

Executive Summary

This response has collected the experiences of 134 disabled people regarding how their lives, homes and human rights have been impacted by the Coronavirus response. After summarizing the key findings, this report is split into sections based on common themes:

- The introduction of the Coronavirus Act (2020) and insufficient observance of the Social Model of Disability, mainly focusing on the potential risk to disabled people's human rights; and access issues particularly shopping;
- Disability related discrimination during the pandemic, in provision of support services and public attitudes; and the general feeling from disabled members that they have not been fully considered during the pandemic.
- Findings from shielding disabled people, such as, their concerns around accessing shielding letters and easing lockdown.
- Pre-existing issues to the pandemic, such as, increasing concern of rising rates of domestic abuse. Other issues covered include isolation, a major concern for disabled people that pre-existed the lockdown, and digital exclusion and access to technology.
- Breaches to the right to independent living are also addressed, as a majority of the disabled people we spoke to felt their ability to live independently has been harmed by the lockdown. This includes accessing transport.
- Issues related to transition out of lockdown and why some disabled people have concerns about leaving lockdown.

- The positives that have come from the lockdown, mostly that it has shown employers that working from home is a viable option.

Overall, this report will find that there have been some positives and that disabled people generally prefer the slower approach to easing lockdown in Wales. However, there are still many areas which need improvement in order to ensure that lockdown doesn't entrench the inequalities faced by many disabled people and sets Wales on the path to be a truly equal and inclusive society.

Key Findings

1. Many disabled people feel that they have experienced discrimination during the lockdown.

- Communications materials need to be more accessible. E.g. the more widespread use of Easy Read.
- Access to toilets is a human rights issue, not having access to a toilet is leaving more disabled people isolated inside.
- There is a problem with methods to control queues blocking off accessibility features like ramps.
- Concerns about impact of increased use of face masks on D/deaf people and people with hearing loss.
- Some disabled people are concerned that schemes to support young people re-entering the workforce will discriminate against older disabled people.

2. Services provided by Local Authorities which are essential to disabled people, have been denied due to not seeming essential to others.

- There has been an overreliance on community support services.

3. There have been issues accessing healthcare

- There has been difficulties accessing shielding letters.
- Some disabled people have missed medical appointments due to not feeling comfortable or safe using public transport.
- Shielding disabled people want to see more information and more of a timeline for leaving lockdown for shielding people.

4. The lockdown has highlighted existing inequality

- There is a major concern about the impact of rising levels of domestic abuse on disabled women.
- Big concern about digital isolation. Especially amongst older people and people who are living in poverty.
- Disabled people feel that their ability to live independently has been significantly decreased by the lockdown.

5. There have been some positives from the lockdown

- Many disabled people hope that practises like the option to work from home and online doctors Consultations continue after the lockdown.

6. Disabled people prefer the Welsh approach to exiting lockdown

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List of Abbreviations

DW- Disability Wales

UNCRDP – United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People

BSL – British Sign Language

PA – Personal assistant

DNR – Do Not Resuscitate

DPOs – Disabled People’s Organisations

EIA – Equality Impact Assessment

Introduction

Disability Wales/Anabledd Cymru (DW) is the national association of disabled people's organisations in Wales striving for the rights and equality of all disabled people, including for independent living. Our core role is to reflect the views of our members to Government with the aim of informing and influencing policy.

Disability Wales subscribes to the Social Model of Disability, by which we mean that “disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (*UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People*).

COVID-19 has had a major impact on the lives of disabled people. The crisis has left many people unable to access support for their additional healthcare needs, increased difficulty in accessing other resources and have left many disabled people extremely concerned about their futures. COVID-19 has revealed the extent of the exclusion of some of the most marginalised members of society. We believe that all people have the right to equal healthcare under the NHS and it is vital that disabled people are included in decisions that impact their health and play a key role in the response to this crisis.

Disability Wales welcomes the opportunity to contribute a written response to the Equality Local Government and Communities Committee's inquiry on the response to this crisis, to support the oral evidence given on Tuesday 30th June. Our response is informed by information gathered from multiple focus groups of disabled people, total

attendance of which was 23 people; a survey on Lockdown Easing which was responded to by 86 people, a call for information via email of which we received 16 emails and participants from our “Lockdown Life” video series on social media, of which there were a total of 9 participants. Alongside other research, this response has been informed by the views of a total of 134 disabled people in Wales.

Coronavirus Act (2020) & the Social Model:

Disability Wales has been very concerned at the language used and the approach to disability during the pandemic. There has been a notable backslide to a more medicalised model of disability as opposed to the social model of disability. We see an example of this in the language used to refer to “vulnerable” people, whereas if following the social model, the term would be “at risk”. Impairments can cause a person to be at risk to the virus, but it is outside factors which would make a person “vulnerable”. This falls into unfortunate stereotypes of disabled people as weaker than their non-disabled counterparts. The Welsh Government has been supportive of the social model of disability since it was adopted in 2002 and was brought to the forefront by the Action on Disability Framework as one of the overarching principles of the framework.¹ **We would like to see this commitment to the social model more clearly evident in policies and plans informing the current and future response to the pandemic.**

We have had major concerns about the Coronavirus Act (2020) and the suspension of the duties of Local Authorities under the Social Services

¹ “Action on Disability: The Right to Independent Living Framework and Action Plan”, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-09/action-on-disability-the-right-to-independent-living-framework-and-action-plan.pdf>

and Wellbeing Act (2014). Suspension of some of these key duties could potentially result in a breach of disabled people's human rights. Local Authorities deliver key services to disabled people, services which are often essential for independent living. We are also concerned that the requirement for testimony to institutionalize a person was reduced, institutionalisation has been shown to be harmful to many disabled people and disability rights activists have been outspoken about the harm of them for many years. This is extremely concerning to us. **It is vital that they continue to ensure that none of the vital services that Local Authorities deliver are suspended without undertaking an equality impact assessment to ensure it will not infringe on the human rights of disabled people.**

The response to the pandemic further highlights the need to incorporate the UNCRDP into Welsh law. Although we acknowledge the previous efforts to consider the rights of disabled people, as we have seen there is still an issue of a lack of consideration for disabled people during the policy making process. Incorporating the UNCRDP would give Ministers the duty to ensure that the rights of disabled people and the impact on them are considered for all policy and legislation put forward. Disability Wales believes that this is a vital step to building a more equal Wales for all.

Access and Shopping:

The inclusion of a BSL Interpreter at all daily Welsh Government press briefings has been widely noted and appreciated. Nevertheless it could be seen as a token gesture as our members have reported having many difficulties with accessible communications. The main concerns have

been a lack of material available in Easy Read, accessibility of online resources for people who are vision impaired and the lack of widespread availability of BSL interpretation.

In line with requirements under the Equality Act (2010) all written materials should be made available in a range of formats including Easy Read, large print and BSL videos. Likewise all speeches or announcements, should have a BSL Interpreter present. All services must continue to be in line with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Equality Act continues to apply in full, as the lockdown has shown to have a worse impact on the protected characteristics, e.g. disabled people. It is vital that it is implemented and that full, thorough EIAs are carried out. We cannot allow pre-existing inequalities to worsen in times of crisis. In emergency situations, it is more important than ever that the Equality Act is implemented in full.

Although disabled members have generally been favourable towards social distancing measures and understand the use of them and need for them, they have reported issues around accessibility. It is extremely difficult for some disabled people to social distance appropriately e.g. people with vision impairment and guide dogs do not understand/ know how to social distance. This also causes issues in the general public and staff do not understand that they are not purposefully violating social distancing guidelines and there has been reported harassment or judgement from the public.

Social distance guidelines have had an impact on the ability of people to use carers/ PAs. Many disabled people need some additional support and since the lockdown many have reported difficulties accessing that support, or do not feel safe enough to do so. This is especially

problematic for those who live alone and do not have other people in their house who can support them.

Disabled people have reported many physical restrictions, especially restrictions to being able to take advantage of what lockdown freedoms they do have. Lack of access to public toilets has been repeatedly highlighted to us as a major concern. Many disabled people are having to stay in their homes and are unable to go outside and socialize with another household as they may not trust that there will be access to a toilet they can use. As rates of loneliness and isolation are already higher amongst disabled people, the effect of this restriction on disabled people feeling isolated is of particular concern to us. Access to toilets is a human rights issue. **No one should feel trapped in their homes due to not having access to a toilet. This is an extremely pressing concern and we call on Welsh Government to take quick action on this matter.**

Some disabled people have told us about their concerns about queuing. Many disabled people cannot stand or find it extremely painful to stand for a prolonged period of time, yet it can also be very difficult to get access to queue jumps. People have told us that they have been told off by staff for attempting to sit down whilst queuing and, particularly towards the beginning of lockdown, have not felt able to rest on a bench or at all whilst on their allowed exercise. This is also a breach of the human rights of the disabled people, it leaves them unable to do their shopping or get their daily exercise, like everyone else. **Clarity was required from the outset from Government on what was allowed here and further training for staff on supporting disabled customers.**

We've had reports of shopping being inaccessible in other ways. Often disabled people, especially wheelchair users, are unable to reach items on high shelves without help, current measures in supermarkets have made this more difficult. We have also been told that many of the measures shops use to control queues can end up blocking off accessibility features such as ramps and Blue Badge parking bays. Recent studies have shown that 47% of non-clinically 'vulnerable' disabled people in Wales have struggled to access food shopping.²

"They barriered it all off so all the dropped kerbs that would have enabled me to get in from my wheelchair quite easily were all barriered off. There was a kerb you had to go up, which you know I'm in an electric wheelchair and my husband had to tip it so we could get up. I commented on this to the staff and told them that they could do with a ramp. They said "that there was a ramp" and I said "well there isn't is there, you've got it barriered off" like it just did not occur to them. Then they were having a big moan about people who can walk a bit but can't stand for very long needing to sit down. They were just not prepared to make any provision for seating for people who needed it like that. I emailed the garden centre and told them "come on this is a breach of the Equality Act, you got to make that sort of access provision for people."
(Focus group participant)

This is a major issue for many disabled people. The lack of online shopping delivery spots has meant that many disabled people, especially disabled people who under normal circumstances would use online shopping, have no choice but to go to supermarkets/ other food shops. **Now that non-essential shopping is starting to open again, it**

² "Which? calls for urgent action as vulnerable people still struggle to get food", Hannah Walsh, (<https://www.which.co.uk/news/2020/07/one-in-four-vulnerable-people-still-struggling-to-access-food-100-days-into-coronavirus-lockdown/>)

is vital that disabled people are not discriminated against while shopping and that the ability to enjoy lockdown relaxations are not denied to people due to their impairments.

Discrimination:

Several disabled members have reported to us that they feel like they have been discriminated against due to their impairment. One member told us about being stopped in the street by police, who assumed that as she was in a wheelchair she should be shielding

“People can be very impatient, they mutter under their breath because they think you’re in the way. I even had a police officer turn round as I was walking the dog yesterday and saying “people like you aren’t meant to be out”. I said “Well I’ve not had a letter personally myself saying that I have to self-isolate.” He stopped me by bringing the car round in the car park I was in.” (Focus group participant)

This is a massive concern to us at Disability Wales, nobody should be getting stopped by police or treated differently due to their impairment. There has been a perception that all disabled people are included in the shielding group. This has major implications on how people treat those whose impairments are visible and affect their right to enjoy the same freedoms as any other person.

The “Do Not Resuscitate” letters sent out by a GP Practice in Maestag have been extremely concerning from the point of view of disabled people. There were many disabled and elderly people who felt pressured into signing these letters, which seemed to imply that their lives were not worth the same as the “young” and “healthy” lives that they were attempting to conserve resources for. This was extremely

distressing and left many people feeling that their lives were not valued by their health service and afraid to seek medical care in case they were deemed unworthy of healthcare. **Healthcare is a human right, we at Disability Wales fully believe that everyone has the right to free and equal healthcare under the NHS. It is vital that the fears of disabled people are calmed and that the Government commits itself to upholding their basic human rights.**

The availability of work is a major concern for disabled people post-lockdown. Like many others, many disabled people are facing a loss of income with the pandemic and are having to look for work in a damaged job market. The disability employability gap means that already there are a disproportionate amount of disabled people who are not in work. Once in work, that work is more likely to be more instable and lower paid, so this is a very worrying time for many working-age disabled people. Many have heard that proposals for job schemes are for young people, but are concerned that this is inadvertently discriminatory to disabled people, many of whom develop their impairments later in life. Although younger people are more likely to lose their jobs, disabled people and older people are less likely to be able to find work again.

“The other issue that ministers have been talking about is a 16-24 employment scheme. Although young people are more likely to lose their jobs in the upcoming recession, they’re also most likely to find jobs within time. Disabled and older workers are less likely to ever work again if they lose their job in a recession, because just 17% of people are born with their impairments, the vast majority of us are lucky enough to acquire their impairments as we get older. An age-based employment scheme automatically discriminates against disabled people.” (Focus group participant)

It is vital that whatever schemes the Government may set up do not discriminate based on age and that they do all they can to support disabled people returning to work.

There is a similar concern around age discrimination in housing allocation. Many disabled members have reported that they found accessing appropriate social housing extremely difficult due to being under the age of 55.

“I was in private rented accommodation, but because I was below 55, a lot of the criteria is 55 or over. My understanding was that you could be over 55, be physically well and mentally well and get accommodation, but it took me three and a half years. The only reason I got this accommodation is because my husband is over 55.” (Focus group participant)

“I’ve said before, if I were 15 years older it wouldn’t be a problem at all [...] Of course, when you’re disabled, you should not be discriminated against based on age. You’re disabled.” (Focus group participant who is applying for a nursing home)

Younger disabled people have been unable to access the care that they require due to this age discrimination in social/ supported housing, to access the support that they need many have to go through an extremely lengthy and stressful application process. This has been made worse by the coronavirus pandemic which, although understandably, has slowed the system down and left some disabled people stuck.

Consideration:

Our members have clearly expressed a preference for the Welsh Government strategy for tackling COVID-19 than the England model. However, many felt that there wasn't enough consideration for the needs of disabled people, especially at the early stages of the pandemic. Many disabled people have reported that without live-in family members, they don't know what they would have done and those living on their own have struggled.

"[T]hinking about it in reality, if I didn't have my husband here, living with me, I don't know how I would manage." (Focus group participant)

People have also reported that this lack of consideration in policy has affected their ability to access medical support. We've heard that as commonly-used services like social services and wheelchair services are only responding to emergencies, or are leaving people to wait until after the pandemic. Whilst many respondents understand and respect the reason for this, they are concerned about what is and isn't an essential service in their view.

"The services, whether the local authority or national, if you're talking to anything like your wheelchair service or your social services, all you get back off of them at the moment is "we'll get back to you when we've dealt with the COVID crisis." They're not doing anything unless it's absolutely urgent. Early in the lockdown, my chair had problems with the seating. I said that I can't even use my chair until the part which, they'd tried to do earlier in the year but had problems with the contractors, they sent somebody out and they couldn't fix it to start with. I had to make special arrangements for somebody to come and they had to take the chair away for two days and I was totally bedbound." (Focus group participant)

An issue which isn't an essential service for a non-disabled person, or what may be labelled a 'non-essential' service by a local authority, may be an essential service for a disabled person. It is important that this notion of "essential services" is flexible and can adjust to an individual's impairment-related needs.

There is also a concern about an overreliance on community support. Many Government services have been dependent on community support and the goodwill of loved ones. Although we have seen some fantastic community groups stepping up for shielding people in their area and many people have given their time to help their families and friends. This overreliance is problematic for many disabled people. Without access to carers and PAs, disabled people without a strong support system, especially those who live in rural areas, are left behind. **There needs to be consideration for those who may not have access to this community support.**

Shielding:

There have been a considerable amount of attention already to issues with shielding letters being sent to the wrong address or sent to people who are not supposed to be shielding. We have also had reports of disabled people who need to shield having difficulty accessing a shielding letters and who have had to get friends and family to contact their GP

"I did not get a shielding letter from my GP at first but my sister rang my GP surgery because she thinks I should be shielding officially. I have breathing problems, my windpipe is smaller than it used to be and I can't cough so the virus would probably affect me severely. I have received a

shielding letter from my a GP surgery now recommending I stay at home for the next 12 weeks” (Disability Wales member via email, edited for clarity)

There have been concerns from disabled people who are currently shielding about a lack of clear information given. It has been highlighted to us that although there have been clear steps set out to ease lockdown for most, that is not the case for people who have to shield. This has caused problems as there are many shielded people who are unsure when they can stop shielding. There is a particular concern from shielding members who have had medical appointments cancelled due to the pandemic. They need more information about when they can expect to be able to safely access their medical appointments. **We call for more information available to individuals who have to shield on the stages of coming out of shielding and information about when medical services will be reopening.**

There are concerns that disabled people who are shielding are still struggling to access support. According to a recent study 25% of shielded adults in Wales have struggled to access food shopping and only 4% have received support to access groceries from their local authority.³ We have heard how disabled people have been forced to take legal action against supermarkets over issues with accessing food shopping, more needs to be done to support individuals who have to shield to get the supplies that they need.

We've had concerns from members that there is a general perception that all disabled people must shield. This is a particular concern for two

³ "Which? calls for urgent action as vulnerable people still struggle to get food", Hannah Walsh, (<https://www.which.co.uk/news/2020/07/one-in-four-vulnerable-people-still-struggling-to-access-food-100-days-into-coronavirus-lockdown/>)

major reasons: harassment faced by visibly disabled people and lack of thought/ support for disabled people who do not need to shield. Issues regarding this has been discussed in previous sections.

“[S]hopping I was talking to our local manager of our local Tescos and we’d done online shopping for years, but because I’m not on the “at risk” register or have high priority status, he cannot actually offer a service to make things easier. You’re going week’s in-between being able to do the basic things that you actually want to do. Then when you go into a store, you’re looked at as if you’re being really odd.” (Focus group participant who is not shielding.)

As previously mentioned in the section on the Social Model of Disability, we are concerned that the language used to describe those shielding and disabled people has contributed to this misconception. Language such as “vulnerable” people that conflates all disabled people as a homogenous group that must be protected by non-disabled people, or must take appropriate action to protect themselves due to their disabilities. Whereas we know that often, disabled people are made vulnerable due to a lack of ability for services to adapt to their impairments and that they are an extremely diverse group of people whom have been differently impacted by the pandemic. **We call on the Welsh Government, to use the Social Model of Disability, seek more nuance in the language used to describe those who have to shield and give clarification about the differences between these groups.**

Abuse:

There have been a lot of concerns raised about the potential for increased rates of domestic abuse. Disabled women already face

increased levels of domestic abuse from partners and family members, we are extremely concerned about the rising levels of domestic abuse and the potential for this to disproportionately impact disabled women. Reports have shown that there has been a massive increase in reported cases on abuse in Wales, calls to domestic abuse hotlines and a much higher demand for services since the beginning of the lockdown.⁴ This is a particular concern to disabled women as many may have to face longer waiting times or have difficulty finding suitable support due to impairment related restrictions. Members of the focus groups have been particularly concerned about financial abuse against disabled people during this crisis. **We join the many voices in the third sector in calling upon the Welsh Government to help support disabled people, particularly disabled women during this time who may be experiencing domestic violence/ abuse.**

Isolation:

There has been a concern about the high levels of isolation and loneliness amongst disabled people for a long time. We have been very pleased to see the Welsh Government making commitments to tackle this in their Action on Disability Framework and the Connected Communities strategy to tackle loneliness. However, we have reports that the lockdown has exacerbated pre-existing loneliness and has increased isolation for many disabled people.

These feelings are most likely to occur in disabled people who live alone, especially if they are shielding. We have had reports of disabled

⁴ "Coronavirus: Domestic Abuse", Hannah Johnson, (<https://seneddresearch.blog/2020/05/01/coronavirus-domestic-abuse/>)

people who have been instructed to shield, moving in together to attempt to avoid loneliness.

“I have been pretty much isolating at home since March. I have a friend in Cardiff who has been here with me. He is 80 year old man who lives on his own in Cardiff, I live on my own here in Bridgend so we decided to isolate together keep each other company rather than spend the entire lockdown period on our own.” (Email from Disability Wales member)

This is a particular concern for disabled people with mental health issues, many of whom were already isolated but now have limited access to support services like carers, PAs and community groups. Many disabled people have reported feeling frustrated with the support available.

“I mean there’s a lot of frustration I suppose, I didn’t do much, I did conferences & meetings & events, I don’t socialise very much because I’m not a very sociable person generally.” (Focus group participant)

There has been a major concern about digital isolation. Although many disabled people are benefitting from some of the benefits of more online options, for many people a lack of access to digital technology such as smartphones, laptops, tablets and a reliable broadband connection, has prevented them from being able to socialize, stopped online shopping and accessing support.

“I think people would like to have more training possibility. Not everybody is capable of doing the online stuff and I think that needs to be seriously looked at. It’s very positive the online thing, but I think it needs to be publicised a lot more and steps to help people do this more. Because it takes, I’m very lucky that I have a very good PA with me who is very tech savvy with me and we can play around and fix things. But

not everyone has the confidence or the physical capability to do that."(Focus group participant)

This is also an issue which existed pre-pandemic but has been exacerbated in the months since. We've been pleased to see the excellent work done by Digital Communities Wales and the Welsh Government's previous commitment to tackling digital inclusion, yet the pressures of the pandemic has made the issues that people previously had that much worse. As 11% of the Welsh population are digitally excluded, a group which are disproportionately older, disabled and financially worse off, it is more vital than ever that we see fast, effective action on digital isolation.⁵

Welsh Government should ensure that there is adequate and accessible training in place on a range of issues, such as how to undertake online banking, getting online delivery orders and how to socialise online. Welsh Government should also ensure that accessible alternative options, such as telephone numbers, are available and easily accessible. Welsh Government should reaffirm its commitment to help ensure that disabled people in Wales are not excluded due to a lack of digital technology.

Independent Living:

All focus group participants felt that the lockdown measures had limited their ability to live independently currently. Many have reported difficulties in doing more than basic tasks, as the lockdown has left them exhausted and with limited access to support.

⁵ <https://www.digitalcommunities.gov.wales/>

“It just takes a lot more time and you’re doing your bare essentials. You’re not actually getting on with life as normal. You’re doing what you need to do and then you’re heading back home, or that’s what I find.”

(Focus group participant)

Although everyone in the lockdown has had reduced freedoms and reduced choices, for disabled people this is all the more extreme. For many people, it feels that all choice has been taken away and that they have been left more dependent on others than before.

“You’re not enjoying life are you, you’re just not going through the motions, but doing the bare minimum. We’ve all had choice taken away from us but it’s even harder when you’ve got a disability and you’re fighting for the same choices as everybody else.” (Focus group participant)

We are extremely concerned that the good work which has been done in the past to promote independent living will be impacted by the pandemic and that progress will take a step back. **Welsh Government should take every available step to ensure that disabled people’s right to live independently is not damaged or regressed by the coronavirus pandemic and that the priorities set out in the Action on Disability Framework are upheld .**

Transport:

Many disabled people are extremely concerned about using public transport. On our survey on easing lockdown restrictions, disabled people were asked to rate their feelings about using public transport from “Very Confident” to “Not At All Confident”. The general response was that they did not feel confident about using public transport, 18.2%

of people responded with “Not So Confident” and 52.3% of respondents were “Not At All Confident”. People reported that they were concerned about their safety whilst using public transport and feel like using public transport would be putting themselves at risk. They also stated they want to follow the Welsh Government guidance to avoid public transport, however are unclear about what the new regulations are. Often it is described as them making a personal choice to not use public transport unless absolutely necessary.

We’ve also had reports from disabled people about harassment/ odd questions being asked on buses. One disabled person told us that she was questioned about why they were travelling and how essential the journey was.

“Been questioned by a driver the purpose of the journey, wanting to know it’s an essential one. This person was on their way to a medical appointment.” (Results from Easing Lockdown survey)

The result of this is that many disabled people have felt anxious or unable to travel to their place or work, or anxious around getting to medical appointments. Considering the disadvantages already faced by disabled people in the workplace, we are extremely concerned that this is going to affect disabled people’s employment and worsen the disability employment gap.

We are also concerned that without feeling secure and safe in their ability to attend medical appointments, some disabled people have been missing appointments that weren’t cancelled. This is something which urgently needs to be addressed by the Welsh Government. We are calling on them to provide clarity on the new

public transport regulations, in accessible formats, to ensure that disabled people are not disproportionately affected by this.

End of Lockdown:

As we have seen a gradual easing in lockdown restrictions, so too have we seen an increasing concern about considerations made for disabled people. The majority of disabled people asked in the surveys and the focus groups supported the Welsh Government's gradual approach to lockdown easing, with one focus group member stating:

"I'd rather be in Wales than England though to be honest." (Focus group participant)

However, there have been many concerns raised by disabled people about the end of lockdown. Many have responded with concerns about communications, as there has been multiple reports that the information has not been accessible enough and that the differences between the 4 nations has been confusing.

Respondents to the survey and a call for evidence via email both mentioned their concerns about the use of face masks. As whilst wearing a face mask sound is muffled, you can't lip read and BSL is dependent on facial expressions for meaning, there are concerns from D/deaf people and people with hearing loss about being able to understand people around them. This goes from being able to understand people in a shop, to being able to understand medical providers whilst giving them treatment. This is a major concern for us, D/deaf people and those with hearing loss need to know that, should they have to go to hospital for medical treatment they would be able to understand and communicate with their healthcare providers.

There has been a concern about the reaction of the public, especially to those who need carers and therefore do not adhere to the 2m rule with them. There is similar concern from those who are vision impaired and therefore cannot social distance as either vision does not allow it or their guide dogs are not trained for social distancing. **It is important that as lockdown continues to ease, the general public is made aware that there are some people who for whatever reason have difficulty abiding by the same restrictions.**

Survey respondents told us that they have some concerns about returning to work and would like for a review of office/workplace environments and to produce a series of recommendations to ensure that workplaces are safe for disabled people.

There have been concerns about adjustments made for disabled people coming out of lockdown.

“Coming out of the lockdown I think is harder for disabled people than going into the lockdown because they’ve got to adjust to a different way of living but what adjustments have been made to help them?” (Focus Group participant)

There is some anxiety amongst disabled people about whether or not the adequate adjustments will have been made for exiting lockdown. This is particularly felt amongst disabled people who are in the shielded group or are currently experiencing difficulties with the lockdown easing.

It is excellent to see Disabled People’s Organisation’s being actively consulted in the process of exiting lockdown, we encourage that the Welsh Government continues to work co-productively with disabled people and their organisations, to

ensure that equalities are reduced during this pandemic rather than entrenched.

Positives:

According to our survey on Easing Lockdown, 77% of respondents would like to keep some of the positive changes that we have seen during the lockdown. The option to work from home is a highly requested reasonable adjustment which allows a lot of people to work around their impairment related restrictions. However, many employers would not grant it. This pandemic has shown that it is possible for many people to work from home and continue to be productive members of an organisation and excellent employees. It has proved that creating a flexible work environment is a positive step that will allow some disabled people to feel more comfortable at work. We'd like to see this practise continue and hope that this pandemic has proved that a flexible workplace culture is possible.

Another positive outcome from the adjustments made for the pandemic has been the availability of prescriptions on delivery and priority slots for supermarket delivery services. These have both been extremely useful for many disabled people and would be a good practise to continue into the future.

Technology has also made active participation in both political and social events more accessible for many, particularly for disabled people living in rural areas. Travelling can be an extremely exhausting and costly experience, technology allows for some disabled people to attend events whilst considering and adjusting for their impairments.

“Powys is an extremely big county, so if you have to travel there and have one meeting in a long time, for me I need to have a hotel and a taxi and everything that costs so much so the organisation. Now it’s just an online meeting, it’s so much easier. In the morning I’m meeting for that and meeting in the national organisation in the afternoon. That’s possible now.” (Focus group participant)

In line with the Social Model of Disability, we believe that full and active participation of disabled people in all affairs that will affect them is absolutely vital. If this practise can help encourage the participation of disabled people from across Wales in political discussions then we would seek for that to continue as an option for people, or encourage the further use of technology to engage with some disabled people, in conjunction with other methods which work better for others.

Conclusions:

To conclude, the disabled people that we spoke to have generally preferred the Welsh Government approach to lockdown than that of the UK Government to over the border. However, there are still some important steps that need to be taken to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against and to ensure that they can live independently, as any other human being can.

There have been serious concerns raised about the impact of this lockdown and some of the measures taken on the human rights of disabled people. For example, the introduction of the Coronavirus Act, lack of toilet access and discrimination that disabled people have faced are serious issues that should be addressed.

We also urge a return to implementing the Social Model of Disability. The Welsh Government have made commitments to abide by the Social Model and we hope that we see the results of this in policy change. We also believe that it is more vital than ever that the UNCRDP is incorporated into Welsh law to ensure that disabled people's rights are considered in any policy and legislation brought forward. Everything from the language to the policy impacts affects how disabled people are seen and treated by the society that they live in. We have a shared goal of ensuring that disabled people are not discriminated against. We hope that the views of our members help create a Wales that is equal and more inclusive to everyone.