

## **SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH CENTRAL BRANCH, NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND**

### **AUTHORSHIP OF SUBMISSION:**

My name is Pauline Topham and I am writing on behalf of the Committee of the Scottish Central Branch of the National Federation of the Blind of which I am secretary. We are all either blind or partially sighted and live in various parts of Scotland, Aberdeen, Moray, Dundee, Angus, Lanarkshire, so we have a range of relevant experience. This submission has been circulated and agreed.

### **Are you generally in favour of the Bill and its provisions?**

A bill is necessary, but I am not sufficiently acquainted with the legislation to comment; We welcome the involvement of the Scottish Parliament and Government because both have consistently shown themselves to be better aware of practicalities of implementation and of the impact of legislation on the people involved.

### **ASSESSMENT CONCERNS**

have comments on the DLA/PIP assessments currently being carried out in Scotland by a company employed by the British Government. These are causing high stress levels and are giving GPs a great deal of work in treating people involved for anxiety and depression. The assessments often show little realism and a high proportion of reversal on appeal (40% we understand), which is a tremendous waste of public money from several agencies.

We also believe that these assessments generally under-estimate the corrosive effects of sight loss on people's ability to perform the simplest of tasks in every aspect of life.

### **BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT**

Among the barriers to increased employment of visually impaired people are: the inadequate level of rehabilitation available for adults of working age; the lack of training and equipment for literacy using assistive technology available to unemployed visually impaired adults; employers are expected to assess and claim for assistive technology add the paperwork and effort involved are a disincentive. We believe that maybe visually impaired people of working age cannot afford the assistive computer equipment that would enable them to acquire and maintain secretarial skills and thus be capable of employment, and that if local authorities or NHS boards were encouraged to provide such equipment under the partnership equipment and adaptations schemes, this would make visually impaired people much more employable. We note that there is a promise of support for those on jobseekers allowance, but there is no indication that it will meet the particular needs of visually impaired people, given that the existing framework falls so far short of requirements.

### **PASSPORTING:**

We believe that there are levels of visual impairment that fully merit passporting of certain benefits, and that this would save time and money in repeated assessments

of capability. Severe eye conditions are most unlikely to improve. There are other permanent disabilities that could be identified.

### **SUBSIDIARY LEGISLATION: IMPLEMENTATION AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES:**

We note and are grateful for the enlightened attitude of the Scottish Parliament and Government towards disability issues, including those affecting visually impaired people. However the implementation of these intentions is dependent on the competence and the resources available to the local authorities responsible for implementing. There are 2 aspects of the care provisions for people with a sensory impairment: disability specific care and the non-specific social support.

Problems are as follows:

- 1) Local authorities have unrestricted right to interpret any guidelines according to local conditions, so there is neither accountability nor transparency and provision is and no two councils offer the same range or level of service
- 2) There are no agreed standards for the care and rehabilitation of visually impaired people
- 3) Local Authority budgets have already been held at steady levels in spite of inflation, so that services have been reduced in various ways, either by making assessments more stringent or by restricting services to higher levels of need.
- 4) Additionally some councils have used generic staff with no real knowledge of sensory impairment ( e.g. a member, registered blind for over 20 years who was informed by a "re-empowerment officer" that she would be able to drive once her broken ankle was healed.
- 5) By the nature of their disability, visually impaired people have difficulty in getting and transmitting information so that few realize that a service is incomplete or are able to complain if they do realize.

These problems mean that most of us do not fulfil our potential and make heavier demands on non-specific social care, but they impact most heavily on those of working age, since you are unlikely to get or hold down a job if you have problems in basic existence.

### **PAT'S PETITION:**

Finally we would like you to consider the English e-petition organised by one of our members , Pat Onions and signed by over 35,000 people so far,( in spite of the web site being difficult of access for visually impaired people): Text as follows:

### **Stop and review the cuts to benefits and services which are falling disproportionately on disabled people, their carers and families**

Responsible department: Department for Work and Pensions

The government were embarking on wholesale reform of the benefit system when the economic crisis struck. These welfare reforms had not been piloted and the plan was to monitor and assess the impact of the new untried approach as it was introduced in a buoyant economy. Unfortunately since then the economy has gone in to crisis and the government has simultaneously embarked on a massive programme of cuts. This has created a perfect storm and left disabled people/those with ill health, and their carers reeling, confused and afraid.

We ask the government to stop this massive programme of piecemeal change until they can review the impact of all these changes, taken together, on disabled people and their carers. We ask the government to stand by its duty of care to disabled people and their carers. At the moment the covenant seems to be broken and they do not feel safe.

Illness or disability could affect any one of us at any time, while many more of us are potential carers.