

The program of welfare reform and cuts is proceeding with alarming momentum. The thought behind it is that the only way out of poverty is going to be through work. I am writing to ask you to step back from this one size fits all thinking and to remember that there are some people for whom work is unlikely to be a realistic option. Please remember the duty of care to them and imagine how they are feeling as this pressure to work is heaped upon them.

They feel that for them the covenant on welfare seems to have been broken. They have been caught up as collateral damage in this push back to work and they feel very afraid.

They had never expected that the Conservative, Labour and LibDem Parties would all abandon them like this. No party is demonstrating any understanding of their situation or offering them any reassurance or protection. They cannot believe that all three main parties continue to sign up to the delusion that they can be forced back to work by pressure and removal of benefits. Unrealistic and cavalier talk of 'helping' them in to work is ill informed and adds to their fears that politicians do not understand the reality of caring, illness and disability.

Carers seem to have been completely forgotten as benefits are changed around them and every one is forced to work. Many carers can't do this. I am extremely concerned that the recent government consultations - both 'Refresh Carers Strategy' and '21st Century Welfare' - failed to address the issue of Carers Allowance. Ruling all financial considerations out of both these enquiries severely compromises what they can achieve.

Carers aren't some optional extra to be added on as an afterthought. Our society would not function without the care currently provided by unpaid carers and the consistent refusal by Governments to improve Carers lives has ripple effects throughout Social Services and the NHS. Precious few people receive the actual support they need and so many carers are just not receiving vital services and support.

Employment Support Allowance is a disaster for the seriously ill and disabled because neither ESA group has been designed to meet their needs. Welfare reform means 'conditionality' and 'conditionality' is completely inappropriate for people with a diagnosis of a severe and enduring disability. ESA has two sizes to fit all and the seriously disabled do not fit safely in to either group. The 'support' group admits only a few of the most severely ill and offers people no help or hope. The second group – the work related activity group – the WRAG – is not a safe place either. The WRAG is predicated on 'conditionality'. It is now time limited to one year. It has coercive elements of pressure and sanctions which are completely inappropriate for disabled people. There is absolutely no reason why there can't be a third option – a group free of pressure and sanctions where disabled people can get help IF

they want it without the pressure. Instead of Mr Grayling wringing his hands about how to allocate people with a severe diagnosis between the two inappropriate groups – why doesn't he introduce a third group that would actually meet their needs

And why when everyone wants disabled people to get out and live fulfilling lives would anyone take away Disability Living Allowance – the lifeline that makes this possible. DLA is an essential benefit that was specifically designed to provide financial support towards the extra costs incurred by people living with a disability. DLA payments have enabled hundreds of thousands of disabled people to maintain a degree of independence and quality of life that would have otherwise been lost to them. Because Middle and Higher rate DLA are both also passport benefits to enable family members to claim Carers Allowance, removing or reducing DLA will not only have an enormous financial impact on disabled people it will also impact on their carers – a double blow which will especially hit hard those families on the poverty line.

It is even more alarming that the Coalition plan a new regime of 'non medical tests' as happened with Employment Support Allowance - a 'test' you are planned to fail. Cutting or reducing DLA will in many cases have a reverse effect on employment and remove the financial support that helps some disabled people get ready to go out to work.

I am outraged at the Coalition's intention to remove the Mobility Component of DLA from those people in residential homes, and will strongly oppose this proposal.

Please also be aware how much the proposed cuts in housing benefit will bear down on carers and the long term sick and disabled.

Can I ask you if behind the enthusiasm for welfare reform there is any residual understanding of how this feels to people for whom work is probably not going to be the answer to poverty? People who now feel abandoned by all three main political parties and will never forget this. Please look past the fantasy and wishful thinking at the reality of what these cuts and reforms are actually doing to them.