



The Rt. Hon. Nick Clegg M.P.
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The Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP
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30 APR 2012
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CORRESPONDENCE UNIT

24 April 2012

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Dear Iain

I recently met with several constituents who are members of Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind (SRSB), regarding the transfer from DLA to PIP and the impact this will have on blind people.

Please find enclosed a copy of my constituents' briefing which I trust is self explanatory. In short, my constituents, and members of the SRSB, are concerned about the move away from disability model to the medical model of assessment. My constituents believe that under the medical model their needs will not be properly assessed. Further to this, there was particular concern over the assessment criteria; my constituents are concerned that mobility assessments do not take into consideration the difficulty blind people have in travelling and the extra cost this often incurs.

I welcome your thoughts on this which I will be pleased to forward to my constituent.

I am writing in my capacity as a constituency MP to bring these issues to your attention. Please reply to the constituency office at the address above.

Yours sincerely

Nick Clegg MP

PLEASE ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO THE CONSTITUENCY OFFICE

Whilst Nick Clegg MP will treat as confidential any personal information which you pass on, he will normally allow staff and authorised volunteers to see it if this is needed to help and advise you. The MP may pass on all or some of this information to agencies such as the DWP, the Inland Revenue or the local Council if this is necessary to help with your case. Nick Clegg MP may wish to write to you from time to time to keep you informed on issues which you may find of interest. Please let him know if you do not wish to be contacted for this purpose.

Notes for meeting with Nick Clegg, MP on Friday 20th April 2012
regarding the change from Disability Living Allowance to Personal
Independence Payment

People Attending: Steve Hambleton, General Manager of Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind, representing blind and partially sighted constituents generally

Robin Story, Euin Hill, Norman Wragg, Hilary Myers and Julie Swift, all constituents.

We appreciate that in the current economic/financial climate that the government needs to save money and we also recognise that there is a need for welfare reform generally. However, with the change from DLA to PIP, based upon the proposed assessment criteria, we believe that the impact upon blind and partially sighted people will be disproportionate.

Under the previous administration the Liberal Democrat party actively supported the case for people registered as blind to be eligible for DLA Higher Rate mobility which only took effect in April 2011. Under the proposed PIP criteria it seems unlikely that many blind people will be eligible for the higher rate. If the need was there then what has changed now?

From discussion with our colleagues at RNIB it would seem that Maria Miller, Minister for Disabilities in DWP, is probably the most influential minister in terms of the change from DLA to PIP but whilst consulting with RNIB just last week, does not seem to appreciate the impact that lack of sight has on people's ability to lead a full life. At the moment she is robustly defending the notion that blind people adapt to their blindness over time and therefore need less money. This would indicate that she has very limited appreciation of the challenges faced every day by blind and partially sighted people.

The government's general policies seem to focus on a shift away from the medical model of disability to the social model of disability, something we applaud. However, the PIP criteria are based on the medical model, ie the proposals state that the assessment will be carried out by "an independent health professional", which RNIB understand to be a consultant. Adopting the social model of disability would focus on the holistic impact upon somebody's life rather than just ability or lack of ability to undertake specific tasks.

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In terms of the proposed assessment criteria we could make many detailed observations but would highlight the following issues: -

Risk and Safety – there is very little recognition of any risks to the safety of the individual either in their own home or outside.

Engaging Socially – there is no recognition that supporting people to engage socially will make a significant contribution towards avoiding social isolation. There is much evidence from Department of Health and other bodies that social isolation impacts upon the mental health and general wellbeing of a person, resulting in high demand on health services.

Employability – there is no recognition that supporting people through PIP will help people retain or secure employment. eg **Communications Needs** – if people cannot access information about jobs/training, read job descriptions etc they are disadvantaged in securing employment. This is at the same time as disabled people are being moved off Incapacity Benefit onto Employment Support Allowance or Job Seekers Allowance.

Communication Needs – there is little recognition of the specialist aids that blind and partially sighted people need to communicate and access information. Despite very little information being available in braille and only a small percentage of blind people reading braille there seems to be a general assumption that all blind people read braille so they have no other communication needs. Adaptive technology is expensive and most information is not available in alternative formats. Nick Clegg will recall that in July 2009 he launched a campaign (Losing Patients) to make information in the health services available in the patient's format of choice – little practical progress has been achieved in the health sector area and the same applies across all parts of life and society generally. If people cannot access information or communicate effectively they cannot achieve their full potential and are severely disadvantaged as a result.

