

**UNISON NATIONAL
DISABLED MEMBERS
CONFERENCE 2021
PRELIMINARY
AGENDA**

**2021 National Disabled Members' Conference
Preliminary Agenda**

ACC Liverpool
30th October 2021 to 1 November 2021

Covid-19

1. Covid-19 and Black disabled workers – learning the lessons for the recovery

Conference notes that Black people were four times more likely to die of Covid-19 than white people while almost 60% of deaths were of disabled people.

The myth that Covid-19 doesn't discriminate has been unmasked. Black and disabled people were hit the hardest and we continue to be disproportionately impacted as we hopefully come out of the pandemic. 'Long Covid' has impacted upon existing conditions and triggered new conditions for many

Many Black workers were too low paid to qualify for statutory sick pay and continued to have to come to work when they needed to self-isolate. For much homeworking is a fanciful dream, whilst living at work is the daily reality.

Disabled people are already facing significantly higher levels of redundancy than non-disabled people and the disability pay gap has worsened since the pandemic started.

The homeworking revolution that many of us have enjoyed has by-passed those Black workers who are more likely to work in low paid, front line and zero hours jobs, with no access to redeployment to jobs that could be done from home.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee, in liaison with the National Black Members Committee, to:

1. Work with the service groups to support negotiation with employers to include front line workers in homeworking policies, with redeployment an option for those who want it
2. Campaign for an increase in the level and extent of sick pay so that low paid Black disabled workers don't disproportionately lose out
3. Work with the NEC and the Labour Link to develop a broad-based campaigning and bargaining response to learn the lessons of the impact of Covid-19 on Black disabled workers.

National Black Members' Caucus

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

2. A Covid-19 secure world for Disabled Members

Conference is concerned that 60% of all people who have died from Covid-19 were disabled and nearly half a million people have had Long Covid for over a year, yet the government have not issued any guidance on supporting disabled people at risk of Covid-19 once restrictions have ended.

So called Freedom Day could almost have been termed as Imprisonment Day for some Disabled Members who were left feeling more vulnerable than ever as the government removed all legislation relating to Covid-19 secure workplaces, transport and public places.

Conference, Long Covid can be a debilitating condition that can cause chronic fatigue, breathing problems, anxiety, depression, brain fog, muscle weakness and severe pain, which can impact on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities. Yet so far there has been no recognition from government that Long Covid could in some cases be classed as a disability.

When restrictions ended so did the requirement for employers to make workplaces Covid-19 secure and the government withdrew work at home rules leaving Disabled Members with no legal route to challenge employers who insist they return to unsafe workplaces.

The failure to continue to enforce the use of face coverings on public transport, in shops and in other service settings has left Disabled Members feeling increasingly vulnerable and at risk of contracting the virus. Many have resorted to staying at home and almost a return to shielding.

While Test and Trace had many faults, it could at least inform people if they had visited a place where someone had tested positive, but by scrapping the requirement to check into venues the government has eliminated even the most basic functionality of the app.

Conference Covid-19 has not disappeared. It is not something Disabled Members can simply learn to live with if there are no protections in place. Leaving decisions to employers, service providers and the wider public does not provide any reassurance to Disabled Members who are feeling increasingly vulnerable.

Conference is calling on National Disabled Members Committee to work with the National Executive Committee, Service Group Executives, Labour Link, the TUC and other bodies they believe appropriate to:

1. Campaign for Long Covid to be recognised as a disability.
2. Write to the Prime Minister and other appropriate government Ministers to lobby for the introduction of statutory guidance to ensure workplaces, public transport and other public places are Covid-19 secure including recognising the need for Covid-19 related reasonable adjustments.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

3. Produce guidance for Branches to use when negotiating Covid-19 secure workplaces and Covid-19 policies including specific reference to the issues faced by Disabled Members and Members with Long Covid.

Northern Region

3. Disabled Workers and Post-Covid-19 Syndrome

Conference notes that as we move past more than a year since Covid-19 hit these nations, we can already see the devastating affects it has had on those impacted by Post-Covid-19 Syndrome.

Common symptoms of Post-Covid-19 Syndrome include (but are not limited to) fatigue, brain fog, shortness of breath, difficulty concentrating, pain and changes in mood. Symptoms can often be fluctuating which adds another layer of complexity in managing the condition both personally and within the workplace.

Conference notes that there is common ground with other Energy Limiting Chronic Illnesses. Looking at the common barriers this group of people face rather than the individual diagnoses will only strengthen the case for appropriate support and action.

While reasonable adjustments may be advised by Occupational Health or other health professionals, employers don't always agree to implement them or implement them in a timely manner. In addition to this, phased returns are historically very difficult as they're often rigid and do not allow enough flexibility to deal with the fluctuating nature of Post-Covid-19 Syndrome. It is vital that employers understand the importance of flexible and timely implementation of reasonable adjustments and the benefits to both employer and worker.

Conference is aware that many of our members are facing employers who use punitive measures such as formal sickness absence hearings, capability procedures and even dismissal rather than offer people the support they need. UNISON has produced new guidance to help branches to support members with Post Covid-19 syndrome, including looking at whether the member may be a disabled person and entitled to protections and adjustments under the Equality Act 2010. However more needs to be done to raise awareness with employers of their duties and responsibilities when it comes to supporting staff with Post-Covid-19 Syndrome.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee, working with other parts of the union where appropriate, to:

1. Continue to produce guidance and training to help branches prevent members being penalised for having Post-Covid-19 Syndrome.
2. Work with the TUC Disabled Workers Committee to put additional pressure on government to support people with Long Covid
3. Lobby government for explicit timescales on responding to and implementing reasonable adjustments to be incorporated into legislation

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

4. Promote the current range of resources available to support our regions and branches, including:
 - Quick guide to Reasonable Adjustment,
 - Reasonable Adjustments Passport and policy guide
 - Disability Leave bargaining guide and model Policy
 - Bargaining to support those with Long Covid guide
5. Learn from the experiences of those with Energy Limiting

Chronic Illnesses, including the challenges of supporting staff at work and preventing punitive processes and ultimately capability dismissal, when there is still a lack of knowledge and recognition for the condition by employers, the medical profession and even broader society.

National Disabled Members Committee

4. Mental health: a trade union issue

Conference notes the huge impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health, whether on staff working under stressful conditions, people isolated from friends and family by lockdown measures, the physical impact of the virus itself, and the continuing uncertainty due to changing and unreliable government advice and public health policies.

Conferences notes that many disabled members have come under intense pressure over the last year, whether because they have experienced isolation as a result of 'shielding' measures, have struggled to access reasonable adjustments, or were expected to attend or return to workplaces where they did not feel safe.

Conference notes that the UNISON Equality Survey in August 2020 found that 72% of disabled members said their mental health had been 'seriously affected by lockdown' or 'slightly affected by lockdown'.

Conference recognises that mental health is a workplace issue which must be addressed by trade unions, both in negotiations with employers and by direct support for affected workers.

Conference asks the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Promote UNISON's updated bargaining advice on mental health;
2. Support disabled members groups in working with their branches to negotiate positive workplace policies addressing and supporting staff mental health;
3. Share examples of best practice and successes in negotiating supportive policies and procedures such as sickness absence policies and policies on reasonable adjustments;

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

4. Encourage and support disabled members to become health and safety representatives, and promote UNISON's Be on the Safe Side campaign to disabled members groups;
5. Work with the National Young Members Forum to promote UNISON's campaigning and bargaining work around mental health to young disabled members.

National Young Members' Forum

5. Mental Health and Suicide Awareness to Support Disabled LGBT+ members following the Covid-19 Pandemic

Conference applauds the National Disabled Members Committee for the work undertaken to date to highlight the effects of austerity measures on disabled lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender plus (LGBT+) workers, the services we provide and the knock-on effects of the reduction in those services.

Conference further notes that a range of governmental bodies, statutory services and civil society organisations have highlighted evidence that LGBT+ people experience increased levels of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress leading to suicidal ideation and action as a result of the negative impact of their experiences of discrimination and marginalisation both in the workplace and in wider society.

Covid-19 has had a particular impact and disabled LGBT+ people in particular are identified as an "at risk" group. LGBT Foundation 2020 Hidden Figures report and Stonewall LGBT in Britain 2018 found:

- 48% of disabled LGBT people identified the need for mental health support in May 2020
- 69% of disabled LGBT people said that they would rather receive support during this time from an LGBT organisation.
- Three in five LGBT disabled people (59%) have felt life was not worth living at some point in the last year, compared to three in ten LGBT (30%) people who aren't disabled

Additional available data on suicide and self-harm among disabled LGBT+ is stark and highlights the need for local and national suicide prevention strategies that consider LGBT+ issues in their approaches. NHS Trusts are starting to realise the importance of suicide awareness and are beginning to make training mandatory for staff so they can spot the signs that someone may be heading towards crisis point.

With a decade of government austerity leading to cuts to health, welfare and support services, our disabled LGBT+ members are more regularly experiencing mental health problems or finding it difficult to access support, and it is therefore important that reps can signpost members to agencies that can give them the help they need.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

A number of charities and organisations such as Chasing the Stigma, PAPHYRUS, MIND and The Samaritans are doing important work to tackle mental health and suicide stigma and encourage additional support for those falling under intersectional categories with poor mental health. It is important that the union supports and promotes organisations which are in line with its values.

It is also important that reps use UNISON's Bargaining on Mental Health Policies guide (which has been updated to acknowledge the impact of Covid-19) to work with the employer to ensure there is sufficient support for staff experiencing mental health problems. All policies, from sickness absence to reorganisation, should be audited to check where they can offer better support. Mental health problems may well mean that the member is protected as a disabled person under the Equality Act 2010 and there should be clear policies around the need to identify and provide reasonable adjustments for such staff.

Conference therefore calls on the National Committee to work with the National LGBT+ committee to:

1. Continue to publicise UNISON's Bargaining for Mental Health policies guide
2. Work with 'There for You' to help branches and regions to signpost members towards suitable organisations and charities working in the field of mental health and suicide awareness
3. Work with service groups to promote and advocate training on mental health awareness and the potential risks of suicide both in the workplace and in our union
4. Consider the provision of materials for pride stalls and other equality events with information and signposting to support LGBT+ disabled people within the area of mental health and suicide awareness.

Disabled LGBT+ Members Caucus

6. Stop the Covid-19 scams that prey on Deaf people

Conference is concerned about the increase in scams during Covid-19 and particularly how this has impacted on Deaf people who are native British Sign Language (BSL) users.

Covid-19 scammers are criminals who use the publicity around coronavirus as a chance to target people. They try to take advantage of people's worries and uncertainty about the pandemic, especially those who are alone, self-isolating or in financial difficulty.

Covid scammers operate through fraudulent emails, phone calls, texts messages or social media posts and door-to-door visits. Many Deaf people are more vulnerable to these scams as written English is a second or other language and Deaf people also have barriers to communicating with strangers.

Coronavirus-related scams include:

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

- people claiming to be able to arrange a COVID-19 vaccine for a charge
- sales of fake products such as face masks or medical equipment which may be harmful or simply never arrive
- bogus healthcare workers who try to gain access to the home by claiming to offer testing for COVID-19
- people pretending to be from charities offering to do shopping
- emails and texts asking for donations to the NHS
- emails or texts pretending to be from the government
- emails offering life insurance against Covid-19.

Conference notes that over a decade of government cuts to public services has seen local council Trading Standards services decimated, with very little resources left to investigate scams.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Support appropriate campaigns to stop the Covid-19 scammers
2. Research and publicise the advice available from appropriate agencies
3. Raise this issue with branches and regions so that isolated Deaf members get the support they need
4. Work with the local government service group to campaign for increased funding for trading standards services.

National Deaf Members' Caucus

7. Returning to the workplace after COVID-19

Conference notes that with the easing of restrictions, members are now being asked to return to the workplace, but this can cause additional stress and anxiety for workers with disabilities.

Working from home can be an isolating experience. People with disabilities are more likely to feel isolated due to the lack of communication in accessible manners and issues of obtaining reasonable adjustments for the necessary equipment to carry out work from home.

With the return to work, there is a need for employers to work with employees and obtain a full understanding of the issues people with disabilities are facing. Conference notes that some disabled people have had to collect adjustments from their workplaces such as chairs, monitors, desks etc. which require returning to the workplace, and this adds additional difficulties, such as transportation of equipment. Many employers show a lack of empathy for disability issues.

This conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Undertake a survey of members to understand the extent of the issues members are facing when returning to the workplace.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

2. Develop a set of guidelines for members detailing the steps they can take to ensure they have the appropriate equipment for working from home, and for returning to the workplace.
3. To work with employers to understand the Access to Work process to ensure members are correctly assessed for necessary equipment to undertake the role.
4. To produce a guidance document to reduce the fear and stigma attached of the costs of reasonable adjustments and to what extent the costs of adjustments can be considered in the process of obtaining adjustments.

Yorkshire & Humberside Region

8. Covid-19 and Disability Inclusion in the Workplace

With one in five employees being disabled it's important that employers make our workplaces inclusive. Failure to make reasonable adjustments may amount to disability discrimination.

Conference is aware that there can be particular benefits to disabled people from working from home; however, this is an individual assessment and decision rather than a blanket policy approach.

There is an anticipation, that the employer's response may simply be that disabled people work from home to save the need to make workplace adjustments; particularly for those in the 'shielding' category. This is regressive step, akin to attitudes towards disability under a Medical Model of Disability, that diminishes workplace accessibility. It reinforces a view that disabled workers 'are the problem' and has the potential to create an underclass of disabled worker among those shielding.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members' Committee:

1. To monitor developments in relation to post-Covid-19 home working arrangements.
2. To continue promoting the Social Model of Disability.
3. To continue to support working from home as a reasonable adjustment.
4. To vociferously commend approaches that promote a right to work from home for disabled people rather than a requirement.

South Lanarkshire UNISON Local Government Branch

9. Covid-19: Personal Protective Equipment and Disabled Workers

This conference acknowledges that during the Covid-19 health pandemic we have had to wear Personal Protective Equipment [PPE] such as face masks and gloves

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

when going about our day to day lives, and also in the workplace. For staff in certain roles there are more vigorous PPE requirements.

This has helped to keep us and others safe, preventing ill-health and even death. As we move forward into the “new normal” with increased emphasis on hygiene then it’s likely we will continue to wear PPE, however not everyone can wear and use it.

For example, around one in every 1,000 people living in the UK have a latex allergy. Latex is found in many healthcare products including PPE. There are other hazards and challenges around PPE, for example, the restricted ability – or inability - to lip read, or the use of hand sanitisers that could contain nuts and alcohol which are also common allergens.

As society opens up, we need to ensure that people health problems or disabilities affected by the use of PPE are not worsened.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee:

1. To work with UNISON’s National Health and Safety Committee to review UNISON guidance on PPE within the workplace ensuring it considers the impact of health conditions on the ability to wear or use the equipment.
2. To raise awareness of the issue through sharing stories about the physical and mental health impacts of wearing PPE as a result of an existing health condition or disability.
3. To seek alternative solutions such as clear face coverings, greater range of sizes of PPE to allow better fitting, and easier to use PPE that reduces restrictions for those with health condition or disability.

Scotland Region

10. Best practice for holding hybrid meetings

Conference notes that Covid-19 has had an unequal impact on disabled people. Statistics show that 6 out of 10 people who have died from Covid-19 are disabled. There is a clear need to protect disabled people from exposure of the virus and the Health and Safety of workers should be a priority for employers.

With the easing of lockdowns and restrictions, conference notes the need for the promotion of hybrid meetings. Expectations on how people fulfil their roles and reconcile work and domestic responsibilities has changed dramatically over the last 18 months and it is important that employers do not rush people to return to the office, especially disabled people who have a much greater risk of death upon exposure to the virus. Employers have a duty of care to ensure that workplaces are safe to return to and employers should listen to concerns from their employees. As a result of this, employers must adapt and embrace hybrid meetings to accommodate everyone safely and maintain flexibility for disabled workers.

This conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

1. Promote the use of hybrid meetings as a reasonable adjustment whilst stressing that remote access is not an alternative to accessible venues, personal assistance, mobility support or other independent living support that enable disabled people to travel and participate in face-to-face meetings.
2. Produce best practice guidance on how to hold a hybrid meeting to ensure inclusion for all attendees.
3. Produce guidance documentation on how disabled people can break down barriers and approach their organisations for the introduction of hybrid meetings as a reasonable adjustment.

Yorkshire & Humberside Region

Recruitment & Organising

11. Recruiting, supporting and developing young disabled activists

This Conference notes that recruitment of young members to UNISON continues to increase year on year, with over 27,000 new young members joining UNISON in 2020.

This conference notes that young members continue, however, to be under-represented as UNISON stewards, representatives and officers.

Conference notes the survey of UNISON young members in November 2020 which found that 28% of young disabled members highlighted the issue of UNISON meetings being held in inaccessible locations. Young disabled members, LGBT+ members, women members and Black members were also more likely to be anxious about taking part in UNISON activities for the first time.

Conference believes that the full participation of young members is vital to the success of the union in developing a sustainable activist base for the future and making sure that the voices of young disabled workers are heard.

Conference asks the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Work with the National Young Members Forum (NYMF) to develop a strategy to increase the numbers of young disabled activists and young people participating in disabled members groups;
2. Engage with branch and regional disabled members groups to identify barriers for young disabled members in getting more active in UNISON, and to highlight positive measures and success stories in addressing these barriers;
3. Encourage and support disabled members groups to develop mentoring and buddying schemes to support and encourage new young activists, including promoting UNISON's Learning and Organising Service's (LAOS) resources on mentoring.

Campaigning

12. We need a British Sign Language Act now!

Conference recalls that UNISON Disabled Members Conference 2018 passed the motion 'Legal Recognition of British Sign Language'. The motion explained that although the UK government formally recognised British Sign Language (BSL) as a language in its own right in 2003, this did not give full legal status to BSL. Scotland is the only country in the UK to give BSL full legal status and to agree to promote its use. BSL still does not have full legal status in England and Wales and the same is true of BSL and Irish Sign Language (ISL) in Northern Ireland.

Since 2018, we have faced a global pandemic, and this has only made it clearer that there is a vital need to pass a BSL Act. Deaf people were left dangerously unprotected against Covid-19 when the UK prime minister's daily press conferences were not supported by a live BSL interpreter in the room. This contrasted starkly with Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish government broadcasts which had live BSL interpreters which meant that Deaf viewers could get the information straight away and in an understandable format.

Live BSL allows greater understanding of the importance and urgency of what is being said and does not leave it down to broadcasters whether to include BSL or not. But in England Deaf people had to rely on recorded BSL interpretation on some news channels or often incorrect information on social media.

Deaf people have had extremely limited information relating to the pandemic, and this has caused much distress and has, for many people, had a negative impact on their mental health.

Conference notes that UNISON responded to the parliamentary Women and Equalities Committee enquiry into the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on disabled people where we raised the issue of BSL interpreters at UK government press conferences and we called for a BSL Act to address the dangerously inadequate level of communication with Deaf people.

Conference strongly believes that all government information should be accessible to everyone, not just hearing people, and calls on the National Committee to raise awareness of this issue.

Deaf native BSL users are a distinctive linguistic group whose rights should be protected. Achieving a BSL Act would mean that BSL would be protected and promoted in a similar way to Welsh and Gaelic languages. Service providers would be required to produce information and support where appropriate in BSL, giving equal access to services for sign language users and removing many of the everyday barriers that they currently face, and which result in widespread discrimination.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

A BSL Act could also mean that the UK government would need to provide a live BSL interpreter in the room for all government briefings, whether about a pandemic, severe weather or other national emergencies.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Campaign for a BSL Act for England, Wales and Northern Ireland that would achieve full legal recognition
2. Raise awareness of this issue with branches and regions
3. Consider ways UNISON can further contribute to this campaign.

National Deaf Members' Caucus

13. Domestic Abuse - Lack of Support for Disabled Women

Conference notes that an unfortunate and unwelcome result of the national lockdown has been a reported increase in domestic abuse and domestic violence. Often isolated and shut off from previous support networks, victims can struggle to access support or alert others to their situation. Perpetrators of domestic abuse have been able to use the restrictions to create real barriers and increase their control over their victims. With cutbacks on the support services, any services that may be able to help are even more restricted with being able to accommodate disabled women and their needs. For example, a safe house or women's refuge may not be fully accessible.

Disabled women suffering domestic abuse, whether from their partners, their children, carers or even family members, are trapped and isolated and fearful of the future.

Victims in these situations can find going to work a safe place and this could allow the victim the opportunity to raise the alarm. However, during lockdown a majority of people have been working from home and not going into the office. This is true for most vulnerable people, especially disabled women who may have been shielding. Conference is calling on employers to extend this safe place to disabled women working from home.

Among disabled women, 17.5% experienced domestic abuse from 2019-20, while the rate for disabled men was 9.2%. These figures have increased since the pandemic as calls to the UK's largest domestic abuse helpline are rising "week on week". More than 40,000 calls were made to the national domestic abuse helpline during the first three months of the COVID-19 restrictions.

Anybody who experiences domestic abuse may face broader risk factors, but disabled women face specific risks. They are often in particularly vulnerable circumstances that may reduce their ability to defend themselves, or to recognise, report and escape abuse. Impairment can create social isolation, which, along with the need for assistance with their health and care raises the risk of domestic abuse for disabled women.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

Physical and environment inaccessibility, stigma and discrimination can also exclude and isolate them. Their reliance on care increases the situational vulnerability to other people's controlling behaviour and can exacerbate difficulties in leaving an abusive situation especially if any benefits they received are controlled by the perpetrator.

Not only do disabled women experience higher rates of domestic abuse, they also experience more barriers to accessing support, such as health and social care services and domestic abuse services.

Conference welcomes the 'Ask for ANI' (Assistance Needed Immediately) initiative that is being rolled out across all four countries of the UK in community pharmacies. The initiative is a codeword scheme that allows those who are experiencing violence in the home to discreetly ask for help in contacting the police and other services. However, Women's Aid has reported concerns that the scheme may not be accessible to all marginalised groups for example, disabled women who may not be able to access a pharmacy.

The Domestic Abuse Act was given royal assent and became law on 29 April, after years of campaigning from survivors, charities and unions, including UNISON. For the first time in history, there is now a wide-ranging legal definition of domestic abuse, going beyond physical violence to include emotional, coercive or controlling behaviour, and economic abuse.

Abuse protection orders will also extend their coverage to victims' workplaces to make sure victims stay safe at work and will also cover other places where a victim may regularly be found, such as their place of worship or any children's school.

In order to take this work forward, conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee, working with the National Women's Committee, to:

1. Continue to promote UNISON guidance and other resources relating to domestic abuse through social media, bulletins to activists and members, and other media including highlighting the support 'There for You' can offer.
2. Regularly update our domestic abuse guide and model policy to include consideration of those who work from home, such as disabled workers.
3. Campaign to make women's refuge housing fully accessible, including barrier-free access to sleeping rooms and common areas, architectural features that comply with regulations, visual and auditory alarm systems and provision for assistance dogs.
4. Work with branches to identify employers that have adopted domestic abuse policies and highlight best practise as well as use information to promote benefits of doing so to other employers.

National Women Members' Caucus

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

14. Domestic Abuse - Lack of Support for Disabled Women

Conference notes that an unfortunate and unwelcome result of the national lockdowns during Covid-19 was a reported increase in domestic abuse and domestic violence. Often isolated and shut off from previous support networks, victims can struggle to access support or alert others to their situation. Perpetrators of domestic abuse have been able to use the restrictions to create real barriers and increase their control over their victims. With cutbacks on the support services, any services that may be able to help are even more restricted with being able to accommodate disabled women and their needs. For example, a safe house/women's refuge, may not be fully accessible.

Disabled women suffering domestic abuse whether from their partners, their children, carers or even family members are trapped and isolated and fearful of the future.

Victims in these situations found attending work gave them a safe place and this could allow the victim the opportunity to raise the alarm. However, during lockdowns, a majority of people were working from home and not going into the office. This is true for most vulnerable people especially the disabled women who may have been shielding. UNISON is calling on employers to extend this safe place, to disabled women working from home.

Among disabled women, 17.5% experienced domestic abuse from 2019-20, while the rate for disabled men was 9.2%. These figures have increased since the pandemic as Calls to the UK's largest domestic abuse helpline are rising "week on week". More than 40,000 calls were made to the National domestic abuse helpline during the first 3 months of the Covid-19 restrictions.

Anybody who experiences domestic abuse may face broader risk factors, but disabled women face specific risks. They are often in particularly vulnerable circumstances that may reduce their ability to defend themselves, or to recognise, report and escape abuse. Impairment can create social isolation, which, along with the need for assistance with their health and care raises the risk of domestic abuse for disabled women.

Physical and environment inaccessibility, stigma and discrimination can also exclude and isolate them. Their reliance on care increases the situational vulnerability to other people's controlling behaviour and can exacerbate difficulties in leaving an abusive situation especially if any benefits they received are controlled by the perpetrator.

Not only do disabled women experience higher rates of domestic abuse, they also experience more barriers to accessing support, such as health and social care services and domestic abuse services.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

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The Domestic Abuse Bill was given royal assent and became law on 29 April, after years of campaigning from survivors, charities and unions, including UNISON. For the first time in history, there is now a wide-ranging legal definition of domestic abuse, going beyond physical violence to include emotional, coercive or controlling behaviour, and economic abuse.

Abuse protection orders will also extend their coverage to victims' workplaces to make sure victims stay safe at work and will also cover other places where a victim may regularly be found, such as their place of worship or any children's school.

In order to take this work forwards, conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to work with the National Disabled Women's Network to:

1. Continue to promote UNISON Guidance and other resources through social media, bulletins to activists and members, and other media including highlighting the support 'There for You' can offer.
2. An updated guide and model policy to include consideration of those who work from home, such as disabled workers.
3. Campaign to make women's refuge housing fully accessible, including barrier-free access to sleeping rooms and common areas, architectural features that comply with regulations, visual and auditory alarm systems.
4. Work with branches to identify employers that have adopted domestic abuse policies and highlight best practise as well as use information to promote benefits of doing so to other employers.

South East Region

15. Deaf workers, Access to Work and PIP

Conference notes that Deaf workers rely on Access to Work to pay for British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters so that they can do their jobs and live independent lives. However, during the pandemic, the Access to Work system wasn't as flexible or responsive as it needed to be in the changed circumstances. Long standing issues with the system were also more obvious.

Deaf workers were faced with an inflexible paper-based system which saw 'wet' signatures required from managers and interpreters. Some Deaf members had to go back and forth to the post office to send invoices off for signing and then send them back to the Department for Work and Pensions – in the middle of lockdown. Although Access to Work say they will allow electronic signatures on request, it is not the default and people have to fight for it.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

Access to Work caps the annual amount a work can claim, and this disproportionately impacts Deaf workers.

Personal Independence Payments (PIP) also continue to be an issue for Deaf members who are often unfairly turned down for support that can help them to retain their job. This is also the case for other disabled members including those with fluctuating conditions like Multiple Sclerosis which the PIP system fails to understand.

Conference notes that social security is a devolved matter in Scotland and that the Scottish government is introducing a replacement for PIP called Adult Disability Payment from 2022. Although the system will take time to assess, UNISON Scotland responded positively to the consultation before it was agreed. We welcomed the commitment to bringing the service back into the public sector and making it a more tailored service that is responsive to individual disabled people's needs.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Lobby the Department of Work and Pensions for the option of a fully electronic Access to Work application and claim process
2. Campaign against the cap on Access to Work
3. Work with UNISON Scotland to closely watch the roll out of the Scottish Disability Payment scheme to see if there are lessons to be learned for the rest of the UK

National Deaf Members' Caucus

16. What are they (still) hiding? Black disabled people and PIP

Conference recalls the 2019 Disabled Members Conference agreed the motion "What are they hiding? Missing PIP data on the experience of Black disabled people". The motion asked the national disabled members committee to seek data on the percentage of Black claimants turned down for Personal Independence Payments (PIP) compared to white claimants.

Conference notes that in response to requests from UNISON, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) confirmed that they do not have any data on the proportion of PIP refusals by race. This is because they do not routinely ask for ethnicity data from PIP claimants.

Conference believes that the DWP are failing to abide by the public sector equality duty (PSED) if they do not collect ethnicity data as they cannot therefore guard against a potential disproportionate impact on Black disabled people.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to work with the National Black Members Committee to:

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

1. Lobby for ethnicity monitoring of PIP claimants so that the proportionality of DWP's decision making and its duties under the PSED can be assessed
2. Raise this issue with the Labour Party, via the Labour Link, and with other organisations working on welfare benefits with the aim of provoking a broader campaign on this issue
3. Continue to campaign for a fairer system of publicly delivered PIP which acknowledges fluctuating conditions, puts the needs of disabled people at its heart and does not penalise people who are in work.

National Black Members' Caucus

17. Protecting and Promoting Equality and Equity Employment Opportunity of People with Autism and with Severe or Specific Learning Impairments

This conference commends work ongoing in Scotland to protect and promote the rights of people with Autism and with Learning Impairments. This includes the Our Voice Our Rights Campaign, led by the organisations ENABLE Scotland, the National Autistic Society Scotland, and Scottish Autism, to make Scotland the first place in the world to have an Autism and Learning Disability Commissioner to protect and promote their rights. So far this has led to manifesto commitments from four of the five parties that are represented in the Scottish Parliament including the Scottish National Party, and Labour.

Conference knows that disabled people face many inequalities in their lives, including employment. In a 2020 Office of National Statistics publication, "Outcomes for Disabled People in the UK: 2020", it was reported that 81.3% of non-disabled people of working age are in employment, reducing to 52% among disabled people.

However, there is great disparity in employment among disabled workers based on the type of disability, and the disability employment gap is greatest among those with Autism or Severe or specific learning impairments at 21.7%, and 26.5% respectively.

In March 2020 Jane Harris of the National Autistic Society observed that autistic people were being let down by a lack of employment support. In November 2020, a survey of managers by the Institute of Leadership & Management noted 50% of managers held a bias to recruiting a neurodivergent job applicant, with 26% of respondents saying they felt uncomfortable employing an applicant with Autism.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members' Committee:

1. To commend the work of the Our Voice Our Rights campaign in Scotland and the concept of establishing a commissioner for autistic people and people with a learning impairment.
2. To share the good work ongoing in Scotland to establish an Autism and Learning Disability Commissioner and lobby to establish similar roles across devolved nations in the UK.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

3. To raise awareness of the inequalities and inequity facing autistic people and those with severe or specific learning impairments and provide best practice guidance to branches on supporting these groups gain and maintain meaningful employment opportunity.

Scotland Region

18. Failure to engage won't silence Disabled Members

Conference is concerned to hear that a forum established by Justin Tomlinson, the Minister for Disabled People, to 'bring the voices and expertise of disabled people into the heart of government policy making' appears to have been shut down amid concerns that the government will launch their long awaited Disability Strategy without any meaningful consultation with disabled people.

And this isn't the only example of the government failing to meet their UN Convention on the Rights of Persons' with Disabilities obligation to engage with disabled people.

A Disability Unit consultation on the Disability Strategy has been condemned as disrespectful as all but four of the questions were multiple choice included a question that asked non-disabled people if they would be happy to have a physical relationship with a disabled person. The government are now facing legal action after claims that the survey didn't give disabled people the chance to say what they felt should be in the strategy.

Conference over the last decade disabled people's rights have been rolled back, our support has been eroded and we've been demonised by successive Tory governments.

During the pandemic the government ignored disabled people, implemented policies that discriminated against us and left us to fend for ourselves. Their failure to hear what we had to say cost lives.

Conference we can't allow this to continue. We can't let their inability to listen prevent us from speaking out, their lack of consultation to stop our voices being heard or their failure to engage to silence us.

With around 200,000 Disabled Members UNISON is one of, if not the, largest disabled people's organisation in the country, it is vital the government hear what we have got to say, and we must take steps to make them listen.

Conference calls on National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC and Labour Link to:

1. Launch a media campaign to highlight the failure of the government to engage with disabled people
2. Send a message of support for the action against the government's Disability Unit relating to the failure to engage

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

3. Write to the Equality and Human Rights Commission to request they carry out an investigation into the government's failure to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty

National Disabled Members Committee

19. Review of the Equality Act

Conference notes that the Equality Act 2010 has now been in place for over 10 years and despite both the House of Lords and the United Nations stating that it fails disabled people there are still no plans for a review.

Since its implementation the world has changed significantly with Covid-19 being just one major event that has impacted on the lives of our Disabled Members.

Since Brexit equality legislation that came from the European Union has been transferred into domestic law but there is no guarantee that this won't be repealed as the government review their position EU law.

Some sections of the Equality Act such as dual discrimination have never made it onto the statute books leaving some Disabled Members at increased risk of discrimination.

Other groups, such as carers, still have no legal rights or protection against discrimination under the Equality Act.

Conference calls on National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC and Labour Link to:

1. Campaign for a full independent review of the Equality Act 2010 which involves meaningful consultation with disabled people and considers whether there are other groups, such as carers, who need to be offered protection
2. Lobby for the parts of the Equality Bill that were never implemented to be revisited, reviewed and brought into law
3. Support the TUC campaign to fully implement all Equality Act provisions including the socio-economic duty, dual and multiple discrimination and the publication of impact assessments

Northern Region

20. Campaigning for accessible environments

Conference is concerned that the recent pandemic, poorly funded local authorities and the government's proposals to reform planning are combining to make hopes of better access for disabled people a distant dream.

As the country started to reopen after the first lockdown local councils were told to do whatever was needed to help kickstart the economy. While these changes may

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

have helped businesses, they often made life increasingly difficult for disabled people trying to navigate their way around their local areas.

Seats that disabled people relied on to rest as they went about their daily lives were removed to make way for pavement cafes that blocked pavements. Disabled parking bays and bus stops were removed to create new pedestrian walkways or cycle lanes or even worse dangerous and outdated shared spaces.

While these measures were supposed to be temporary some councils are planning to make them permanent despite the devastating impact this has on disabled people's ability to access services or get to work.

The government's failure to reimburse councils for the cost of Covid-19 has left funding gaps that need be plugged. Many councils have resorted to introducing parking charges for blue badge holders, reducing non-statutory services that disabled people rely on or increasing the cost of services such as Shopmobility.

And the outlook isn't much better when it comes to housing, transport and planning. Ministers announced £30 million of funding for 17,000 new homes in England with no requirement for any of the 160 new housing schemes to include accessible homes.

New housing developments are being built with little or no consideration of the public transport infrastructure, availability of healthcare, schools and essential services making these homes inaccessible for Disabled Members.

The government's proposed planning reforms will create an increasingly inaccessible environment for disabled people with all proposed developments in 'Growth Zones' automatically be granted planning permission as local authorities lose the right to refuse applications that don't include disability access.

The planning reforms won't just apply to housing applications but to everything from health centres to shops and leisure facilities to transport hubs and workplaces. And with no need for public consultation, no opportunity to raise objections and no requirement for access statements Disabled Members will be left feeling increasingly isolated and excluded by the inaccessible environments they are forced to live in.

Conference calls on National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC, Service Group Executives and Labour Link to:

1. Through the Local Government Agency, lobby councils for the removal of temporary changes to the environment or infrastructure that were introduced due to Covid-19 that have an adverse impact on disabled people
2. Lobby government for the implementation of the recommendations in the Equality and Human Rights Commission report "Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis" including:
 - amending Part M of the Building Regulations to make accessibility standards M4(2) the mandatory minimum for all new housing; and
 - requiring 10% of all new homes to be built to the higher wheelchair accessible standards

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

3. Campaign for a ban on charging for Blue Badge parking in all council owned car parks and for the introduction of a national fund to support services aimed at disabled people such as Shopmobility schemes.
4. Lobby for any reforms to planning law to:
 - require all new planning applications, including in 'Growth Zones' to include an access statement that explains steps that will be taken to ensure the development is accessible to disabled people; and
 - give local authorities the power to refuse any planning application, including in 'Growth Zones', where the development will not be reasonably accessible for disabled people.

Northern Region

Negotiating and Bargaining

21. Make disabled employees a priority

Conference notes that there are 13.9 million disabled people in the UK yet disability rights are still being questioned. From July to September 2019, there were over 2,000 disability discrimination cases brought to tribunals and cases are rising. Employers are legally obliged to treat disabled workers fairly and implement the necessary adjustments/ changes. Yet even with this protection, disabled workers are still having to fight for equal treatment compared with their non-disabled colleagues.

The Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted discrepancies in society for people with disabilities. It is now more important than ever for disabled people to have equal rights and for employers to understand and embrace the widespread nature of disability.

This conference calls upon the National Disabled Members Committee to develop and run a campaign to make disabled people/ members a priority for all employers. This campaign should include:

1. Promoting disability inclusion on methods of communication, ensuring appropriate language and etiquettes are used and communication methods are accessible for all.
2. Promote inclusive practices employers can use to fully include disabled people in their organisations – with perhaps a UNISON award for best disabled employer of the year (nominated by branches)
3. A bargaining pack for branches
4. A guide and training on how to be a good ally of disabled members
5. Training on disabilities for inclusion and awareness of the differences in disabilities

**2021 National Disabled Members' Conference
Preliminary Agenda**

6. Recognising talent of people with disabilities
7. Creating plans to hire and retain disabled employees

West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Transport Branch

22. Disclosure of Disabilities at Work

Conference is concerned that many members continue to be reluctant to disclose a disability or long-term health condition to their employer.

It is important that disabilities and/or long-term health conditions should never be considered as something to hide away. Disclosure of a disability in the workplace should be considered as standard practice without fear of reprisals or detriment.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to develop a programme of confidence building aimed at members to enable them to work with local reps and branches in overcoming barriers to disclosure.

West Midlands Region

23. Disability Related Absence: Improving conditions for disabled members

This conference believes that when disabled members are employed by an organisation, either on a zero-hours or permanent basis, they are put at a disadvantage when it comes to their working conditions, especially in relation to potentially losing out on pay and / or being marked down as off sick when their condition prevents them from working on certain days for reasons not related to actual sickness.

This conference believes that there is a need to review and address this in order to improve pay and conditions for disabled members who frequently have to take time off due to their condition. This should be done by working with organisations / employers to adjust their sickness absence policies to include disability leave alongside existing policy on standard sick leave.

This conference notes that the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 provide support for the need to address this issue and to negotiate with employers to agree amendments to policies in order to fully implement the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

This conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to work with regions and local branches to develop a toolkit to support members, stewards and other reps such as Workplace Contacts to work with their organisation to work towards amending sickness absence policy to better support disabled members.

Community and Voluntary Organisations Branch

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

Efficient & Effective Union

24. Building on the race discrimination protocol

Conference notes UNISON's ground-breaking Race Discrimination Protocol which means that cases that potentially involve racism are referred for legal advice at an early stage.

Conference welcomes UNISON's commitment to fighting racism in this way and notes that for many Black disabled workers it may not be clear if they are being discriminated against because of their race or because they are disabled – or even because of both.

Conference further recognises that under Rule K it is the NEC who makes decisions around representation of members.

Notwithstanding this, conference asks the National Disabled Members Committee to seek legitimate ways of raising the potential benefit of a disability discrimination protocol with the NEC that are within the rules of the union and respect the NEC's decision making in these matters.

National Black Members' Caucus

25. Time to change the rules of the game – disabled women fulfilling our potential in our union and in society

Conference notes that disabled women face barriers to participation in our union, in the workplace and in society.

Over one million of our members are women and a large proportion of these are disabled. Although UNISON has rules about gender proportionality which mean, for example, that where there are two seats at least one must be for a woman, the situation is less clear for disabled women. Although we have fair representation rules these are not clear cut.

For many of us, the daily mentally exhausting slog of dealing with our impairment leaves us with little energy to 'play the game' of getting ourselves known by attending as many regional meetings as possible and canvassing support. Women still do the lion's share of caring work in society, whether for children or elderly relatives, and we can't spend time cultivating votes in our 'free' time. It all feels like a man's game that women are expected to play.

Conference regrets the talent and opportunity that is being lost because so many of us give up or are deterred from being active to the level we could achieve in our union due to caring responsibilities and the barriers we face as disabled people.

One of the few benefits of the pandemic was the move towards online meetings. This led to better engagement by disabled women and could be a model for the future.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Committee to work with Learning and Organising Services and with regions to:

1. Assess and address any gaps in the level of support to help to guide disabled women around the maze of committees and sub-committees so they can find the best role in which they can grow and flourish
2. Analyse support at regional level for disabled women who want to stand for internal positions in the union and any barriers our ways of working may present
3. Develop a short guide to understanding the union's democratic processes that can be used by regions and branches
4. Seek ways of offering online or hybrid meetings in the future to break down the barriers disabled women face.

National Women Members' Caucus

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

Motions ruled out of order:

Beyond the Remit of Conference

Levelling the playing field: Fairer conditions for workers with a disability in relation to Statutory Sick Pay

This conference believes that the current administration of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) puts members with a disability at a disadvantage due to SSP normally only starting after 4 consecutive days off sick. This particularly impacts on those with a hidden disability or those whose condition affects them severely on occasional days.

This conference further believes that this issue leads to loss of earnings for members who this issue affects; this includes some employers viewing disability-related absence from work as sickness and creating a hostile work environment for employees who have to take days off due to their disability on a regular basis.

Conference notes the disproportionate impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on those with disabilities and that many disabled workers, particularly those in the at-risk groups including those previously told to shield for periods of time as part of the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) group, remain extremely vulnerable. Conference notes the need for employers to ensure that disabled workers are not penalised either financially or otherwise due to time off directly or indirectly related to their condition. Conference further notes the detrimental financial impact the pandemic has had on many, worsened by the restrictions around payment of SSP.

This conference calls upon the National Disabled Members Committee to lobby the UK Government to amend legislation to enable more timely payment of SSP and work with the Regional disabled members committees, Self-Organising Groups and local branches to mount a national campaign to change the way SSP works for members with a disability.

Community and Voluntary Organisations Branch

Covid-19 and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in the Workplace

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, is commonly associated with the Armed Forces, however, is a condition that can affect people who have experienced a psychological trauma and can amount to a disability.

Countless people have been impacted by Covid-19, many experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression, and others experiencing PTSD symptoms. While not exclusive to, this has been particularly evident among health workers and social care workers. They not only bore the responsibility of losing patients in their care in vast numbers but have also found themselves placed in a position of becoming a surrogate family member where families have been unable to comfort and be there for loved ones. There is no underestimating just how traumatic this experience is.

For certain occupations and roles psychological debriefing is routinely used to allow immediate discussion and reflection on an incident and situation, allowing any early

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

opportunity to assess whether further support is required, including referral to occupational health services. Yet, in an attempt in recent years to reduced costs in their Occupational Health Services, many employers have made it more difficult to access face-to-face services.

The trauma of PTSD requires longer term psychiatric and psychological treatment.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members' Committee:

1. To commend employers who actively support emotional resilience in the workplace, including healthy lifestyles.
2. To work with Unison's National Health and Safety Committee to consider what occupational groups or roles may be most vulnerable to PTSD as an occupational hazard arising from Covid-19.
3. To call on employers to provide routine psychological debriefing for groups of workers where helping or supporting those with Covid-19 is assessed to be an occupational hazard.
4. To encourage employers to provide face-to-face counselling services as their default position for employees displaying PTSD symptoms.
5. To consider submitting this motion to National Delegate Conference 2022.

South Lanarkshire UNISON Local Government Branch

Right for Disabled People to work from home

For years disabled workers have been saying that they could often do their job better and with less pain if they could work from home. Disabled workers have had the right to work from home as a reasonable adjustment under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. However, the reality has been entirely different for many. Time and again disabled workers have been told by their employers' home working is "not our policy" or "it's just not possible". But then Covid-19 came along and all of a sudden millions of people were told to work from home.

A UNISON survey conducted in 2020 of more than 4,000 disabled people across the UK found that many disabled workers felt working from home during the coronavirus pandemic improved their wellbeing and more than half of those surveyed stated that they would benefit from doing so in the future.

So Covid-19 has proved that working from home is possible and can have a positive impact on workers.

Conference calls for UNISON and UNISON Branches to campaign and support a new enforceable right to home working for disabled workers who want it, with penalties for employers who refuse.

UNISON Northern Ireland

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

Working from Home as a Reasonable Adjustment

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the benefits of working from home for many workers and shown that it can be effective for both employers and workers alike. Many workers across sectors have had previous requests to work from home as a reasonable adjustment unfairly refused.

Conference notes the results of the UNISON survey of disabled members carried out in June 2020 looking at this issue which showed that:

- Of the 5000 respondents, 50%, including many in Local Government, were working from home every day
- 73% were more or as productive as they were in the workplace
- They were able to manage pain more effectively
- They could take longer breaks and work flexibly
- They took less sick leave, and
- Not having to commute assisted energy levels.

Conference is aware that working from home does not suit all workers and therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. work to ensure that UNISON builds on the positives of home working for disabled workers whilst also guarding against any detrimental impact.
2. Prioritise this issue as national and local bargaining priority, including reference to mental health and wellbeing of disabled members.
3. The NDMC to liaise with the Labour link/GPF to raise this issue with the political parties

West Midlands Region

Disabled women and a new right to flexible working

Conference notes that the past eighteen months have been a difficult time for all of us, but it's been especially difficult for disabled women. Many women found themselves working from home (probably after numerous years of being told home working for them wasn't possible) and sitting at an ad hoc workstation (aka kitchen table) whilst looking after their families.

However disabled women have had the added difficulty of trying to manage their health at the same time. We know that some employers did eventually deliver specialist kit such as chairs to employee's homes, but that took some time and much input from Health and Safety reps. Many disabled women workers are still sitting at a set-up that has real potential to cause harm to their physical wellbeing. This is in addition to a perception that they are less able to ask for assistance for fear of being

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

made to go back into the workplace before its 'safe', or even lose their job for complaining or being seen to be difficult.

Conference believes that what this year has shown is that there are a lot of very capable women out there, but it also highlights the need for flexible working to become the norm. Currently anyone can ask for flexible working, and all the employer needs to do is consider that request and then refuse it for business reasons. The emphasis should be on why a request is being refused and full details justifying this decision.

Conference believes It's time for flexible working to stop being optional, and for it to be embedded into the terms and conditions for all posts to be enacted as an when required without question. All employees should be able to vary their hours or working pattern, especially if it helps them to manage a health condition better and to be at work more of the time. The plus for employers is that they get to keep experienced and skilled staff while freeing up funds to employ others which ensures continuity for the organisation.

Flexible working and welfare benefits is another area where low-paid disabled women can often miss out. Sometimes by being a couple of pounds over the threshold, you can be refused benefits and thereby miss out on much needed financial help. The options are bleak - work and live in poverty or give up working and scrape by on benefits. If members could reduce their hours enough to help them be eligible for benefits and manage their health conditions that would be a real family friendly flexible working policy that would benefit disabled women.

The new Scottish Child Payment or Best Start monies for example are only available to families who receive certain benefits - having access to these monies could help towards having healthy future generations.

Conference is clear that a zero hours contract or a minimal hour contract where the bulk of hours are made up by excess hours or overtime is not flexible working. Although it can suit some women if it is voluntary, for many women this leads to issues if claiming benefits as income is sporadic and benefit monies will differ each 'pay day' making it harder to budget. This can often cause a shortfall in rent if Housing Benefit has been reduced, leading to rent arrears. In October, the £20 per week uplift in Universal Credit (UC) is due to be stopped - those on UC will see a reduction of around £90 in their monthly payment. Again, disabled women will potentially be harder hit especially as we go into winter and household bills start to rise again and when they can't afford to adequately heat their homes and rely on food deliveries - often requiring a minimum spend which hits the household budget hard.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Campaign to have the current law changed from flexible leave requests being an optional benefit to being required for all roles as a right
2. Campaign to keep the £20 per week uplift made to Universal Credit claimants
3. Campaign against zero hour and minimal hour contracts

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

National Women Members' Caucus

Flexible and Agile Working

Despite noises to the contrary early on in the pandemic, many employers are now saying they will demand that employees return to the workplace. Other employers are insisting that their workforce will be entirely home-based. Conference notes that both positions are extremes that fail to recognise the diverse needs of workers, and the changed work environment post pandemic.

A survey by Ernst and Young of over 16,000 employees found that more than half (54%) would consider leaving their job post pandemic if they were not afforded some form of flexibility. Only a fifth would prefer to return to the office full time. There are a number of reasons for this desire for flexibility, caring responsibilities, work life balance, or simply easier ways of working.

Conference welcomes the fact that, for many disabled people, the ability to choose a work location, or work from home is something that we've been asking for, to improve access to work. Conference recognises that the impact on people's mental health overall is one of the great unknowns about the pandemic. Isolation, confinement at close quarters in acrimonious or violent relationships, poverty and fear of loss of income, trying to work at home with children, strained community relationships – all these have been a hidden cost on people.

Conference notes that the intersectionality of disability and LGBT+ identity can create unique challenges. In these cases, flexibility is not just a nice to have, it's essential. For many LGBT+ workers, their own homes have been unsafe with many, particularly young workers, having been forced to stay in hostile environments with unsupportive family. If employers insist on permanent home-based working, they are removing LGBT+ workers from LGBT+ support groups in and outside of the workplace, limiting their ability to seek help. LGBT+ disabled workers are doubly impacted in that it may be a struggle to access this support elsewhere.

Conference believes that an either/or approach to where workers are based could create a problem that doesn't need to exist.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Committee, in liaison with the National LGBT+ Committee and other parts of the union as appropriate, to:

1. Petition the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Employment) to include agile working in the departmental strategy;
2. Gather and publicise examples from branches who have had success in negotiating flexible/agile working with employers;
3. Work with the TUC and Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to explore new guidance to employers on the value of flexible/agile working in maintaining good mental health and preventing sickness absence.

Disabled LGBT+ Members Caucus

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

Sex Workers, HIV/AIDS and Disabled Peoples Safety

Conference recognises that the great majority of sex workers are women, however it must also be recognised that there are workers in the sex industry from all genders and that this includes disabled people of all genders and from differing communities including the LGBT+ community.

What is less well known is that globally, sex workers are 13 times more at risk of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) compared with the general population, due to an increased likelihood of being economically vulnerable, unable to negotiate consistent condom use, and experiencing violence, criminalisation and marginalisation. HIV/AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) are specifically recognised in the Equality Act 2010 as a disability from the date of diagnosis. Therefore, sex work is an issue for disabled people.

Conference also notes that, with so many barriers still blocking disabled people's access to mainstream employment, for some disabled people sex work is an option that allows them to work the hours that suit their needs and take time off when required.

As noted by the UN Rapporteur on Poverty on his visit to the UK, for some disabled people, stringent work capability assessments and unfair PIP decisions have meant they are turned down for benefits and rely on sex work to survive. Some other disabled people use sex work to top up low income as a result of Universal Credit sanctions, the benefits cap and bedroom tax, zero hours contracts and the gig economy.

Conference notes the 2010 conclusions of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Physical and Mental Health that criminalisation of sex workers or their clients may only make it more difficult for sex workers to negotiate safe sex and may drive them to work in more isolated and unsafe areas. Criminalisation and lack of protections for sex workers can lead to violence against sex workers and to traumatisation which can also result in some becoming disabled.

Conference also recognises that a significant number of sex workers identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender plus (LGBT+), including many who are living with HIV/AIDS.

Conference recognises that decriminalisation is not about "encouraging" sex work – it's about the safety of people who sell sex, including disabled and LGBT+ people.

Conference believes that as a trade union we should be listening to the workers – including disabled, women and LGBT+ sex workers, who are at greater risk.

Conference therefore believes that the safety of disabled sex workers is a key issue for the National Disabled Members SOG and seeks that the National Disabled Members Committee to begin a dialogue with the National Women's Committee, the

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

National LGBT+ Committee, and other appropriate bodies within the union with a view to reviewing and advancing and agreeing UNISON policy.

North West Region

Hybrid Working across UNISON

Conference recognises that many Disabled Members across our union have benefited from online meetings, seminars and conferences during the pandemic. In fact, in many ways they have widened participation.

Conference there can be no going back to the 'old' normal which by its very nature excluded some Disabled Members from participation.

Conference this motion is clear and concise 'Hybrid' is the 'new' way of working, it gives the option for Disabled Members to participate within their access needs, in person or online.

Conference seeks that the National Disabled Members Committee:

1. Undertakes a programme of work within the union that will assist and compliment the outcomes of the 2-year Branch Resources Review passed at Special Delegate Conference 2021, Motion 72 as amended. That will further the hybrid way of working across the whole union as priority.
2. Ensure that all work includes a 'whole' union approach including regional meetings and forums to ensure Disabled Members receive the support and adjustments they require.
3. Survey disabled members, so they are included and involved in order to ensure all aspects of access needs are considered.

North West Region

Virtual Medical Appointments

Conference is concerned that following their use during Covid-19 virtual medical appointments, either online or by telephone, will become standard practice.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) recently launched a paper 'The future of remote consulting and patient triage' in which they argue that there should be a comprehensive review of total triage to increase significantly the use of online appointments to reduce the pressure on services. Whilst they say this should only be done following consultation with GPs and patients this could lead to some doctors pressuring disabled people into accepting an online appointment instead of seeing them face to face.

However, some doctors have raised concerns that the RCGP have underestimated how important face to face appointments can be in helping to build patient trust and identify medical conditions that may be missed during an online or telephone appointment.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

Conference is further concerned that some organisations including ATOS are promoting the use of shared or group virtual medical appointments for patients with the same condition as a way of transforming health care. Shared virtual appointments are already commonly used in the USA but can lead to patients not being open about their symptoms, cause increased stress and anxiety, a loss of dignity and risk breaching patient confidentiality. While support groups can sometimes be a useful option shared virtual appointments are not a replacement for individual medical appointments. This approach to health care could be extremely damaging for Disabled Members and cannot be allowed to be replicated here.

While NHS England have issued guidance that patients should be given a face to face appointment if it is their preference there are concerns that patients may not be aware of this and that under pressure GPs and hospitals may not be clear that this is an option.

Conference virtual appointments have their place and some people prefer them, but nobody should feel pressured into accepting an appointment that is either not suitable for their needs or is inaccessible.

Conference calls on National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC and Health Service Group Executive to:

1. Raise awareness of the patients right to choose face to face appointments including through Health Branches
2. Campaign against the introduction of group or shared consultations
3. Carry out a survey of members to determine whether they are being pressurised into accepting virtual appointments and, if there is evidence that they are, work with Labour Link to lobby for the NHS England guidance that patients have the right to a face to face appointment to be made a statutory requirement

Newcastle City Branch

Fair funding for social care

Conference notes that many disabled people need social care to help us to live independent lives. This include working disabled people who may need help to get ready in the morning before doing a full day's work.

Unlike the NHS however, social care services are not fully centrally funded by government and free at the point of use. Instead the government gives some funding to local councils who use this to help provide social care services. But that money doesn't cover the cost of a free service. It covers a service that is means tested with many people having to pay depending on their income.

Over recent years the money the government gives to local councils to fund social care has been cut to the bone, to the extent that councils are having to make more and more people pay increasing amounts.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

In many cases councils are resorting to taking people's benefits into account when working out how much they should have to pay for social care.

Conference notes that many disabled people need additional benefits (such as Personal Independence Payments or Disability Living Allowance) to pay for the extra costs of being disabled or – in the case of Universal Credit - to help us make ends meet due to low paid jobs. These benefits are not meant to pay for social care, which most of us would think should be provided for free to a disabled person.

However, in all but one local authority in England, disabled people's benefits are taken into account when working out how much they need to pay for their care. Wales is similar to England. Although Scotland introduced free personal care in 2002, this is only for over 65s and applies to personal care only – it doesn't include help with housework, laundry, shopping or the cost of attending day care centres.

There is no consistency on this across the country, but as an example some authorities take 80% of DLA, PIP or other means tested benefits into account when working out what to charge disabled people for care. It is possible to argue that some income can be discounted as it is required for specific disability related expenses, but disabled people shouldn't have to fight for individual exemptions in this way.

With many disabled workers and their families living on low income those affected are pushed further into poverty.

Conference believes that it is deeply unfair that income from benefits is taken into account when these benefits are not supposed to be for social care – they are often simply to keep food on the table.

Conference notes that the government promised to deliver a “sustainable improvement of the adult social care system” and said they would bring forward proposals this year, but we are yet to see any clear plans.

Conference welcomes UNISON's campaign for a national care service and our involvement in the Future Social Care Coalition – co-chaired by our General Secretary Christina McAnea. We fully support our union's call for an emergency cash injection into social care from the government and for a longer-term funding solution. We also support UNISON's campaign for national terms and conditions for workers, at least the real living wage and a clear career structure with decent training and opportunities for progression. This conference is clear that we will never achieve a good quality social care system if the workers are under-valued and badly paid.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to work with other relevant parts of the union to:

1. Campaign in the short term for an end to benefits being taken into account when assessing charging for social care
2. Publicise UNISON's national care service campaign
3. Work with Labour Link and with the Labour Party to find ways of funding solutions to the social care crisis.

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

4. Seek support for long-term properly costed, robust and sustainable government funding for social care that would allow free universal personal care for all age groups

National Disabled Members Committee

Not Competent

Combatting hate crime against disabled LGBT+ people

Conference notes that we are all tired and frustrated with the pandemic and the restrictions we have had to live with aimed at slowing the spread of Covid-19. However, this does not give a minority of the public the right to verbally or physically abuse those who they may perceive as “vulnerable” or “different”.

This includes those who are exempt from wearing face coverings and who have non-apparent impairments. Some disabled people feel forced to wear a face covering to reduce the risk from a minority, even though it can exacerbate an existing impairment, including anxiety. Other disabled people do not have the choice and can face abuse and intimidation. Conference believes this abuse, both online and face to face, needs to stop.

LGBT+ disabled people have also faced abuse for other Covid-19 related reasons. Many disabled LGBT+ people have been unable to get out of their homes to go to safe spaces in the community where we can be ourselves and spend time with our partners or friends. A lot of us were told to shield or had to stay at home due to our network of services and support being significantly curtailed due to reduced staffing levels. This has led to disabled LGBT+ people being increasingly isolated, potentially finding themselves going back into the closet to fit in with their family's views or to avoid confrontation with carers.

This has led to many disabled LGBT+ people spending more time on social media and online forums to maintain a level of social interaction. Unfortunately, a minority of people find it much easier to be vitriolic in an online environment, trolling, bullying and belittling disabled LGBT+ people not only for being what they perceive as different, but also for not wearing face coverings in public spaces, even bullying any allies that stand with us and challenge this unfair hate.

Research tells us that bullying can have a significant, long term impact on self-esteem and confidence and this can compound any internalised homophobia, transphobia or biphobia or negative perceptions of disability we may hold which already affect our self-worth. We know that it is often hard enough getting through the day when we face discrimination, either as a result of being disabled or our gender identity or sexual orientation, without having to live with the additional fear that we might be subjected to hate at any time. No-one has the right to make us feel even more marginalised than we often already do.

If we are in a position where we have been subjected to a cowardly attack, whether online or in person just for being disabled and LGBT+ or because we are medically exempt from wearing a face covering, we need to know that we can report it and that

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

it will be taken seriously. We need to know who we can report it to and what will happen when we do.

Conference notes that the Law Commission is undertaking a review of hate crime legislation, with options to make LGBT+ and disability hate crimes aggravated offences, like race hate, and to potentially update the definition of disability hate crime to stop some perpetrators getting off the hook.

We call on the National Disabled Members Committee to continue to publicise UNISON's Hate Crime guide, to signpost members to sources of support and to work with the National LGBT+ Committee to lobby the UK government to:

1. Invest in policing and justice services in order to prioritise a timely and effective response to hate incidents and hate crimes to send a clear message to perpetrators and to those who have experienced the distress of being subject to these acts that hate will not be tolerated and that their dignity as a disabled LGBT+ person will be preserved.
2. Increase public awareness of what hate incidents and hate crimes are and what we can do to report them, including the victimisation of disabled people who cannot wear face coverings.
3. Accept and fully implement appropriate changes to existing hate crime legislation that may be recommended by the Law Commission as part of their review.

Disabled LGBT+ Members Caucus

We Need to Treat Long Covid as a True Disability

Introduction

Covid-19 is a severe and multi-organ disease, which can have lasting consequences on the body. Also, it can take longer to clear the virus from your system, particularly if you are immunocompromised or have existing health problems. Long Covid is a blanket term which includes both ongoing Covid-19 symptoms and new symptoms which may develop as a result of Covid-19 infection. Long Covid is an emerging condition, so there is a lot we don't know yet about how it works and affects people in the long run.

An estimated one million people in private households in the UK - 87,000 of whom were Scottish - reported experiencing Long Covid in the four weeks to May 2, according to the Office of National Statistics.

Detail

There are a wide range of symptoms associated with Long Covid. We don't yet know how these symptoms will develop going forward, but there seems to be a lot of variation between individuals. These can include Cardiovascular symptoms, risk of embolism, Respiratory symptoms, Neurological symptoms, e.g., fatigue, headaches, sleep problems, dizziness, peripheral neuralgia (pain, pins and needles, or

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

numbness), and also mental health problems (depression, anxiety, and even symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)).

Long Covid symptoms often follow a 'remission and relapse' pattern, which means they can get much better or even go away entirely (remission), but then come back (relapse). Relapses often happen when people overwork themselves because they feel well and try to do too much. This means it is very important to enable them to manage their activity even when they feel well.

There is no single, standard treatment. Individuals can need support for months after the initial Covid-19 infection and it can be devastating in terms of the effect it can have on their lives. Emotional support is also key.

Why is Action Necessary?

"Before Covid-19, I was healthy and fit Now, after nearly a year of Long Covid, I still struggle to walk more than three blocks from home ... and don't know how long my symptoms might last. All I can do is try to manage this life changing illness at home. I just want my old life back – to be healthy, able to work, run, visit my friends and family, but I'm scared that won't happen. My employer has been really supportive, but that can't last forever – I don't know what I'll do if I don't get well enough to be able to work again." Brigid Ó Dochartaigh, a 47-year-old geologist from Edinburgh, quoted in Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland.

Action Sought

This motion calls for the conference to:

1. Raise awareness of the issues surrounding those members with Long Covid through sharing stories, providing information, and working up guidance sessions.
2. Support the motion that long Covid should be viewed as a disability under section 5 of the 2010 Equalities Act giving our members equal support and protection to other conditions already identified under same.
3. To work with TUC colleagues to make this a reality.

Lothian Health Branch

Not sufficiently clear

HIV/AIDS and Decriminalisation for Disabled People's Safety

Conference recognises that the great majority of sex workers are women, but sex workers also include disabled men and disabled women. However, what is less well known is that globally, sex workers are 13 times more at risk of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) compared with the general population, due to an increased likelihood of being economically vulnerable, unable to negotiate consistent condom use, and experiencing violence, criminalisation and marginalisation. HIV/AIDS

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

(Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) are specifically recognised in the Equality Act 2010 as a disability from the date of diagnosis. So, sex work is an issue for disabled people.

Conference also notes that, with so many barriers still blocking disabled people's access to mainstream employment, for some disabled people sex work is an option that allows them to work the hours that suit their needs and take time off when required.

As noted by the UN Rapporteur on Poverty on his visit to the UK, for some disabled people, stringent work capability assessments and unfair PIP decisions have meant they are turned down for benefits and rely on sex work to survive. Some other disabled people use sex work to top up low income as a result of Universal Credit sanctions, the benefits cap and bedroom tax, zero hours contracts and the gig economy.

Conference notes the 2010 conclusions of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Physical and Mental Health that criminalisation of sex workers or their clients may only make it more difficult for sex workers to negotiate safe sex and may drive them to work in more isolated and unsafe areas. Criminalisation and lack of protections for sex workers can lead to violence against sex workers and to traumatisation which can also result in some becoming disabled.

Conference also recognises that a significant number of sex workers identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender plus (LGBT+), including many who are living with HIV/AIDS.

Conference notes that UNISON's policy on sex work, adopted in 2010 on the basis of a motion from UNISON National Women's Conference, is to support proposals which decriminalise the selling of sex acts while introducing a "sex buyers law" criminalising those who purchase sex acts. However, conference further notes that UNISON National LGBT Conference takes a different view, based on motions to their conference which:

Recognise that criminalisation of any kind, including of buyers, increases the risks for sex workers and hinders the global fight against HIV and AIDS;

- 1) Oppose the introduction of a sex buyers' law;
- 2) Reflect the view that sex workers are workers, who should have the same rights and protections as workers in other industries.

Conference acknowledges that there have been significant developments since UNISON agreed its policy in 2010 including:

- a) Amnesty's 2016 publication of its policy on sex workers, which includes advocating for the decriminalisation of all aspects of consensual adult sex work;
- b) Full decriminalisation is also supported by many other organisations including the World Health Organisation, the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, and Anti-Slavery International, and by sex workers organisations;

2021 National Disabled Members' Conference Preliminary Agenda

c) The rejection by 2018 UNISON National Women's Conference of a motion "Nordic Model Now!" which called for women's conference to affirm its policy of supporting the Nordic Model, a legal model based on decriminalising the selling of sex acts while introducing a "sex buyers" law.

d) The Royal College of Nursing 2019 conference decision to support a policy of full decriminalisation in order to safeguard sex workers, improve their health and reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS.

Conference further notes New Zealand decriminalised sex work in 2003. The legislation recognises sex work as work, and it is therefore covered by employment law. Sex workers have the legal right to refuse any client for any reason at any point – the law treats sex workers consent as crucial and trafficking remains illegal.

The "New Zealand model" has been praised by women's rights organisations, human rights organisations, and international bodies such as the World Health Organisation, as the best legal approach to protect the safety, rights, and health, of people who sell sex.

Conference recognises that decriminalisation is not about "encouraging" sex work – it's about the safety of people who sell sex, including disabled and LGBT+ people.

Conference believes that as a trade union we should be listening to the workers – to sex workers – and should not be calling for laws that put sex workers, including disabled, women and LGBT+ sex workers, at greater risk.

Conference therefore believes that the safety of disabled sex workers is an issue for the National Disabled Members SOG and instructs the National Disabled Members Committee to begin a dialogue with the NEC, the National Women's Committee, the National LGBT+ Committee, and other appropriate bodies within the union with a view to reviewing and advancing UNISON policy in support of full decriminalisation.

North West Region