

## Open Letter to Government: Opposing Cuts to Welfare and Access to Work

To the Rt Hon Prime Minister, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and Members of Parliament,

We write on behalf of **Good Life Collaborative** – a group of organisations working across the North East of England to improve the lives of autistic people and people with a learning disability – to express our deep and united opposition to the cuts proposed in the *Pathways to Work* Green Paper.

These reforms are not simply policy adjustments. They are life-altering decisions that threaten the wellbeing, financial security, and basic human rights of millions of disabled people across the UK. It is estimated the proposals could push at least 350,000 people into poverty, including over 50,000 children, and cause more than 3 million disabled people to lose payments. The average financial loss is estimated at £1,720 per year, with some people losing as much as £723 per month through the removal of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and the Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity benefits.

In the North East, the impact will be particularly severe:

- Our region has the **highest proportion of disabled people in England**, with over **25% of working-age adults identified as disabled** – significantly higher than the national average.
- The North East also has the **lowest employment rate for autistic adults and adults with a learning disability**. Nationally, less than 5% of adults with a learning disability known to social care are in paid employment. In parts of the North East this is as low as 0.9%, yet recent figures show that 86% of people want to work.
- **Autistic people are more than twice as likely to be unemployed** as other disabled groups, yet face some of the highest barriers to accessing support like Access to Work – with long delays causing job offers to be withdrawn.

Many disabled people rely on their PIP to cover essential costs like carers, travel to work, and health-related expenses - just so they can feel well enough to go to work. These reforms will deepen inequality. They will not result in more people working. On the contrary, they will increase hardship, force people further from the labour market, and damage the very outcomes they claim to improve.

The government's own rhetoric acknowledges that "there will always be people who can never work, because of the severity of their disability or illness." Yet the proposed cuts – combined with plans to end the Work Capability Assessment and tighten eligibility for PIP – show a worrying disconnect from this reality. Cuts don't create jobs. They simply create fear, instability, and worsening mental health.

We also strongly oppose any reduction in funding or access to the **Access to Work** scheme. This is one of the few supports that works – when it is accessible. Delays, complexity, and recent policy changes have already limited its impact. Rather than cutting back, the government should be investing to expand and improve Access to Work, particularly for autistic people and those with learning disabilities who require flexible, enabling support to thrive in work.

We are deeply concerned that decisions appear to be underway before the consultation period has ended. This undermines the integrity of the consultation process and risks breaching the Gunning Principles - including the duty to keep proposals at a formative stage and to conscientiously consider the views of disabled people and their organisations.

The Connect to Work programme will only offer time-limited support, where many of the people we support, alongside those with physical impairments, require ongoing support to enable them to work. Leaks from whistleblowers at Access to Work suggest that all ongoing support is set to end later this

year, meaning a scheme that was specifically designed to support disabled people into employment is now actively forcing skilled and experienced disabled workers out of the workforce.

Good Life Collaborative is built on the belief that everyone deserves a good life – one with purpose, choice, and good support. These proposals undermine that vision. They will strip away the limited but vital scaffolding that many disabled people rely on to live independently, pursue ambitions, and feel valued in their communities.

We urge the government to:

1. Immediately pause the welfare reforms proposed in the Green Paper until a full and transparent impact assessment has been conducted;
2. Engage meaningfully with disabled people's organisations, especially those led by and for autistic people and people with learning disabilities;
3. Protect and invest in Access to Work, ensuring that some of the proposed £1b investment in supported employment is directed to the Access to Work scheme to help reduce waiting times and make the scheme more responsive to needs;

Without a fundamental shift in direction, these reforms will cause untold harm. They are unjust, unevidenced, and incompatible with a society that claims to value inclusion, equity, and human dignity.

**Signed,**

Good Life Collaborative

