

Independent living and disabled people

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Introduction

There was much political consensus on disability policy during the 20 years to 2010. Campaigning by disabled people's organisations had led to all-Party support for an additional costs benefit (Disability Living Allowance), anti-discrimination legislation, and measures to increase disabled people's employment rate and reduce the numbers living in poverty. In addition, Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties all came to support disabled people's wish to have choice and control over the support required to go about their daily lives. This piece will summarise the resulting commitments to independent living and review progress made since 2010.

In 2005, with all-Party support, the Labour government published *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005), which stated that:

'By 2025, disabled people in Britain should have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and will be respected and included as equal members of society' (p.7).

In 2008 the Independent Living Strategy (ILS) (HM Government, 2008) set out an aim that, by 2013:

- disabled people who need support to go about their daily lives will have greater choice and control over how support is provided
- disabled people will have greater access to housing, transport, health, employment, education and leisure opportunities and to participation in family and community life.

This five year strategy included outcomes against which progress was to be measured and

stated that, if sufficient progress was not made by 2013, further consideration would be given to the need for legislation to deliver an entitlement to independent living.

The Coalition Government's approach

On entering government, the Coalition parties restated their support for the Independent Living Strategy but then spent three years developing another strategy and action plan, *Fulfilling Potential* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013a). The Independent Living Scrutiny Group, intended to report on progress, was disbanded and the government refused to carry out the promised five year review of progress in 2013.

Fulfilling Potential has some similar outcomes to the ILS, but many of the databases against which progress was to be measured were discontinued or affected by changes in the definition of 'disabled person' in the Equality Act 2010, resulting in breaks in the time series of a number of data sources. This means that the government's 2014 progress report on *Fulfilling Potential* is limited in what it measures – on most outcomes 2013 is taken as the baseline year. It is also difficult to fully measure progress on ILS commitments. Nevertheless, there is serious cause for concern when key outcomes of the ILS are measured against what data is available.

Choice and control

An increase in the proportion of disabled people saying they have choice and control over support needed to go about daily life is a key outcome for the ILS and *Fulfilling Potential*. However, there has been a significant fall in choice and control since 2008 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014a: 20) despite the increase in 'self-directed support' in the form of personal budgets for social care. Most personal budgets

take the form of council-managed services, only 17% are direct payments and there is evidence that inadequate funding and restrictions on how personal budgets can be used inhibit choice and control (see e.g. Needham and Glasby, 2014).

Participation in family and community life

Expenditure on social care fell by £4bn between 2010/11 and 2012/13, and is predicted to fall by a further £4bn by 2015 – a total reduction of 33% (Duffy, 2014). The consequences are significant for people who need support to live at home and to participate in 'family and community life'. For example, between 2010/11 and 2013/14, the numbers of older people receiving home care support fell by 31.7%, the numbers receiving equipment and home adaptations by 41.6% and those receiving by meals on wheels by 63.7% (Age UK, 2015). Home care providers are worried about risks to dignity and safety of service users, and many report that levels of service purchased by local authorities or via direct payments are not sufficient to cover the support required (Angel, 2012).

There has been a significant increase in the percentage of people with learning disabilities who receive no support, and increases in charges for those that do (Mencap, 2012). Closure of the Independent Living Fund to new applicants in 2010 and to current recipients in 2015 means people with high levels of support needs are at increasing risk of institutionalisation. The money to be transferred to local authorities is less than that currently spent on supporting ILF recipients, confirming evidence from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services that they are unlikely to provide equivalent replacement funding. More local authorities are being open about their practice of limiting the amount of money they will spend to support someone at home to the cost of alternative residential provision (Disability Rights UK, 2013).

Employment and economic well-being

The ILS (and *Fulfilling Potential*) committed the government to narrowing the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people. In

2010 this was 30%, having fallen by 10% since 2002. In 2014 – using the new definition of 'disabled person' – it had risen slightly to 33% (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014a: 10). There is no evidence that current policies to support disabled people into work are improving employment opportunities: only 5% of disabled people on the Work Programme have found a job (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014b). The reported success rate for the Work Choice programme is better but only 1% receive this form of support (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014c). There was a 16% decline in the numbers of disabled people receiving support from the Access to Work programme between 2009/10 and 2012/13, and although there was a slight increase during 2013/14, the number is projected to fall by a further 31% during 2014/15 (House of Commons Library, 2014: 5).

The proportion of disabled people and their families living in poverty has fallen over the last 10 years, although they are still more likely to be living in poverty than non-disabled households. This improvement is largely because of reductions in the numbers of pensioner households living in poverty (McInnes et al., 2014: 32-33). Large numbers of disabled people have experienced, or will experience, a reduction in their household income as a result of welfare reform. Demos calculated 3.7 million disabled people will experience some reduction of income, and, over the period to 2017 they would lose £28 billion as a group (Wood, 2013). For many, this will be compounded by the reductions in funding for social care and the increase in VAT, which has a disproportionate impact on poorer households.

There is mounting evidence of substantial negative impact on disabled people's quality of life. Research carried out by Ipsos Mori on behalf of the National Housing Federation found that amongst households affected by the bedroom tax (61% of whom include someone with a disability or long-term illness), 9 out of 10 are concerned about meeting their living costs, 32% have cut back on meals and 26% on heating (National Housing Federation, 2014).

Housing and transport

Disabled people are experiencing a reduction in housing opportunities. In 2001, 33% of households containing a disabled person were social housing tenants but by 2011 this had fallen to 13% (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013: 72). The numbers of people accepted as homeless by local authorities reduced considerably between 2003 and 2010 but has increased since then, and this pattern also applies to people accepted as homeless because of old age, physical disability, or mental illness (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2014).

In 2011, 15% of households that included someone with a long term limiting illness or disability felt their current home was not suitable for their needs (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013: 70). One in five people with learning disabilities are living in accommodation which 'needs improvement', 4 in 10 live with their families and of these 7 out of 10 want to change their housing situation (Mencap, 2012).

Funding for home adaptations rose each year from 1997-98 until 2011-12 but has since levelled off (House of Commons Library, 2013), although it has been estimated that the need for adaptations is more than ten times higher than the total amount of disabled facilities grant allocated (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011: para 2.2).

Research on older people's housing opportunities concluded 'there is very limited choice for older person households moving home to accommodate their support needs (in terms of tenure, location, size, affordability and type of care/support)' (Pannell, et al., 2012: 7). Around 5% of older people live in specialist housing with support and there is evidence of a reduction in on-site support which has 'affected the quality of life for some residents, especially those aged 85+ and/or with high support needs' (Pannell and Blood, 2012: 1).

The Good Practice guide on Planning and Access for Disabled People has been cancelled following the publication of the National Planning Policy

Framework; and Design and Access statements have been scrapped for the majority of planning applications. A survey of district councils in England, found 'most new-build homes are still not designed to meet the needs of disabled people, nor to be readily adaptable' (Astral Advisory, 2013: 1).

In terms of transport, there has been no improvement in the proportion of disabled people experiencing difficulties, which remains at about 1 in 4 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014a: 24). Forty-two percent of disabled people claiming Job Seekers' Allowance and 36% of those in the Employment and Support Allowance Work-related Activity Group cite difficulties with transport as a barrier to employment (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013b:13). Since 2010 there have been significant reductions in expenditure on important programmes intended to increase transport opportunities.

Conclusion

For the first time in the history of modern social policy things are getting worse for disabled people. Independent living opportunities amongst the current generations of disabled people are diminishing, and will only worsen for future generations unless urgent action is taken to reverse current trends. Such action would need to address not only the support that many disabled people need in their daily lives but also their access to housing, transport, education and employment opportunities. Without such action, our society will never achieve the goal, set out in *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*, that disabled people in Britain 'will be respected and included as equal members of society'.

Note

This is a summary of evidence contained in Morris, J. (2014) Independent Living Strategy: A review of Progress, <http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/sites/default/files/pdf/IndependentLivingStrategy-A%20review%20of%20progress.pdf>

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