



Press Release

Accessible Britain Challenge a Sick Joke

In September last year Mark Harper, Minister for Disabled People launched the Accessible Britain Challenge. He did this 4 months after his Department had committed to closing the inaccessible disability assessment centre in Norwich and re-locating to suitable premises. That centre is still open, still inaccessible and is still turning away disabled people 8 months after the decision to close it was made.

The Department for Work and Pensions publicity states:

The Accessible Britain Challenge encourages communities to be inclusive and accessible. That means working with disabled people to remove the barriers that stop them participating fully in their community.

Far from working with disabled people Mr Harper has ignored us and refused to enter into a dialogue or even answer our letters.

What makes it more perverse is that a new provider Maximus, an American outsourcing firm takes over the multi million pound Work Capability Assessment (WCA) contract from Atos next Monday and will continue to operate from St Mary's House, 3 years after the DWP was made aware of the access issues.

Disabled campaigners and our supporters will be demonstrating between 12.30 – 1.30pm on Monday 2nd March outside St Mary's House against this injustice.

Mark Harrison, CEO of Equal Lives said “This shows that the Accessible Britain Challenge is just a publicity stunt. We have been campaigning for 3 years outside St Mary's House. They are even presenting awards in conjunction with the British Institute for Facilities Management and one of the categories is ‘innovative use of buildings, spaces and places’. The winners are to be announced on 15 March. I am sure the irony of this is not lost on the thousands of disabled people who have been forced to travel hundreds of miles for their assessments because the DWP won't lease a suitable premises.”

“It also demonstrates the contempt this Government has for disabled people. How can you appoint a new provider for the hated assessments and force them to use an inacces-



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sible building which the DWP leases through another private sector provider Telereal Trillium? This clearly demonstrated that we are not all in this together. There is one rule for disabled people and another for the private sector, bankers and Ministers who see themselves as being unaccountable and above the law”.

About Equal Lives

Equal Lives is a user-led human rights organisation supporting all disabled people in Norfolk. It was formed in 1996 by groups of disabled people in Norfolk. The organisation is led by a Board of Trustees all of whom are disabled people and elected by and from its membership. The organisation undertakes a wide range of services including:

- Comprehensive advice that covers all Department of Work and Pensions benefits relating to illness and disability. We offer support, advice and information to families and carers of disabled people
- Providing advice and support to people considering or using Personal Budgets or Direct payments in Norfolk
- Support for vulnerable adults and juveniles detained in police custody
- Advocacy support for users of mental health services to make sure that their views and concerns are heard by others
- Advice and support to people considering or using Direct Payments in Suffolk with our Suffolk Independent Living service
- Projects and activities with our membership and others to work towards achieving Equal Lives

Press/TV/Radio: Interviews are available

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