



Disability Rights UK (DRUK) – News Roundup – April 2023

We work with our members to influence national policy on independent living, benefits,

education, employment, transport, human rights and other issues – shaping policy through direct experience and expertise.

We also work with our local individual and organisation members to empower and to influence local policy and services.

To contact Disability Rights UK (DR UK) see

www.disabilityrightsuk.org/contact-us

In This Issue

Two-Thirds Of Workers With Long Covid Treated Unfairly

Huge Dissatisfaction With Social Care Services

Customers Not Paying By Direct Debit Pay More For Energy

Data Reveals Extent Of The Prepayment Meter Scandal

Improved Protections against Forced Fitting Of PPMs

DVLA Criticised For Delays In Vehicle Licence Applications

Changes To Definition Of "Terminally Ill" For PIP, DLA And AA

DWP Announces First £301 2023/24 Cost Of Living Payment Date

Emergency Alerts System Launched

Women & Equalities Committee - Government's Approach To Disability

Dispatches Reveals Appalling Treatment Of Autistic People

Improved Protections - Forced Fitting Of Pre-Payment Meters

TUC Recommends Significant Public Transport Investment

Roll Out Of Audio-Visual Bus Announcements

Sanctions Ineffective As A Way Of Getting People Into Jobs

MPs Launch Inquiry Working-Age Benefit

The Health Assessments System Lets Down Those Who Rely On It

New Report Reviews York's Blue Badge Ban

Get Involved

Prepayment Meter Support Phonenumber Opens

Barriers in Accessibility - Glasgow Arts Sector Survey

Online Focus Groups About Working Conditions

Casting Call For Disabled People Who Want To Become Actors

Parliamentary Early Day Motion To Abolish VAT On Audio Books

Two-Thirds Of Workers With Long Covid Treated Unfairly By Employers

New research by the Trade Union Congress has found that one in seven workers reported losing their job because of reasons connected to Long Covid. Learn more about the [TUC's latest research into Long Covid](#) on the DR UK website.

Huge Dissatisfaction With Social Care Services

A new British Social Attitudes survey found two-thirds of people who have used or had contact with social care – for themselves or someone else – were dissatisfied. Learn more about [this in-depth research into people's relationship to social care](#) on our website.

Customers Not Paying By Direct Debit Pay More For Energy

Following the recent news that Ofgem has “indefinitely” paused the forced installation of prepayment meters, the spotlight is now on another group of energy consumers that are paying over the odds. People who pay by cash, cheque or bank transfer have much higher charges than those who pay by direct debit. Read the full story on [energy price differences](#) on our website.

Data Reveals Extent Of The Prepayment Meter Scandal

New data given to energy minister Grant Shapps showed that in 2022 94,000 prepayment meters (PPMs) were forcibly installed in homes without customer consent, with around 70% of them by the biggest energy suppliers such as Scottish Power, OVO Energy, and British Gas.

Scottish Power was “the worst offender” in relation to its customer base as it apparently forced more than 24,300 prepayment meters into its customers’ homes. Read more on the [prepayment meter story](#) on our website.

Improved Protections Against Forced Fitting PPMs

Ofgem has announced a new code of practice, which bans the forced installation of Prepayment meters (PPMs) for people with severe health conditions, including terminal illness, those over 85, people with health conditions that worsen in the cold and those with health-related equipment. Read more about the [code of practice](#) on our website.

DVLA Criticised For Delays In Vehicle Licence Applications

MPs have been investigating the backlog of driving-licence applications that have been accumulating at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

Up to three million people who applied for licences since April 2020 experienced delays, the [Public Accounts Committee](#) (PAC) said, with 60 million phone calls going unanswered. Read more on the [vehicle licence story](#) on our website.

Changes To Definition Of "Terminally Ill" For PIP, DLA And AA

New regulations have been issued that provide, from 3 April 2023, for changes to the definition of “terminally ill” for the purposes of personal independence payment (PIP), disability living allowance (DLA), and attendance allowance (AA) in Great Britain. Read more about the [Changes to the definition of "terminally ill"](#) story on our website.

DWP Announces First £2023/24 Cost Of Living Payment Date

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has announced that a £301 cost of living payment for people claiming qualifying means tested benefits or tax credits will be made from 25 April 2023. Read more about the [next cost of living payments](#) on our website.

Emergency Alerts System Launched

The Government has launched a new Emergency Alerts service which is now live across the UK. This new service will enable people to be contacted via their mobile phone if their lives are at risk in an emergency. Read more about the [new Emergency Alerts system](#) on the DR UK website.

Women & Equalities Committee - Government's Approach To Disability

Disability News Service (DNS) has written about DR UK's evidence to the Commons women and equalities committee inquiry into the government's National Disability Strategy.

You can learn more about [our response to the Commons women and equalities committee inquiry](#) on the DNS website.

Appalling Treatment Of Autistic People By Mental Health Services

TW: This article discusses sexual assault.

A [new documentary by Channel 4's Dispatches programme](#) has revealed the poor and inappropriate treatment and abuse experienced by autistic people in mental health units. You can read more about [the failures of the mental health hospital](#) system on the DNS website.

TUC Recommends Significant Public Transport Investment

In a new report, the Trade Union Congress is promoting a significant increase in investment in public transport.

The report emphasises the Social Benefits of such investment for the whole population, including how this would impact Disabled people, especially as public transport is vital for many people to access employment, education or training. Learn more about the [TUC's latest report on public transport investment](#) on the DR UK website.

Roll Out Of Audio-Visual Bus Announcements

The Department for Transport is introducing rules requiring almost every local bus or coach service to provide audible announcements and visual displays identifying the route and direction, each upcoming stop, and the beginning of any diversions. Read more about the [new rules for audio-visual bus announcements](#) on our website.

Sanctions Ineffective Way Of Getting People Into Jobs

Following an order by the Information Commissioner, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has published a withheld internal report on the effectiveness of benefit sanctions

Among its findings are that sanctions have a minimal effect on moving claimants into work and decrease the rate of movement into higher-paid work.

It also says that the policy intent of sanctions is not to sanction individual claimants but to encourage all claimants to comply with their requirements by creating a consequence if they do not. Read more about the [DWP report on benefit sanctions](#) on our website.

MPs Launch Inquiry Working-Age Benefit

The Work and Pensions Committee has launched an inquiry on the adequacy of benefit levels.

It said: "Given the high costs facing households across the UK, we are launching an inquiry into the adequacy of benefit levels in the UK, to help inform current and future Government thinking. We will also look at the relationship between social security and the labour market."

The deadline for submissions to the inquiry is Wednesday 3 May 2023. Learn more about [the Committee's inquiry](#) on the DR UK website.

Health Assessments System Lets Down Those Who Rely On It

The health assessments system to access benefits for those who cannot work or face extra costs due to disability or ill-health continues to let down those who rely on it, a new Work and Pensions Committee report has found.

While the MPs acknowledge that the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has taken some welcome and significant steps to improve health-related benefit assessments, there remain “important changes that could greatly increase transparency, improve trust in the process among claimants, and ensure more accurate assessments and fewer appeals, that have still not been made.” Learn more about [the Committee’s report](#) on the DR UK website

New Report Reviews York's Blue Badge Ban

The campaign group [Reverse the Ban](#) has published a new research report entitled: 'The Blue Badge test in York: Can the realisation of disabled people's rights and the prevention of terrorism be reconciled'. It was prepared for by postgraduate students in International Human Rights and Practice students at York Law School. Read more about [Reverse the Ban’s report](#) on the DR UK website.

Get Involved

Prepayment Meter Support Phonenumber Opens

Citizens Advice and Ofgem have opened a phone line to support the [national evidence call](#) to ask energy customers to share their experiences of moving to a prepayment meter (PPM).

It is calling for the experiences of customers who either have had PPMs installed to recover unpaid bills or those actively choose to use pay-as-you-go to manage their budgets. There are approximately four million customers overall in Britain on prepayment meters.

The phone line builds on the [web form for the evidence call launched earlier this month](#), and means that people who cannot access the internet have a chance to have their say. The number is 0800 464 3374. This is now open.

Barriers in Accessibility - Glasgow Arts Sector Survey

People Without Labels have recently [put together a survey to collect information about accessibility issues](#) in the arts sector and how our charity can potentially help remove those barriers.

Online Focus Groups About Working Conditions

The Work Foundation at Lancaster University has partnered with UNISON, the public service union, to explore the decisions people make about work and the choices available to them.

This research aims to improve policy and practice to ensure everyone can access secure work that meets their needs. To learn more about taking part, please contact Olivia Gable at the Work Foundation by email: o.gable@lancaster.ac.uk or call 01524 521792

Casting Call For Disabled People Who Want To Become Actors

Wall to Wall Media are looking for aspiring actors who reflect the rich diversity of perspective and talent in the UK today. Successful candidates will get: An intensive 'DRAMA SCHOOL' type experience from fantastic mentors. A chance to PERFORM on set for the LEADING LIGHTS of tv drama. Learn more and [apply for the Bring The Drama programme](#) on the Wall to Wall website.

Parliamentary Early Day Motion To Abolish VAT On Audio Books

There is currently a [Parliamentary Early Day Motion to abolish VAT on audio books](#) being proposed by Sir Mike Penning MP

This EDM has cross party support from 51 MPs including Sir Graham Brady, Chairman of the Conservative governing 1922 Committee, and Labour's Dianne Abbott and John McDonnell. Audio Books vital for those with dyslexia, sight loss, and for those who cannot hold books.

Details on [how to lobby your MP about abolishing VAT on audio books](#) are available on the Parliament website.