**Joint sector letter to the Chancellor**

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP

Chancellor of the Exchequer

HM Treasury

1 Horse Guards Road

Westminster

London SW1A 2HQ

Sent by email

15 November 2023

Dear Chancellor of the Exchequer,

**Joint letter from the disability sector calling for urgent support with the cost of living for disabled people**

We are a group of 75 national and regional disability and sight loss charities united in our mission to support disabled people, and people with long term conditions.

We are writing to you to call for urgent action in the Autumn Statement to support disabled households through the ongoing cost of living crisis, in recognition that disabled people have been disproportionately affected by the cost of living.

We are acutely aware that the cost of living crisis has not gone away. As we approach a second winter, the situation will only get worse. Disabled people continue to be at the sharpest end, facing the double blow of low incomes and unavoidable higher costs for heating, eating, transport and other essentials.

Too many disabled people and their families are already at breaking point.

Scope research has found that on average disabled households face extra costs of £975 per month, including the cost of specialist equipment and higher energy use. Meanwhile half of blind and partially sighted people are using their disability benefits to pay for every day living costs, rather than the additional costs associated with their sight loss.

It’s vital that benefits are set at a level that means disabled people can afford the essentials. This means being able to put food on the table, heat their home, and charge vital equipment. Too often we hear that benefits, including disability benefits, fall woefully short.

Sense research found that 68 per cent of disabled people are worried they’ll have to skip meals to cope this winter, and 58 per cent fear they’ll be forced to take out loans.

Laura, who has MS and two sons with autism, explains:

‘Because of the MS, I can’t get too cold or I get ill. Having the heating on during the winter is a total non-negotiable for me. Otherwise, my symptoms get so bad that I can’t move, I’m slower and I’m at much higher risk of falling.’

We are alarmed and deeply concerned the 2022 Autumn Statement commitment to make energy support more targeted to those who most need it has not been delivered for disabled people. Meanwhile the warmer months have not provided enough respite for disabled household budgets. Equipment and services are needed throughout the year, and debt and worry has continued to build up for many.

As a sector we feel let down that the UK Government has not launched a consultation on an energy social tariff. A discounted energy tariff would protect disabled households struggling with their energy bills from price increases.

We write to you today to call for:

1. All benefits to be uprated at least in line with inflation in the Autumn Statement, as is the norm.
2. A UK Government review of how benefits are set and increased, so people can always afford the essentials, and manage the extra costs that come with disability.
3. Additional Winter financial support targeted at disabled households with higher energy costs.
4. Consultation on an energy social tariff under the UK Government's commitment to develop a new approach to consumer protection in energy markets.
5. All support to be promoted and communicated in accessible formats, including in BSL and easy read, and compatible with screen reading and magnification software, and to be available at the same time as mainstream formats.

Yours sincerely,

4 Sight Vision Support

Action for Kids (AFK)

Affinity Trust

Aspens

Berkshire Vision

Blind Veterans UK

Brainkind

BucksVision

Bury Society for Blind and Partially Sighted People

Camphill Village Trust

Certitude

Choice Support

Chrysalis Housing

Community Integrated Care

Croydon Mencap

David Lewis

Devon in Sight

Dimensions UK

East Cheshire Eye Society

Fight for Sight / Vision Foundation

FitzRoy

Forth Valley Sensory Centre

Glaucoma UK

Golden Lane Housing

Grace Eyre

Guide Dogs

Headway East London

Henshaws

Imagine Act and Succeed

Imagine Independence

Jewish Blind & Disabled

Kent Association for the Blind

Kids

Learning Disability England

Learning Disability London

Leonard Cheshire

Macular Society

Making Space

Mencap

Mind

MySight York

MyVision Oxfordshire

NAS

New Prospects Association

One Fylde

Outlookers

Papworth Trust

PSS

Retina UK

RNIB

Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC)

Scope

SeeAbility

Sense

Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey

Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind

Sight Loss Shropshire

Sight Support Derbyshire

Sight Support West of England

St Anne's

St Elizabeth's

Sutton Vision

The Northam Care Trust

Thomas Pocklington Trust

Together Trust

Turning Point

United Response

VICTA

Vision Support

Vision Support Barrow and District

Visionary

Vista

VoiceAbility

Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG)

Your Support Matters CIC