



APPGA Meeting on the Government's Proposed Welfare Reforms

Date: Wednesday 21st of May 2025

Time: 15:30-16:30

Location: Room W3, Westminster Hall

Attendance:

Marie Tidball MP (Chair)

Alison Hume MP (Officer)

Sir Stephen Timms MP, Minister of State for Social Security and Disability

Shockat Adam MP

Olivia Blake MP

Andrew Cooper MP

Cat Eccles MP

Jodie Gosling MP

Toni Woodman and Megan Rimmington, on behalf of Alex Baker MP

Agenda

Meeting Opened at 15:30

1. Welcome and Introduction – Chair Marie Tidball MP

Marie welcomed everyone to the APPGA meeting and introduced the first speakers, Jessa Faithfull, the National Autistic Society's (NAS) Policy and Parliamentary Officer (Education and Employment), Joey Nettleton Burrows, the NAS Policy and Public Affairs Manager and Mel Merritt NAS Head of Policy and Campaigns.

2. Briefing on how the Welfare Reforms will impact autistic people –
Briefing from the National Autistic Society

Jessa, Joey, and Mel delivered a presentation on the Government's proposed welfare reforms to incapacity benefits and Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and the impacts these will have on autistic people, with reference to examples shared with us by concerned autistic people. Both the briefing and the presentation will be shared along with the minutes.

3. Update from Minister Timms followed by any questions for Minister; and discussion with APPG members on next steps, led by Chair

Minister Timms explained that the Green Paper set out to (I) improve employment, including investment to address barriers to work, (II) remove disincentives to work, and (III) make the cost of PIP sustainable. On the first point, he mentioned the case of Dominic Jones, an autistic man who had a positive experience with a Work Coach who was also autistic.

Cat Eccles MP highlighted her lived experience as an autistic woman and said the new requirement that the four-point threshold be met in a single category, rather than cumulatively, is causing concern.

Minister Timms responded that analysis from the Office for Budget Responsibility projects that only 10% of current claimants will lose their benefits.

Marie Tidball MP asked the NAS for an example of people who may lose out on PIP under the new rules.

Jessa responded that people who need prompting to undertake essential tasks across a number of areas (e.g., personal hygiene, toileting, eating, and attending appointments), which many autistic people need, will lose essential support as their points are cumulative. They also highlighted that autistic people have fluctuating support needs, and a lack of support causes a deterioration in one's wellbeing such that their support needs increase.

Minister Timms said that he would like to hear the NAS's views on PIP reforms. He said that Terms of Reference will be published in the summer. He expressed his frustrations with the lack of tangible targets for employment support in the Buckland Review, and said the expert neurodiversity panel led by Professor Amanda Kirby will publish their recommendations in the summer. Additionally, Connect to Work is being rolled out and disability pay gap reporting will be mandatory for large employers.

Olivia Blake MP asked about Jobcentres and work coaches supporting the self-employed and those wanting to start their own business, which is currently a missed opportunity. She also asked if there could be incentives for employers to hire disabled people, such as National Insurance Contribution discounts. She also highlighted that the biggest issue with the proposed reforms, the changes to the four-point threshold, is not being consulted on, nor are ideas on improving the assessment process.

On self-employment, Minister Timms responded that the Department for Work and Pensions used to support this, and he would need to consider this further. On improving the assessment process, Minister Timms said these ideas are needed. The Department wants to record assessments as a default, having heard stories of disabled claimants saying their assessment report doesn't reflect the meeting; recordings would also be used to improve assessments.

Alison Hume MP spoke of her experience as the mother of a 26-year-old autistic adult son who lives in supported living. She voiced her deep concerns about the proposed reforms and asked why the Government cannot wait for an impact assessment.

Minister Timms expressed that the need to implement the proposed reforms quickly is due to the country's finances.

Andrew Cooper MP asked why MPs need to vote in June.

Minister Timms responded that this was due to changes in legislation requiring new training for assessors.

Becca, an autistic self-advocate/consultant spoke of her own experiences as an autistic person who works from home and receives both Universal Credit and PIP, which help to cover her rent. Without PIP, she would lose her job, be made homeless, and have to access community housing, incurring additional costs for the Government. This reflects the situation for many autistic people across the country.

Becca spoke to many issues based on both her own and other autistic people's experiences of the inaccessibility of the assessment process, the basic living costs autistic people use PIP for, obstacles and barriers faced by autistic people in the workplace, and disability discrimination.

Becca raised a number of concerns around the proposed reforms including linking PIP assessments with LCWRA status in Universal Credit and the absence of incentives for employers to hire disabled people. She also raised the lack of impact assessment from the Government and asked if assessments had been conducted to determine the impact of the proposed cuts on other public services including housing, health and social care, and more.

Minister Timms said that the Government has plans to address the cost of living and the housing crisis. The Minister stated his desire to further engage with autistic and disabled people on these issues and committed to meeting with Becca.

Shockat Adam MP asked about provisions for those for whom English is a second language, especially given the complexity of the assessments.

Minister Timms spoke about improvements being made to translation services but did not comment on the complexity of assessments.

Marie Tidball MP asked about the sequence of events; when the supply-side (e.g., available jobs) of the measures will be rated by the OBR, and why the changes can't be postponed until that assessment has been made. She proposes that the Government alternatively delay the reforms and focus on closing the employment gap before making cuts.

Minister Timms responded that legislation is needed now and highlighted that the new criteria will not come into force until November 2026 and then only for those whose (re-)assessments are due.

Meeting Closed at 16:30