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[The Preventable Harm Project](#)

The Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP
Minister of State for Social Security and Disability
The Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London SW1H 9NA

Ref: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

via email

Dear Sir Stephen,

Re: [An Independent Advisory Panel On DWP-Related Deaths](#)¹

Further to our previous correspondence, I write in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project² to offer access to a recently published report which identifies the proposal for a much needed Independent Advisory Panel on DWP-Related Deaths.¹

The report identifies the ongoing government induced public health crisis and the need to replace the less than impressive Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Serious Case Panel with a new Independent Advisory Panel on DWP-Related Deaths, of which there have been thousands in recent years which is constantly dismissed by successive administrations and DWP Ministers. It's past time for this relentless government induced preventable harm to be called to account,² and the proposal benefits from the full support of Disability Rights UK:

'For years, we have seen the devastating consequences of punitive policies, most notably the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and the wider benefits system, which have forced people into impossible situations – pushing many into poverty, mental distress and, tragically, even to their deaths. Reports have repeatedly exposed the failures of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in safeguarding Disabled people's lives, yet accountability remains absent, and lessons are not being learned. Instead, we see the same hostile rhetoric and damaging policies being recycled by successive governments, ignoring the real-life consequences for those most in need of support. ...

A genuinely independent panel – free from government control or influence – must be established to investigate and expose the systemic failures that continue to put Disabled people's lives at risk.'¹ ... Kamran Mallick CEO Disability Rights UK

¹ [An Independent Advisory Panel On DWP-Related Deaths](#)

² [The Preventable Harm Project](#)



Please be advised that your comments to me in our recent correspondence are quoted in the report, which demonstrates the need for a new Independent Advisory Panel on DWP-Related Deaths which, of course, cannot report to the DWP given that it is the Department that is the cause of an identified government induced public health crisis.³

You may recall that during your time as Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee you wrote to various Ministers identifying the '*significant weaknesses in how the DWP learn lessons from some of the most tragic cases.*'⁴ However, nothing has improved regardless of the DWP Serious Case Panel, and those in greatest need continue to live in fear of the DWP. This is nothing to celebrate and this identified DWP psychological tyranny⁵ should not be defended.

'I met Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary, on 13 February to discuss the recent National Audit Office report *Information held by the Department for Work and Pensions on deaths by suicide of benefit claimants*, as well as other matters. ...

It is shocking that DWP does not have suitable processes in place to identify these tragic cases. Even where it does try to learn lessons, the Department has no system in place to check to see whether recommendations from its own investigations have been put in place, or whether there are any trends or systemic issues that could be identified. It is therefore entirely possible that recommendations made after people have died have not been implemented, and the DWP is missing opportunities to prevent deaths of the people it serves as a result. This cannot be allowed to continue.'⁴ (March 2020)

Furthermore, Minister, I found your unexpected and defensive comments⁶ to the Work and Pensions Committee on 12th February regarding the content of '*The Department*,'⁷ the critically acclaimed new book by John Pring, were inappropriate. I know of no-one else who found the book contents to be simply 'interesting.'⁶ Most people who reviewed it found the book content to be disturbing, with many claiming they couldn't read it without taking a break from the reported suffering and deaths of some of the most vulnerable people in society.⁸

'As demonstrated in '*The Department*,' a disturbing number of chronically ill disability benefit claimants committed suicide, linked in no small measure to persecution by the DWP, and to the fear instilled by the relentless threat of sanctions that meant the total loss of their only income which guaranteed destitution. Perhaps more disturbing is the number of coroners' 'Prevention of Future Deaths' reports, warning of the potential risk to life of the WCA, which were routinely disregarded by the DWP.'⁸

³ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms](#)

⁴ [Letter to Rt Hon Dr Therese Correy MP from Chair, Work and Pensions Committee 5th March 2020](#)

⁵ [Psychological tyranny prescribed by the DWP: preventable harm is government policy](#)

⁶ [Work and Pensions Committee Oral evidence: Safeguarding Vulnerable Claimants HC 402](#)

⁷ [The Department: How a Violent Government Bureaucracy Killed Hundreds and Hid the Evidence](#)

⁸ ['The Department' – book review](#)



I should also advise that your claims that the content of *'The Department'* suggested a DWP 'conspiracy' was cause for serious concern. Indeed, you are in a minority opinion if that's the conclusion you took from reading the book,⁸ given the years of evidence that clearly shows how a '*violent culture*' had been developed by the DWP over three decades.⁹

It should be remembered that NHS statistics published in September 2016 revealed that almost half of those claiming access to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) had attempted suicide at some point, which was never reported to the media.¹⁰ Someone should surely be asking why these disturbing figures were not identified by the DWP as a serious warning that the disability assessment using the totally discredited Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and adopted to limit access to the ESA benefit should be stopped.

'Dr Jay Watts, a consultant clinical psychologist and member of the Alliance for Counselling and Psychotherapy, who uncovered the figures, said she had felt 'shock and horror followed by, on reflection, an absence of surprise' when she first saw them. ...

Being treated like a second-class citizen, being blamed for not being an ideal neoliberal subject, being denied the basic financial means to survive, being sanctioned for being too ill to to make an appointment – these belittlements monopolise the internal world and the result is now often suicide.'¹⁰

What is a cause for great concern is successive administrations manipulating the facts to justify the latest political threat to those in greatest need, now continuing with the Labour administration. Once again there have been claims that social security spending is '*spiralling out of control*' which is a manipulation of the facts and is a claim not supported by the Office for Budget Responsibility.¹¹ The endless hostile political rhetoric by the Labour administration impacting on the wellbeing of disability benefit claimants continues where the last Conservative administration ended, and there is a tendency to disregard the fact that this inevitable government induced public health crisis was introduced by the last Labour administration in 2008.¹² It's nothing to celebrate.

You may recall that in my last letter I alerted you to the fact that DWP mortality totals no longer publish the number of applicants who died shortly after being refused access to the ESA long-term disability benefit.¹² This is another DWP induced crisis that is disregarded by the administration, with no-one held to account for a disability assessment system that is failing and causing endless preventable harm,² and a Department originally created to help those in greatest need now guilty of relentless intimidation and hostility as 'the norm.'

² [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

⁸ ['The Department' – book review](#)

⁹ [Years of evidence exposes minister's claims in parliament that DWP is not to blame for deaths.](#)

¹⁰ ['Shocking' NHS stats show nearly half ESA claimants have attempted suicide](#)

¹¹ [Government claims of 'spiralling' spending on benefits are false and 'ideological,' official figures show](#)

¹² [Letter to Minister of State for Social Security and Disability, 27th September 2024](#)



As long ago as January 2006 the Labour administration published a green paper, 'A New Deal for Welfare,' which introduced the ESA as a replacement for the previous disability benefit, identified as Incapacity Benefit. One significant voice against the planned reduction of the social security safety net was by the academic and author Dr Alison Ravetz, who predicted the future with disturbing accuracy:¹³

'... what might be expected is a slowly accumulating number of bad decisions and blatantly scandalous cases, eventually giving rise to a groundswell of unease. ... In the long run, this reform will stand or fall by the correctness of its belief that two thirds of all claimants are well enough to compete as jobseekers in the labour market. If this is wrong, the cost to society of a system that forces people into jobs they cannot sustain, on threat of penury, might well outweigh any financial savings; while the cost, in stress, to those people and their families will be incalculable.¹³

In July 2024, having been appointed as the Minister for Social Security and Disability, you claimed that you would '*ensure disabled people's views and voices are at the heart of all we do.*'¹⁴ The chronically ill and disabled community are waiting for you to demonstrate this claim, and to ending the relentless DWP intimidation of those in greatest need with endless hostile rhetoric, and policy reforms that are guaranteed to cause more preventable harm. Perhaps you should alert the Prime Minister¹⁵ to your stated intentions regarding the chronically ill and disabled community who are still persecuted when unable to work.

Yours, most sincerely

Mo Stewart

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Research Lead, Preventable Harm Project



Author ['*Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state*'](#)
Editor ['*The Preventable Harm Project*](#)
Researcher ['*Influences and Consequences*](#)

Copied to: Kamran Mallick, CEO Disability Rights UK
Dr Jed Boardman, Consultant Psychiatrist
Debbie Abrahams MP, Chair Work and Pensions Select Committee

¹³ [An independent assessment of the arguments for proposed Incapacity Benefit reform.](#)

¹⁴ [New disability minister pledges to put disabled people's voices at the heart of government's work](#)

¹⁵ [Prime Minister 'should be ashamed' after he fails to provide evidence for latest 'fit for work' attack](#)