and issues like appropriate seating, accessible documentation and the conference's Safe Space. Huge credit should go to party staff and Disability Labour for pushing this work and I thank them for this. However, there are still gaps and it is the responsibility of the party as a whole to ensure that there are sufficient resources so that we are a model of Disability access. We cannot claim to represent the interests of Disabled people if Disabled people are still facing challenges to participating in our most senior policy making process.

Again, the role of a National Disability Officer would provide focus and clarity about where the lead will come from on these issues. That is not to say that one individual will be solely responsible for this work but that they would head up this work, hold a specific budget and ensure disabled members' views are represented. Every internal policy and process that happens in the party whether it is national, regional and local should be checked to ensure it takes into account the need for accessibility for all. We also need training for all employees about how we ensure this happens.

Members expressed frustration that they have to repeat their access needs every time they attend a Party event. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the GMB union have worked together on their policy for Disability passports, in which

employers hold details on an individual workers' access needs in one central place, and that information is available to appropriate managers in the organisation, for example if they have a new line manager or they attend an event organised by a different department.

We should implement a similar Disability passport in the party that means that we hold details of what needs a member might have and they do not need to keep repeating this information to their CLP, events team, conference arrangements, etc. It goes without saying that we would need to ensure stringent confidentiality on this but with such good practice already in place with our affiliates I am confident we could do this.

## **Recognising everyone's contribution**

Many Disabled members are very keen to take part in party campaigning. However, not all forms of campaigning are accessible to all people. Obviously this would include the physical element of door knocking, but there are many other reasons why people may find this difficult, for example members with certain mental health conditions.

Disability Labour have written a document on how CLPs can hold accessible canvass sessions which should be made widely available and CLPs and candidates should be encouraged to hold these sessions:

<https://disabilitylabour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/AccessibleCampaigning.pdf>

However, it is also true that there are many other ways in which members can usefully contribute to our campaigning. Although door knocking and phone canvassing is of course vital there are many more modern and innovative ways that we can reach the public. CLPs should carry out skills audits of their members and identify where there are skills they can harness. Some members reported to me that they have offered to help and had

never received a response. Of course, I know all too well the pressure of organising activity in the middle of a campaign but it is important that we utilise all of the skills and talents in our party.

Kerena Marchant, the PPC for Basingstoke in 2019 who herself is deaf, ran a model campaign with a number of Disabled members playing key roles. For example, her campaign videos were produced by a member who could not do other types of campaigning. It is likely that because of Kerena's own Disability she was very open to how she could harness the skills of her local party members, we need this to be the norm across the party.

## **Seats at Every Table**

This brings us to how the party can increase the number of Disabled people standing and winning elections for elected office. We have to acknowledge the very urgent need to increase representation and as with women's representation we need to take positive action to ensure that this happens.

Disabled members standing for elections incur additional costs which other candidates do not and we must continue to campaign for the government to reinstate a fully funded Access to Elected Office Fund.

However, we can also take a lead and provide the necessary support for Disabled members to stand for election in council, mayoral, Police and Crime Commissioner and Member of Parliament elections. Candidates and local parties must be given clear advice about what is available to ensure they can plan their campaigns. The finances must be made available in advance so that no member is left out of pocket and waiting months for reimbursement, or doesn't stand because they can't be sure the funding will turn up.

One of the biggest barriers facing Disabled people considering standing for election as councillors is that any councillor allowances are taken into account for Universal Credit and other benefits. This means that for many Disabled people they would lose essential support and in many cases it would cost them money to become a councillor.

This is not something which we as a party can resolve from Opposition but alongside campaigning to ensure workers are given paid time off for public duties, I also want to see councillor allowances removed from income affecting these benefits. Nobody should be financially punished for taking up public office, especially when it is for additional support required for those with a Disability.

There is more that the Labour party could do to support Disabled councillors. For example, we have support for employees of the party such as occupational health and employee support services. I would like to look into how similar support could be provided to elected councillors.

Our process for selecting council candidates can disadvantage Disabled members. Although we know doorstep canvassing is important, it is not the only way we judge the value of people's contribution to the party, or how good a councillor they would be. The same issue can apply to others, for example working class people who work shifts or people (often women) with caring responsibilities. We need local government panels and members to look in the round at what people can contribute as candidates and councillors, and consider the need for more broadly representative candidates.

## **Movement Generosity**

In the first chapter of my Manifesto for a Movement I addressed the need to embed the Party in communities, so people see the Labour Party as their natural home. As a party we can do the

same with the Disabled community. Given the impact of austerity on many Disabled people, we should use some of the resources we have in our wider movement to provide valuable support for Disabled members.

Party members, particularly including Disabled members, could be trained to support Disabled people through social security application and appeal processes, working with our candidates and elected representatives. Many are anxious about it and we could build up resources that give vital support to Disabled people, give party members skills and remind Disabled people that the Labour party is there for them when in opposition as well as in government.

### **Making a lasting change**

The challenges that Disabled people face are going to be made worse by the current COVID-19 pandemic. It will not only make marginalised peoples' lives harder, but it will also highlight the degree to which individualism threatens to undermine the community response necessary. I have been heartened to see the way in which communities have come together throughout these last few weeks and hope this will be a lasting legacy of this terrible event. I also think the added spotlight exposes how meagre the levels of benefits are and how hard it is to exist on them.

More involvement of Disabled people in our party can only bring huge positives, from our policy and practice better reflecting the lived experiences of Disabled people, to the country seeing us as the natural home for Disabled campaigners. There is no doubt that it will take a large investment of resources and skills and will take commitment. But if we want to be the party of equality, frankly we need to put our money where our mouth is.

I don't see this as the end of the conversation but the start. If I am fortunate enough to be elected as your Deputy Leader I commit to working with Disabled members to ensure that our party implements these suggestions and continue to work to be the most inclusive and representative party it can be, because it is only when we genuinely represent people's lived experiences that we will build back the trust from the public to form the Labour government so desperately needed.

### **Summary: recommendations for action**

- Disabled membership rate easily accessible on the joining page of the website
- Reaching out, working and campaigning with Disability campaign groups
- Guidance on contacting new members, with standard templates
- Accessible venues for party meetings
- A checklist for what accessible features a venue has - to be shared with CLPs
- Central point of contact, advice and resources for CLPs on accessible venues
- Programme of training for CLP Chairs and executive officers in inclusion
- Spread best practice on how CLPs can hold more accessible meetings
- Develop video conferencing technology for party meetings
- Develop guidance for CLP Disability Officers
- Implementation of the NEC Disability Seat
- Appoint a National Disability Officer with a clear role and resources
- Disability Passport for members' access needs
- Disseminate Disability Labour's guidance on accessible campaigning
- Encourage and support CLPs and candidates to skills audit their membership

- Resources and support Disabled members standing for election
- Local government panels to receive advice on recruiting Disabled candidates
- Training for party members to support Disabled people through benefit application