



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1158
Ein cyf/Our ref FM -/10190/21

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
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27 August 2021

Dear Jack,

I am writing in response to your letter of 3 August, in which you enclosed the Petitions Committee Report on petition P-06-1158, for the Welsh Government to put in place a dedicated Disability Minister within the next term of Government. The Welsh Government welcomes the initial petition submitted by Alex Chung.

In June 2020 the Welsh Government's Disability Equality Forum undertook to do some in-depth work looking into the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on disabled people. The resulting ['Locked Out: Liberating disabled people's lives and rights in Wales beyond Covid-19' Report](#) with its 70 Recommendations, published on 2 July, brought into focus the continuing existence of deep-rooted inequalities in our society. The call for a dedicated Minister for Disabled People is one of the recommendations.

I met with the authors on 18 March to discuss the Report and consider the next steps. It was a very powerful meeting, where each member of the steering group outlined how COVID had impacted them personally. I committed, if Welsh Labour formed the next Government, to establish a Ministerial-led Disability Rights Taskforce to consider the findings in more detail. This Taskforce is now being established and is due to meet in October. The recommendations will be taken forward as part of the remit of the Taskforce, involving everyone across all Welsh Government Departments together with external partners and delivery organisations. Such a conversation will put the perspective of disabled people at its

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

centre ensuring the Welsh Government's ambition to make the Social Model of Disability the central organising principle for action, is visibly applied and continually re-affirmed.

The Disability Rights Taskforce will be co-chaired by the Minister for Social Justice and they will be tasked to build on the actions already taken by the Welsh Government to mitigate the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on disabled people in the development of a Disability Rights Action Plan.

The petition highlights the importance of accessible travel, mental health services and employment and the need for action. Locked Out: Liberating disabled people's lives and rights in Wales beyond Covid-19 also echoed those calls. I am pleased to say that the Welsh Government has already put in place many of the key building blocks to address inequalities in these areas.

The need for accessible travel, became even more apparent during the pandemic, and Llwybr Newydd – the new [Wales Transport Strategy 2021](#) has been developed with a view to putting accessibility front and centre alongside sustainability. As a result of the strategy work is underway to develop an equality pathway which will set out the milestones and actions needed to deliver a more accessible transport system. Passenger Assist services for train travel were enhanced through the work of the Transport for Wales Accessibility and Inclusion Panel which continued to operate virtually and by post. A number of improvements were made to staff guidance, briefings and risk assessments with an emphasis on proactive support for anyone in need of support.

The Welsh Government is aware of the ongoing impact the pandemic is having on the mental health and well-being of disabled people and their families and carers and will work with the Loneliness and Isolation Advisory Group to consider what more can be done. We continue to monitor the evidence to understand the impact of Covid-19 and the restrictions on mental health and well-being. Levels of anxiety are higher now than pre-pandemic levels and we also know that some groups have been disproportionately affected. For some, the easing of the restrictions and the ability to see loved ones and do the things they enjoy will improve their mental health, but we recognise that some people will need access to more specialist support. We are committed to ensuring that this support is equitable and accessible, and that services are delivered in line with the all Wales standard for communication and information for people with sensory loss. Please find attached link to the Welsh Government's [Together for Mental Health delivery plan 2019-2022](#) which provides further detail on our current priority areas

The Programme for Government identifies a commitment to our Disabled People's Employment Champions as a mechanism to help close the employment gap between disabled people and the rest of the working population. The Champions are working with employers across Wales, utilising their lived experience to advocate for employment of disabled people, encouraging employers to take action to create the conditions where disabled people can gain and thrive in employment. The Champions are, in partnership with Business Wales, promoting awareness of the support available to employers, including providing practical advice and help on issues such as inclusive HR policies, recruitment, and retraining and staff retention.

While I recognise and understand the call for a dedicated Minister for Disabled People, I believe if we are to address inequalities in Wales, we need to provide an intersectional approach to understanding how inequalities can combine to compound disadvantage. The Minister for Social Justice champions the rights of disabled people and alongside a diverse portfolio of social justice issues. All Welsh Ministers continue to advocate for equality and human rights in all they do and seek to embed equalities effectively into their work. They will also continue to show leadership and pro-actively drive action on addressing all inequality to make our vision for a fairer Wales a reality.

I am copying this letter to the Minister for Social Justice

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARK DRAKEFORD