



Mo Stewart Research

Fellow, Centre for Welfare Reform
Research Lead, Preventable Harm Project

Phone: xxxxx xxxxxx

Text: xxxxxxxxxxxx

Email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

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Douglas Chalmers CB DSO OBE
Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life
Room G.07
1 Horse Guards Parade
London
SW1A 2HQ

sent via email

Dear Mr Chalmers,

Re: Recognising and Responding to Early Warning Signs in Public Sector Bodies

[A review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life](#)¹

Writing in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project,² ongoing since 2009, I'd like to thank you and your colleagues on the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Committee) for the above review, which identifies the various crises in the recent past which may have been avoided had 'early warning signs' been identified and acknowledged.

Whilst I support the report content in theory, I fail to comprehend how similar disasters could be avoided in future. What is missing from the listed requirements to acknowledge 'early warning signs' is the political will to identify them, and to respond to them, in order to prevent a repeat of the scandals which all had 'a catastrophic impact on human lives.'¹ They were often politically motivated, as identified in my most recent published paper (2023).³

'In order to demolish the welfare state, it was first necessary to remove the past psychological security provided by the welfare state. This has been achieved, with disability denial created by significant social policy reforms since 2008. ...

Their often hostile rhetoric encouraged a 213 percent increase in prosecuted disability hate crimes, and successive administrations disregarded the thousands of deaths directly linked to the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), which was adopted using a discredited and dangerous biopsychosocial model of assessment to restrict access to long-term disability benefit. Influenced by corporate America since 1992, the UK social policy reforms guaranteed that many of those in greatest need were destined to die when, covertly, killed by the State' (p 217).³

¹ [Recognising and responding to early warning signs in public sector bodies](#)

² [Preventable Harm Project](#)

³ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms. *Justice, Power and Resistance* 6\(2\): 217-228](#)



Whilst I can't speak with any authority regarding the scandals listed in the Committee's latest report,¹ I can advise following 15 years experience that UK social policy reforms were influenced long-ago by corporate America,^{3,4} and many of those in greatest need were always destined to suffer, which was a political decision with no-one held to account.⁵ The hostile culture identified within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is as a direct result of the hostility of successive administrations aimed at the chronically ill and disabled community, who are persecuted by the State when unable to work. All 'warning signs' of preventable harm are dismissed and will continue to be disregarded. Without political will, the Committee's recommendations will be disregarded regardless of human consequences.

'The UK has been 'importing' American social and labour market policies since 1997 (Daguerre, 2004), and that includes the American system of disability denial via the income replacement insurance industry. Successfully manipulated by consecutive UK governments, the previous public empathy for the chronically ill and disabled community has been eroded. Every chronically ill and disabled claimant is conscious of the fact that the WCA was designed to restrict access to disability benefit, and they are also aware that public opinion is now suspicious of disability benefit claimants. The national press and media resisted alerting the public to the fact that the Waddell-Aylward BPS model of assessment, as used for the WCA, has failed all academic scrutiny; identified in 2016 by Professor Tom Shakespeare and colleagues as having 'no coherent theory or evidence behind this model' and demonstrating 'a cavalier approach to scientific evidence' (Shakespeare et al, 2016).

The influence of corporate America on future UK welfare reforms has been ongoing since 1994 when UnumProvident Insurance became official government advisers for welfare claims management, and successive UK governments have successfully manipulated the British public on route to the planned future demolition of the UK welfare state (Stewart, 2016). The identified preventable harm created by various DWP policies to make this political ambition happen is totally disregarded, and chronically ill and disabled people who are unable to work feel persecuted. Claimants with physical disabilities are being afflicted by the onset of mental health problems as this perceived DWP persecution continues. The DWP justify extremes of benefit conditionality whilst overlooking the human consequences of sanctions, which do not increase the numbers moving into paid employment and are deemed to be 'psychological tyranny' (Stewart, 2018b) and 'the application of welfare conditionality consistently had the opposite effect and pushed disabled people [...] under threat of sanctions [...] further away from work (Dwyer *et al*, 2018)' (p. 228).⁵

¹ [Recognising and responding to early warning signs in public sector bodies](#)

³ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms. *Justice, Power and Resistance* 6\(2\): 217-228](#)

⁴ [Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state, New Generation Publishing, London 2016](#)

⁵ [Preventable harm: creating a mental health crisis. *Journal of Public Mental Health* 18\(4\): 224-230](#)



It remains unclear that all politicians subscribe to the ‘moral courage’ identified in your report (p.vi),¹ and there is no evidence that various politicians chose to ‘honour the basic contract that we as holders of public office have with the public we serve’ (p. vi),¹ or act ‘solely in terms of the public interest’ (p2).¹ I suggest that there is a great deal of evidence of politicians, when in positions of perceived power, demonstrating that attracting attention to support their right-leaning ideology is of greater importance than honouring any contract with the public. Indeed, there is very little evidence that successive neoliberal Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions have any concern for ‘honour’ which, I suggest, is a word many DWP Ministers – regardless of the administration they represent – routinely demonstrate that they fail to comprehend, which often has fatal consequences.⁶

‘The evidence is overwhelming: Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions have been systematically harmed by a welfare system that prioritises cost-cutting over care, suspicion over support, and bureaucracy over basic human dignity. For years, we have seen 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’ (p.1).⁶

Unless the brutality of the DWP is successfully challenged I regret that the significant content of your report will become another document disregarded by the administration, and I think you’ll find that public trust in the DWP is very unlikely to ever be reinstated now that DWP hostility towards those in greatest need is identified as being ‘the norm’ in the UK.

Whilst ‘acting in line with the public interest’¹ may be considered to be ‘an obligation,’ the DWP have demonstrated that it is an obligation they routinely overlook for political gain.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mo Stewart', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mo Stewart

Fellow, Centre for Welfare Reform
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: Tim Durrant, Programme Director Institute for Government
Daniel Greenberg, Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner

¹ [Recognising and responding to early warning signs in public sector bodies](#)

⁶ [Proposal For An Independent Advisory Panel On DWP-Related Deaths](#)