

## **Minister and mayor face angry hecklers over cuts and Atos**

The minister for disabled people and London's mayor faced repeated, angry heckling from activists when they addressed a conference held to discuss disability issues in the capital.

Maria Miller and Boris Johnson were constantly interrupted in their speeches at the mayor's annual Disability Capital event by disabled people and other campaigners angry about brutal government cuts to disability benefits and services.

They were asked to explain why the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics were being sponsored by Atos, the much-criticised company that carries out "fitness for work" tests for the government.

Before Miller's arrival, banners highlighting the deaths of several disabled people – deaths linked by families, friends and campaigners to welfare reform and the work capability assessment – were ordered to be taken down by conference staff.

When a heckler warned Johnson that disabled people would be protesting at the Paralympics if Atos was involved in the games, he said: "They are perfectly entitled to protest against it as I am entitled I think to support the Paralympic games, and that is what I propose to do."

Johnson promised to "do my best to answer your questions about why Atos is sponsoring the Olympics", while Miller told the audience: "A lot of people seem to have an interest in Atos. Why don't we take that as a question afterwards?"

But most of the questions in their joint question and answer session had been submitted in advance, and neither Johnson nor Miller responded to the questions about Atos, with Johnson asking for any such questions to be put to him in writing.

There was also considerable anger when – in response to a question submitted by Inclusion London, on whether planned cuts of 20 per cent to spending on disability living allowance (DLA) meant the government was breaching its duties under the Equality Act – Miller appeared to suggest there was widespread abuse of DLA.

When she said that £600 million a year was "going to people whose conditions have changed, who may have been receiving DLA for up to 20 years without being assessed" and that the "vast majority of people who receive DLA do not have lifelong conditions", one disabled heckler shouted out "we are not frauds", while another added "shame on you" and a third said "that's a lie".

There was also an angry reaction when – in response to complaints that disabled people on benefits could not afford to attend the Olympics – Johnson replied that "90 per cent of tickets are under £100".

Later in the morning, the former Paralympian Baroness [Tanni] Grey-Thompson, who had been asked to speak about London 2012, ended her speech with a call for disabled people to contact her with their “views and opinions and cases” about the government’s welfare reform bill.

The crossbench peer gave out her Lords email address – [greythompson@parliament.uk](mailto:greythompson@parliament.uk) – and asked disabled people to contact her with material she could use during debates on the bill.

She said the bill had made her “probably the most depressed I have ever been in my life as a disabled person”, and added: “We need to fight and keep making a difference and make the government listen.

“We need people’s views and opinions and cases so we can go back through the committee and the report stage and argue really strongly to try and get it into a better place than it is.”

But when the peer was asked – as a member of the 2012 organising committee – whether she was concerned about the involvement of Atos, she said she was not involved with sponsorship issues and that she would be “taken less seriously” when debating the bill in the Lords if she was to speak out publicly now.

One of the disabled activists who heckled Johnson and Miller, Claire Glasman, from the disabled women’s organisation WinVisible, said afterwards that it was “a disservice to the Paralympic athletes who worked really hard and fought discrimination” to be associated with companies such as Atos.

She said of Miller and Johnson’s failure to answer the Atos question: “I think they are skirting around it because they want the sponsorship, but people’s lives are more important than the sponsorship.”

**20 October 2011**

### **Motability rule change means disabled people must drive cheaper cars**

Disabled people have reacted angrily after they were told they will no longer be able to drive vehicles worth over £25,000 through the Motability car scheme.

The announcement of [tighter new rules by Motability](#) follows a series of inaccurate, hostile and disablist media reports attacking the disabled people’s car scheme.

Earlier this month, campaigners complained to the press watchdog after the Mail on Sunday suggested there was widespread abuse of the scheme.

The paper claimed that more than 3,000 families of people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder – which it called “naughty child syndrome” – were “abusing” the benefits system by receiving “free” cars through the scheme.

It claimed that work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith was “determined to stop what he regards as abuse of free cars for the disabled”, and said the Motability website “openly advises claimants how to use the benefit to get luxury cars”. The newspaper later published [a series of corrections to its story](#).

Duncan Smith is attempting to force through a controversial package of welfare reforms, including proposals to cut spending on disability living allowance (DLA) by a fifth.

In a statement announcing the rule changes, Motability’s chair, Lord Sterling, mentioned “recent press comments” which had focused on customers obtaining “prestige” cars through the scheme.

He stressed that only five per cent of cars leased through the scheme had a recommended retail price of more than £25,000 – those available only with an advance payment of more than £2,000.

The average car obtained through the Motability scheme is worth £19,500, far less than the UK average of over £28,000. Motability vehicles can only be obtained by disabled people claiming the higher rate mobility component of DLA.

Helen Dolphin, director of policy and campaigns for the user-led charity Disabled Motoring UK, said she was “angry” and “disappointed” with the new rule, and accused Motability of bowing to media pressure.

She said: “I feel they have listened too much to the negative press reports and reacted to them in this way.

“I am saddened by it because it is restricting the choice of the car for disabled people.”

Dolphin also pointed out that the new rule would not save the government any money on its benefits bill.

She said: “It is not going to save a penny. It is going to limit people who have chosen to drive a slightly more expensive car.

“If the government think that restricting vehicles for disabled people is going to save money, they have clearly misunderstood what the scheme is about.”

She said there was a “gross misunderstanding” about the scheme in the media and among the public, who failed to realise that if a disabled person wants to obtain a prestige car they have to pay a much higher advance payment.

She said she would not in future be able to lease the Motability car she currently drives, because it was worth more than £25,000.

She said: “It was a completely personal choice because I do a lot of mileage and I wanted a car that could reach reasonable speeds and was safe to drive.

“Is it outrageous for me to want to have a nice car? I work full-time and I put my money towards it. What is outrageous about it? I don’t get it.”

But Dolphin said she did agree with some of the other changes introduced by Motability, such as only accepting named drivers – people the disabled customer can choose to drive their car – who live within five miles of the DLA claimant. Previously this was set at 25 miles.

Motability also said that from January 2012 it would no longer accept named drivers under the age of 21, unless they lived with the disabled customer.

And Lord Sterling said Motability would “invest further in our capacity to investigate and act on allegations of abuse, as well as piloting new vehicle technologies to monitor how cars are used where we perceive the greatest risk of abuse”.

Asked whether Motability had bowed to government and media pressure, a spokeswoman declined to comment.

She also declined to comment when asked whether Motability believed the new maximum price would actually cut government spending on disability benefits.

## **20 October 2011**

### **Gervais sparks storm over disablist word**

Comedian Ricky Gervais has sparked a storm of protest from disabled people and other campaigners after repeatedly using an offensive and disablist word in messages on the social media network Twitter.

Gervais sent a string of “tweets” that used the word “mong” – a term of abuse used to refer to people with Down’s syndrome.

He claimed he would never use the word about people with Down’s syndrome, and that because its meaning had changed it was OK to use it as a generalised term of abuse.

But Andrew Lee, director of People First Self Advocacy, an organisation run by people with learning difficulties, said he knew people with learning difficulties who had been called “mong”.

He described the word as “an offensive disability term” and said Gervais and other comedians who used disablist terms of abuse were probably “oblivious to the actual spite”.

He said: “If people actually think that that statement is cool, then it most definitely is not cool.

“He has lost an awful lot of street cred and if the people who watch him at the moment want any kind of street cred they would desert him in their droves.”

He said people should stop watching Gervais’s programmes and buying his DVDs.

Lee added: “Individuals like him only sit up and take notice when their pocket is actually hurt.”

He said Gervais’s excuses were “pathetic”, and added: “He probably knows he has done something wrong but doesn’t want to admit it. I don’t think he has any kind of morals. Maybe he hasn’t had to fight for anything in his life.”

Alice Maynard, a leading disabled campaigner and director of the consultancy [Future Inclusion](#), said Gervais’s use of the word was “unacceptable”.

She said she was most shocked that Gervais had used the word last year to insult the singer Susan Boyle, who has a learning difficulty, telling fans at a live show that she “looks like a mong”.

Gervais then went on to joke about how easy it was to say the word “mong”, and added: “Even mongs can say it. That’s part of the beauty of the word.”

Maynard said: “If he applied the term to Susan Boyle it doesn’t suggest to me that he is using it in a completely abstract sense, because Susan Boyle has a learning difficulty.”

But she added: “We should question and challenge in a constructive way rather than going, ‘no, you may not say this or that.’”

Comedian Richard Herring, a long-time supporter of the disability charity Scope, used Twitter to criticise Gervais, and questioned why he would use a word which “demeans and offends” disabled people.

Herring spent much of the week replying to critical Tweets from fans of Gervais and trying to explain why the word was offensive, telling his followers he was “trying to explain [the] impact of disablist language on disabled people”.

**20 October 2011**

## **More news is bad news, says report**

There has been a “significant increase” in the number of negative stories about disabled people in national newspapers over the last six years, according to new research.

[The Bad News for Disabled People](#) report, which compared articles from 2004-05 and 2010-11, found that the proportion of stories about disability benefit fraud had more than doubled.

When focus groups were asked to describe a typical story in the newspapers about disability, benefit fraud was the most common subject mentioned.

There were also more stories discussing the alleged “burden” that disabled people are placing on the economy, and a fall in the number of articles about disability discrimination.

All the focus groups used by the researchers thought fraud was much higher than its true level, with suggestions that as many as 70 per cent of claims were fraudulent, justifying this by referring to articles they had read in newspapers.

Government figures estimate that the [overpayment of incapacity benefit due to fraud is just £20 million a year, or 0.3 per cent of spending](#).

The report, written by the University of Glasgow’s Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research and Glasgow Media Group and commissioned by the disabled people’s organisation Inclusion London, concludes that there has been a shift from a “largely patronising portrayal of disabled people” in 2004-05 to one where “the predominant focus has been on disabled people as scroungers”.

There has also been a sharp rise in the use of offensive language used to describe disabled people, with terms such as “scrounger”, “cheat” and “skiver” found in 18 per cent of tabloid articles about disability in 2010-11 compared to 12 per cent in the same period in 2004-5.

The Daily Mirror increased its use of “pejorative” – unpleasant or disparaging – language from 4.3 per cent to 8.8 per cent of articles, but the greatest increase was found in the Daily Mail, the Daily Express and the Sun.

There was a large fall in the number of articles in which the suggestion that disabled people were “deserving” claimants of benefits was a “dominant theme”, with such articles in the Sun falling from 7.9 per cent in 2004-05 to zero in 2010-11, in the Daily Express falling from 6.2 per cent to 1.1 per cent, and in the Daily Mail falling from 1.4 per cent to 0.8 per cent.

This coverage contrasted with the Guardian and the Daily Mirror, both of which ran stories expressing concern about the impact of cuts to disability benefits on disabled people.

Professor Nick Watson, of the Strathclyde Centre, said: “Much of the coverage in the tabloid press is at best questionable and some of it is deeply offensive.”

Researchers found a “significant increase” in the reporting of disability in the five newspapers over the last six years, with 713 disability-related articles in 2004-5 compared with 1,015 in a similar period in 2010-11.

Anne Kane, Inclusion London’s policy manager, said media coverage was becoming more offensive at the same time that disabled people were facing the “savage impact” of government spending cuts.

She said: “The researchers at Glasgow University have done a great service by analysing the disturbing way in which bad government policy finds its reflection in pejorative language and an increasing portrayal of disabled people as ‘undeserving’.”

A senior Department for Work and Pensions spokesman said: “It is difficult for us to comment on what stories the media run or choose not to run.

“Ministers have said repeatedly that what they wanted to do is get the system working the way it should do for people who need help from the welfare state. We are not interested in tarring people as fraudsters or anything like that.”

He denied that the government was failing to take any action when newspapers published inaccurate and hostile stories about disability benefits.

Although he could not say whether he and his colleagues had complained about particular stories or to particular papers, he said DWP press officers frequently phoned the media when they published or broadcast inaccurate stories.

He added: “We phone up journalists and we attempt to correct the stories. My team do it, I do it, we try and correct articles when we see inaccuracies.”

**20 October 2011**

### **Wales secures long-awaited independent living strategy**

The announcement of a long-awaited strategy for promoting independent living in Wales has been welcomed by disabled campaigners.

The Welsh government announced plans to develop a new Framework for Action on Independent Living at a seminar organised by the disabled people’s organisation [Disability Wales](#) (DW), which has campaigned for a Welsh independent living strategy.

In a statement to the Welsh Assembly, Jane Hutt, the Welsh government minister whose responsibilities include equalities, said the framework would “underpin” the Welsh

government's actions under the Equality Act to advance disabled people's equality of opportunity, eliminate discrimination and foster good relations.

The framework will identify areas where action is needed and bring together policies and strategies that support independent living into a "coherent delivery plan".

DW's chief executive, Rhian Davies, welcomed the announcement, which she said was "aimed at disabled people having greater control over their lives and the necessary support to live independently in the community".

She added: "In these financially challenging times it is even more vital that services and facilities are designed and delivered in a way which responds to the needs of individuals and supports independence and inclusion rather than dependency and exclusion."

In May, Davies told peers and MPs on the joint committee on human rights that Wales "appears to be the only country in the UK that doesn't have an over-arching strategy on independent living", which was "a huge loss for disabled people in Wales".

The DW seminar in Newport was held to discuss the impact of welfare reform and cuts to public services on disabled people in Wales.

This weekend, DW will take part in one of a series of regional anti-cuts protests taking place under the [Hardest Hit banner](#).

The Cardiff protest will take place on Saturday 22 October from 12.30pm and starts outside City Hall, Cathays Park.

**20 October 2011**

### **Government is 'talking up' benefit fraud, says shadow minister**

Labour's new shadow minister for disabled people has accused the government of "talking up" the issue of disability benefit fraud as it attempts to push through its sweeping welfare reforms.

Anne McGuire, herself a former minister for disabled people, told Disability News Service that she was "highly critical" of the "context" the government had created around its welfare reforms.

She was particularly critical of the focus on "benefits cheats", when the government's own figures show that only a "tiny proportion" of disability benefits claims are fraudulent.

She said: “People who cheat on disability benefits are not disabled people, and [the amount of fraud] is a tiny proportion.”

Government figures estimate that the [overpayment of incapacity benefit due to fraud is just £20 million a year, or 0.3 per cent of spending](#).

She also attacked the government for not doing more to address offensive and inaccurate stories about “cheats” and “scroungers” in the media.

She said: “They certainly do not appear to have done anything to mitigate the wilder accusations in the tabloid media. That is something I will be wanting to raise in the Commons.”

She was speaking days after being appointed as her party’s new shadow minister for disabled people.

McGuire also criticised ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions – including the disabled people’s minister, Maria Miller – for failing to work more closely with disabled people on the welfare reform bill.

She said: “We had two major welfare bills, I was minister on one of them, but we worked with disabled people at all points in developing the policies and in the parliamentary process.

“I do not yet have the confidence that the government – the Department for Work and Pensions ministers – are listening and responding to some of the concerns.”

And McGuire said there was “great concern” about government plans to scrap disability living allowance and replace it with a new “personal independence payment”.

She said her party would “continue to challenge” the government on the bill, which is currently passing through the Lords, but was unable to say which disability-related elements of the welfare reforms her party might target for possible concessions.

**19 October 2011**

### **Scope’s DIAL UK closure threatens rift with movement**

A disability charity’s decision to close down a national advice organisation, just two years after they merged, has provoked anger among disabled people’s organisations (DPOs).

Scope merged in 2008 with [DIAL UK](#), a long-established DPO which supports a network of about 120 local disability information and advice services, most of them user-led.

But Scope has now decided to close DIAL UK next month, and make redundant its four paid staff – all of whom are disabled or have health conditions.

Scope says it wants to improve support to members of the network of local DIAL (Disability Information and Advice Line) services by employing four new regional support workers as part of its own Scope Response information service.

None of the four existing members of DIAL UK staff, all based in Doncaster, were successful in applying for the new posts.

Tony Kay, manager of Calderdale DART, a member of the DIAL network, said the closure of DIAL UK proved the “merger” with Scope was really a “takeover”.

He has received emails from a string of DIAL groups which he said were “even more vocal in their objection” to Scope’s decision to close DIAL UK than he was.

He praised the knowledge, understanding and expertise of DIAL UK’s staff, and added: “Our affiliation has always been with DIAL UK and if this is to be lost due to the enforced restructuring, then I feel we may need to look elsewhere for support as we do not feel it would be appropriate to be affiliated to Scope given their current remit and how they have let down the staff of DIAL UK.”

Other local groups have contacted DIAL UK through phone calls, emails and letters to express their unhappiness with the closure decision, which now threatens Scope’s efforts to build a closer relationship with the disability movement.

Jane Thompson-Brierley, head of DIAL UK, who has been working for the organisation for more than nine years, said it had been a “very difficult time” for the staff and five volunteers.

She said: “We were an organisation run by disabled people for disabled people. That was one of the things we always prided ourselves on.

“I have always thought we have been in tune with the disabled people’s movement, and obviously through our members our role has always been about providing that support to local groups.”

She said DIAL UK had provided groups with information and resources, but also helped them to “develop and thrive”.

She questioned how the new structure could provide the same support offered by DIAL UK, which has been praised by local groups for the high quality of the information it provides.

Linda Burnip, co-founder of Disabled People Against Cuts, said she feared Scope would use the restructuring to make it easier to win contracts at the expense of local DPOs.

She said: “DPOs are just going to be cut out. That is the main concern. They thought it was a merger but since then it has become apparent it was a complete takeover. It is going to be an enormous loss.”

Jaspal Dhani, chief executive of the UK Disabled People’s Council, said his organisation was trying to clarify the concerns that have been raised by disabled people about the decision to close DIAL UK.

But he added: “If the issues being raised are true then obviously we will engage in dialogue with Scope to try and understand the situation better and maybe direct a different outcome.”

A Scope spokesman said the intention was “not to compete with local DIAL groups”, and added: “If Scope knows a DIAL group is going for funding, it will not compete with it.”

Ruth Sutherland, executive director of services for Scope, said: “We are working hard to build a stronger relationship with independent DIAL groups.

“There are some back office changes – but these won’t affect the support DIAL groups receive from Scope to help them provide vital information and advice to disabled people.

“Currently the DIAL groups are supported by a small UK team based in Doncaster. The plan is to move that support closer to the local groups by creating regional support roles.

“At the same time we are creating a new knowledge and learning directorate in Scope, which will ensure that expertise in information and advice – both from the local groups and from Scope’s services – can be retained, developed and shared throughout the network.”

**19 October 2011**

### **Merger leads to concern over new DPO’s name**

The UK’s leading disabled people’s organisation (DPO) has raised serious concerns over the new name chosen by a trio of national disability charities that are set to merge.

Members of the National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL) decided last week to back the merger, which had already been approved by RADAR and Disability Alliance (DA). The trio propose to call their new organisation Disability Rights UK.

But senior figures within the UK Disabled People’s Council (UKDPC) are concerned that the name of the new DPO is too close to UKDPC’s human rights offshoot, [Disability Rights Watch UK](#).

Disability Rights Watch UK, which was set up last year, aims to ensure that disabled people and DPOs are “fully involved” in monitoring how the UK government is implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

UKDPC believes the new DPO’s name will cause confusion among funders and has written this week to the chief executives of RADAR, NCIL and DA, asking them to reconsider.

Disability Rights Watch UK is establishing a growing international reputation, with UKDPC’s chief executive, Jaspal Dhani, returning this week from a trip to South Africa in which he gave a presentation to local DPOs and other organisations about its work. Dhani was invited to give the presentation in Johannesburg by the British Council.

Julie Newman, UKDPC’s acting chair, will visit Brussels next week to represent UKDPC and Disability Rights Watch UK at a European Union “work forum” on the UN convention.

Dhani said the project’s growing international reputation was “absolutely” a reason to avoid any confusion caused by a new, similarly-named DPO.

He said: “DPOs in other countries have responded really favourably. What we are doing here in Britain is unique. It is not being replicated anywhere else. We can develop up-to-date reports and analysis and share that with DPO partners in other parts of the world.

“Disability Rights Watch UK as a brand, as a project, is not just something we are promoting domestically, it is recognised internationally.”

Newman added: “We have had some concerns but I have written to all three chief executives.

“We are hoping any difficulties can be overcome amicably and we will be awaiting the response to the letter in the next two weeks.”

UKDPC has said it cannot decide whether it will work alongside the new merged organisation until it starts work.

No-one from DA, RADAR or NCIL was available to comment.

A UKDPC delegation was in South Africa for the eighth world assembly of Disabled Peoples’ International (DPI), the network of national DPOs.

Among the issues raised by UKDPC with other DPOs were the struggle for inclusive education, the UK government’s implementation of the UN convention, and the importance of [UK Disability History Month](#), which aims to raise the profile of the fight for equality and human rights in the UK.

A workshop at the assembly that was headed by two young disabled activists from the UK, Lucy Mason and Zara Todd, led to a recommendation for DPI to set up its first group for young disabled people.

Dhani said UKDPC would continue to push DPI's executive committee to establish such a group.

**19 October 2011**

### **Scheme brings MPs face-to-face with disabled constituents**

More than 100 disabled people have raised campaigning issues around disability rights and equality in face-to-face meetings with their local MP, thanks to a scheme that aims to build relationships between politicians and their disabled constituents.

Disabled people who took part in this year's MP Disability Dialogue raised concerns such as cuts to disability benefits and services, workplace discrimination, the importance of the Access to Work scheme, disability hate crime, and the portability of social care.

One of the disabled people who met with their local MP – with support from the scheme – was Emma Bishop, a member of the Devon Learning Disability Parliament.

She told a parliamentary reception this week how she talked with her MP about the need for more Changing Places toilets – fully accessible toilet and changing facilities – in east Devon.

Neil Parish, the Conservative MP for Tiverton and Honiton, supported her campaign, suggested names of organisations she could approach, and wrote letters backing her campaign.

Other MPs wrote letters or asked questions of ministers, pledged to contact government departments and wrote to local authorities on behalf of the disabled people who met them through the scheme.

Liz Sayce, chief executive of RADAR – which was organising the scheme for the fifth time – said the aim was for disabled people “to have a voice, to get things changed”, but also to break down MPs' misconceptions about disabled people, as well as disabled people's misconceptions about MPs.

The disabled Labour MP Dame Anne Begg told the reception it was useful for her as a wheelchair-user to hear about the challenges facing disabled people with different

impairments, and added: “It is very important for us to realise that there are a lot of different views out there in the disabled community.”

Maria Miller, the minister for disabled people, told the reception: “One of the dialogue’s real strengths is that both parties get something out of the meeting.”

She added: “It’s vital that disabled people have that strong voice in the policies and decisions that affect them.”

She pointed to the £3 million in government funding announced in July to support the growth of local disabled people’s organisations, and the government’s new strategy to make it easier for disabled people to become MPs and local councillors.

Miller added: “We don’t just want more disabled people to influence policy, we also want them to participate actively in government. We want disabled people to be at the heart of the decision-making process.”

RADAR has now called for more practical support to help disabled people communicate with their MP, and for MPs to review the accessibility of their arrangements for communicating with constituents, with the help of local user-led organisations and disabled people.

RADAR is also working with the training organisation Wideaware, with support from the Office for Disability Issues, to produce a new disability equality e-learning tool for MPs and parliamentary staff.

As part of the project, Wideaware is asking disabled people to take part in [a short survey about their experience of engaging with their MP](#).

**19 October 2011**

### **Maynard hopes bill will bring dignity to public transport**

A disabled MP is attempting to introduce new legislation that would extend free travel concessions in England to disabled people who use community transport services.

Paul Maynard, the Conservative MP for Blackpool North and Cleveleys, said extending the concessionary scheme was a matter of “human dignity”.

The scheme provides disabled people and over 60s with free off-peak travel on local buses and some other forms of public transport.

But the free travel does not usually apply if the user needs to use community transport – such as a dial-a-ride service – because of their mobility impairment.

Maynard told MPs: “To me, that imbalance seems to be not only unfair, but contrary to the spirit of human dignity.”

He added: “I understand that many councils seek to subsidise travel for those who are disabled in various ways. However, not every council does, and with increasing budgetary pressures... I fear that fewer and fewer will.”

His bill follows a report by the transport select committee in August, which found that most local authorities in England had cut funding for bus services.

The report on the impact of [government spending cuts on bus services in England](#) – except for those in London – backed the government’s commitment to protect free bus travel for older and disabled people.

But it pointed out that the concessionary scheme does not apply to most of England’s 1,700 community transport providers, and called for a change in the law.

Maynard’s bill would amend the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 so that people with “complex mobility problems” who cannot access public transport could use their concessionary passes on community transport services.

The bill was introduced under the ten-minute rule, one of the ways in which backbench MPs can introduce legislation. Such bills rarely become law and are mainly an opportunity for MPs to highlight an important issue.

But Maynard said afterwards: “I am happy with the support the motion got from all sides of the house and I very much look forward to its second reading in February next year.

“This is a great step forward in bringing fairness and equality to many people who have thus far been denied what others take for granted due to disability or mobility issues.”

**19 October 2011**

### **Protesters block buses over danger of shared spaces**

Campaigners have highlighted the dangers of controversial “shared space” street developments by blocking buses outside a railway station, as part of an international day of action.

The protest in Southend-on-Sea, Essex, was led by blind and partially-sighted people, but included other disabled people, older people and families with prams, all protesting at the town’s two new shared space developments.

More than 50 people held up buses outside Southend Victoria station, before marching along the high street to the second of the town's shared spaces at City Beach, on the seafront.

The protest came just days before the government published [new guidance](#) aimed at helping local authorities "design high-quality shared space schemes". The guidance points out that such designs "can be problematic for some, particularly blind and partially-sighted people".

Shared space designs usually remove kerbs and crossings so motorists and pedestrians can share the street space, but pedestrians and motorists and cyclists have to make eye contact to establish right of way.

Campaigners say the need for eye contact and the absence of kerbs, which people with guide dogs and long canes use to navigate, puts blind and partially-sighted people at risk, as well as some people with learning difficulties and children.

Visitors to Southend Victoria station now come out of the main entrance straight into an area shared with buses, cars, taxis, bicycles and other pedestrians.

The protest was organised by Jill Allen-King, who chairs the European Blind Union's commission on mobility and transport and has warned the council that she believes its developments breach the parts of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on accessibility and consulting properly with disabled people.

She said the two developments had become "no-go areas" for blind and partially-sighted people.

She said: "I have lived here for 71 years and for the first time in my life there are two areas that I cannot go.

"We keep being told that these shared streets work well in Europe but, as chairperson of the European Blind Union's commission on mobility and transport for the past 14 years, I know that they don't."

She also welcomed the inclusive nature of the demonstration. "The majority were not blind and partially-sighted people, they were local residents really concerned about the shared spaces, because they are dangerous for everybody."

Tony Cox, the council's executive councillor for public protection, waste and transport, claimed that both schemes were "designed in consultation with a number of disability groups".

He said they both provide "guidance" for blind and partially-sighted people, including "signalised junctions" at the end of each scheme, and crossing points with dropped kerbs and tactile paving.

He said: “We would challenge the claim that these locations have become ‘no-go areas’ for blind and partially-sighted people and we have received positive comments on both schemes from partially-sighted and blind visitors to the town.

“However, we are aware of Jill Allen-King’s concerns and have made a commitment to review the performance of both schemes, particularly for vulnerable users and people with impaired mobility, who have told us they welcome the step-free environments.”

The protest took place on Saturday 15 October, White Cane Day, an international day that recognises the rights of blind and partially-sighted people to independence and mobility.

## **18 October 2011**

### **DPO hopes funding will turn volunteers into employees**

A disabled people’s organisation has secured £300,000 of National Lottery funding to support disabled young people into volunteer placements.

The three-year Including Disabled Volunteers project aims to provide workplace experience that will make it easier for young people to move into paid work, education or training.

Those taking part will be offered information, advice and guidance, as well as workshops and training on issues such as assertiveness, life skills, job-readiness training and job-seeking support.

The project is being run by [Hammersmith and Fulham Action on Disability](#) (HAFAD) and Hammersmith and Fulham Volunteer Centre.

Sarah Robinson, HAFAD’s fundraising manager, said the project would “make a huge difference to disabled young people who are desperate to work and desperate to have independent lives”.

She said many people find paid work as a result of volunteering opportunities, but young disabled people are not being offered such placements.

They also do not usually have the opportunity to build up their skills, CVs and confidence through the part-time or Saturday jobs that non-disabled young people often find while at school or college, she said.

Robinson said the opportunities were “really not there for them” and they were “not getting the kind of support that would help them get a job”.

She said the project would also provide support similar to that offered through the Access to Work scheme for disabled people in paid work.

She added: “When they are going for a job they will be able to talk confidently about how they use assistive technology or a personal assistant in the workplace.

“If you can do that in an interview and give an employer a vision of how it can work, it could dramatically improve your chances of getting a job.”

She warned that government support aimed at helping disabled people into jobs – through its new Work Programme and the Work Choice scheme – “really isn’t working, except for people who do not need much in the way of reasonable adjustments”.

Kamran Mallick, HAFAD’s director, said the two organisations were “thrilled” to receive the funding, which would “help to create a lasting change” and enable young disabled people to “raise their aspirations and confidence in their abilities”.

He said the project would “support the third sector to take a strategic approach to the removal of barriers that prevent disabled people from volunteering and gaining employment”.

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News provided by John Pring at [www.disabilitynewsservice.com](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com)