

The Conservative Disability Group

'The Power of the Purple £'

Report based on the

CDG's 7th Annual Colloquium

Held on Monday, 14th May 2018

The Attlee Suite, the Houses of Parliament,
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@The_C_D_G

www.conservativedisabilitygroup.com

Part 1 - About the Conservative Disability Group

Our Principles & Values - Fundamental to the CDG's approach is a deeply Conservative philosophy as to the empowerment of disabled people - ensuring everybody has the freedoms, opportunities and support to live their lives, in the way they choose.

The CDG is an independent organisation made up of UK Conservative Party members from across the ability spectrum who want to see a more inclusive society for disabled people.

Through its activities, influencing and various networks it aims to create a bridge between the Conservative Party and the disability sector and the wider disabled community — supporting disabled people to inform policy, and promoting a better understanding of the Conservative approach to disability issues. An approach which believes in individual choice, opportunity for all, freedom and community.

The leadership of the CDG comprises of an Executive elected every year from our membership, which meets regularly and is responsible for the overall direction of the organisation and its priorities for the year - and years - ahead.

To find out more about the CDG please visit our website at www.conservativedisabilitygroup.com

Part 2 – The 7th Annual Colloquium

On Monday 14th May the CDG held its annual flagship event – a Colloquium in Portcullis House – on the theme, 'The Power of the Purple £.' The event was well attended with representatives from across the disability sector and included a keynote address from the Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work – **Sarah Newton MP** - followed by a question and answer session.

The Colloquium also included two separate panels, the first was chaired by the CDG's Parliamentary Link (Commons) **Heidi Allen MP** and included the following representatives of the disability sector, **Philip Connolly** (Disability Rights UK), **Diane Lightfoot** (Business Disability Forum (BDF)) and **Chris Wood** (Flying Disabled).

The second panel was chaired by the CDG's President, **The Rt. Hon. Maria Miller MP** and included the following representatives of the Conservative Parliamentary Party, **Heidi Allen MP**, **Lord Shinkwin**, **Lord Holmes of Richmond MBE** and **Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne**.

The event also included a brief address from **Rehman Chishti MP**, former Vice-Chair of the Conservative Party, Communities, under which disability is included.

Part 3 – Overview of the Purple £

Businesses should think inclusively about how any products or services they are selling to consumers, with the widest possible potential usage and explore innovative ways of enabling everybody to benefit from them. With businesses using the power of free-markets to benefit their customers and enjoy success.

Scope's Extra Costs Commission was an independent inquiry that was set up in response to research that showed life costs more if you are disabled. It looked closely at how businesses can meet the needs of disabled people and found that there is still a long way to go:

- The 'purple pound' is worth £212 billion.
- Three quarters of disabled people and their families have left a shop or business because of poor customer service or a lack of disability awareness.
- Two-thirds of disabled people think products are not developed with them in mind.

Source: Business Disability Forum (BDF).

Examples of businesses taking steps to be more inclusive of disabled people:

- Sainsbury's recently rolled out trolleys designed specifically for children with disabilities, that are now used in stores across the country.
- RBS and Natwest have invested in hi-tech, fully accessible mobile branch vans that can be used by customers with mobility restrictions who are unable to make it into a bank branch.
- EE are just one of many organisations that now offer a video relay service for customers who use British Sign Language as their first language.
- Changing Places Toilets Installed at Sports Venues and Large Shopping Centres.

Related to the theme of the Power of the Purple £, is the importance of employers recognising the value and contributions that disabled people can make to their organisations, as recognised by the Government's ambitious commitment to see a million more people in employment by 2027.

With the Government's Disability Confident Scheme and Access to Work among other initiatives playing a key role to help deliver on this target.

The backdrop to the 'Power of the Purple £' is the importance of having a strong economy, which ensures there are more opportunities for employment, and creates the right environment for businesses to flourish and the spread of prosperity.

Part 4 – Overview of the Minister’s Keynote Address

The CDG welcomed the keynote address from the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work – **Sarah Newton MP** - at the Colloquium and supports the Government’s commitment to ensure that people who are disabled and/or with health conditions can play their fullest possible role in society and that we remove those barriers that prevent people from fulfilling their potential and aspirations.

There is a huge amount of support across the Government, from the Prime Minister and across all the different ministries to deliver on removing these barriers. The Conservative Party has had a long and proud tradition of speaking up for promoting the equality of disabled people, including the landmark Disability Discrimination Act back in 1995.

However, the Conservative Party is not complacent and there is still more to do, but there is a huge amount of commitment and ambition.

- There are 13 million disabled people or people living with a health condition in the UK – 21% of the population.
- Within that number, four out of five disabilities are sometimes hidden - people on the autistic spectrum or with a mental health condition.

The barriers disabled people face, often prevent them from participating in society as they would like to do and can range across a variety of different areas such as access to transport, access to local businesses or access to websites and other online and digital platforms.

Businesses do not always adequately respond to the additional needs of disabled people. For most businesses, it is most likely not a deliberate policy to exclude people, but most likely due to a lack of awareness. Staff turnover and training will contribute to the attitudes that disabled people face when they try to access business and services.

In the context of access and inclusion, the built environment is important and the construction industry has a crucial role to play and it must build-in accessibility into its plans. While there are building regulations that promote good access, everyone must play their role do everything that they can to make the UK as fully inclusive a place to work and play as possible. The Government is working with the Construction Industry Council to help deliver on this.

Increasing the accessibility and inclusion of goods and services for disabled people is a key priority moving forward for the Government, which the CDG welcomes.

The 13 million disabled people in the UK with their families have a huge

combined spending power - around £250 billion per year, hence the Purple pound. Many businesses are missing out on potential customers because many services in stores and online are inaccessible to disabled people.

It is unacceptable that shopping and eating out ranks in the top three of most difficult experiences for disabled people to access, too often experiencing poor customer service.

- 75% of disabled people and their families have left a shop because of poor customer service.
- 70% of disabled people say a lack of accessibility puts them off visiting their local high street to do their Christmas shopping.
- 90% of disabled people would go to a store regularly and give them repeat business if it was fully accessible.

This lack of accessibility prevents many disabled consumers from spending their money in the UK shops, bars and restaurants and must be addressed.

To help raise the importance of inclusion and accessibility within the retail sector and challenge them to improve, the Government have established a forum with the with Helen Drury, the Government's retail sector champion, to bring together high-quality leaders in the retail sector to discuss the challenges as they understand them and to share good practice.

This forum now meets every three to four months, has a larger and more diverse membership and is focusing on ways it can drive improvements for disabled people accessing retail, goods and services. One of the initiatives which the forum came up with was the introduction of a new 'Purple Day' which took place on 12th November 2018.

It was anticipated that 'Purple Day' would help to raise awareness of the Purple pound, provide a package of support to retailers, and encourage disabled consumers to confidently visit their high streets and go online to buy their goods and services. Purple Day is a positive initiative and its aims should be supported.

To further tackle the issues disabled people face as consumers, the Government is working with the other sector champions to promote accessibility and inclusion. The Government appointed 11 sector champions early in 2017 to represent a range of different sectors and businesses and at the first anniversary event appointed an additional three more.

In addition to retail, the Government now have sector champions for gaming, hotels, airports, tourism, live music, physical activity, media, banking, buses, rail transport, arts and culture, insurance, and advertising.

These sector champions are leaders and use their influential status within

their industries to help promote the benefits of being inclusive to disabled people, to help improve the access of their sectors to disabled people and share good practice within their industry as well as across sectors. These sector champions are one of the ways the Government is making more businesses accessible and inclusive.

A further priority area for the government in this area is the importance of ensuring more businesses employ even more disabled people. The Government's Work & Health Unit has a key role to play in this area.

The unit has developed a strategy called Improving Lives work; the future of work, health and disability - it focuses on three main areas where the Government is committed to driving forward innovation and change, in welfare, the workplace and the health system.

This strategy seeks to transform employment prospects for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions and is committed to a very ambitious target.

The Government wants to see more than a million disabled people in work by 2027 - or as soon as possible. In order to be successful, the Government recognises that it must work in partnership with a wide range of organisations as well as our partners within Government also.

The Government is seeking to change attitudes and behaviours as well as services, so that the prevailing culture across society supports disabled people and people with health conditions in realising their aspirations.

We are already beginning to see some success with the number of disabled people in work rising by nearly 600,000 in the last four years. For the UK to reach its potential, every one of our citizens must reach theirs and harnessing the skills and talents of every person is not only good for the individuals and employers but for the economy as a whole.

There are potentially big gains for the economy and employers by enabling disabled people to get in work, stay in work and make progress in work. Ill health in working-age people who are not working costs the economy a billion pounds a year.

The Government is continuing to work with employers to unlock the economic benefits with getting more disabled people into the workplace - one of the ways the Government is doing this is through the Disability Confidence scheme.

Many of the best businesses already recognise the business benefits of employing disabled people. Six thousand organisations have already signed up to the Disability Confidence scheme. The Government is challenging employers to remove barriers to disabled people and those with long-term health conditions in employment and ensure that even more disabled people

have the opportunity to fulfil their potential at work.

All main Government departments have already achieved Disability Confident leader status and over 70% of local authorities are disability confident. The Access to Work programme is also enabling more disabled people into work, and progress in their careers. work. There is also a great deal of potential to use the new and emerging assistive technologies to enable more inclusive work spaces.

If we want to ensure that we live in a society that is inclusive and accessible for everyone, including disabled people, we cannot focus on one area and hope the rest will follow. It is important for a range of different partners to work together to ensure that the construction industry and the built environment, professional design and buildings are fully accessible and inclusive. Businesses must make sure that the services they offer are inclusive and accessible. Employers must employ more disabled people. They will not only be an asset to the businesses concerned, but they will enable the business to be more accessible and inclusive to all of their customers. This is about a movement of people, the Government, the public and private and third sectors all have a vitally important role to build a more inclusive society for disabled people.

Part 5 - Key Themes Which Emerged from the Panel Discussions:

Ambition – The ambitions of disabled people to run their own businesses, have successful careers and be independent was a recurring theme at the colloquium. It is important to establish the right environment so that these ambitions can be met and we tackle prejudice and discrimination against disabled people, particularly in the field of employment. The Government is working to create this environment through schemes such as Access to Work, Disability Confident and widening participation in apprenticeships.

Sharing Best Practice – It is vitally important to share examples of best practice and to involve local chambers of commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the CBI so that successes and benefits of inclusive and accessible businesses and enterprises, and effective training can be widely disseminated.

Extra Costs Faced by Disabled People – As the Commission led by Scope revealed, disabled people face higher costs than non-disabled people to live their lives, and this presents opportunities for businesses to respond to this demand in the market.

Raising Awareness – By raising awareness as to the potential spending power of disabled consumers and the advantages of employing disabled people, we will ensure that more employers, businesses and retailers are aware of the opportunities to grow and attract new talent.

Opportunities for Entrepreneurship – The spending power of disabled consumers can create opportunities for disabled entrepreneurs, and it is important they are able to access capital and business advice – particularly for new start-ups – and that we create a business-friendly environment for disabled entrepreneurs.

Investing in Skills – By investing in the skills of disabled people, employers and educational establishments can take full advantage of their disabled employees and students, and we must ensure that early-on in the educational careers of young disabled people, prejudice and discrimination as to their capabilities and ambitions is confronted.

Changing Perceptions – While there has been much progress over the last thirty years in other areas of equality, disability has yet to reach the same level of success. It is important that we change people's perceptions and recognise that disabled people want the same freedoms and opportunities as others.

Championing Accessibility – Improving the accessibility of events, information, buildings and services, leads to benefits for both disabled and non-disabled people alike, and by championing accessibility it becomes more mainstreamed and helps to change the perceptions.

Public Procurement – There are opportunities to use the processes of public procurement to widen opportunities for disabled people – as was achieved in much of the public procurement of the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games – and there is scope to use the power of public procurement processes to create more inclusive businesses and employers in the future.

Improving Transport – Improving the accessibility of public transport can have a major impact on the retail and employment opportunities for disabled people. Campaigns such as *Flying Disabled* also highlight the scope for UK plc to be at the vanguard of making international aviation more inclusive and accessible for disabled people and their families.

Providing Incentives – The regulatory and business environment can provide a combination of both the carrot and the stick, and we should be open minded to considering those solutions which provide incentives and encourage businesses and employers to do the right thing; and take robust and effective action against those that do not.

Inclusive Design – Inclusive design – particularly in the context of town and urban planning – is important if we are to create spaces which are inclusive and accessible for all disabled people. ‘Shared Spaces’ has not lived up to the high ideals associated with it, and further progress should be made to ensure alternatives to this model are adopted in our urban areas and cities.

Opportunities for UK plc – As the UK looks to the future, there are great opportunities for UK plc to build upon its successes in promoting opportunities for disabled people and to use the opportunity of a more inclusive economy, as a key component of its potential future economic success in the world.

Part 6 – Acknowledgements

The Executive of the Conservative Disability Group would like to thank all of those who participated in and attended the 7th Annual Colloquium and contributed to its success.

In particular we would like to acknowledge our key Parliamentary sponsors for the event, **the Right Honourable Maria Miller MP**, the CDG's President, and **Heidi Allen MP**, CDG's Parliamentary link (Commons).

We would also like to thank those other Conservative Parliamentarians who supported the event as panel members and speakers: **Sarah Newton MP, Lord Shinkwin, Lord Holmes of Richmond MBE, Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne & Rehman Chishti MP.**

We would like to thank those representatives of the disability sector who participated in one of the panels: **Diane Lightfoot** of the Business Disability Forum; **Chris Wood** of Flying Disabled; and **Philip Connolly** of Disability Rights UK.

In addition for the roundtable event to discuss this report we would also like to acknowledge the contribution of **James Taylor** of Scope and **Nick O'Shea** of the Ignition Brewery, Lewisham.

Our sponsor **Dr Mustafa Mohammed** for his generosity, **121 Captions** for providing Live subtitles for the event, **Naveed Osman** for taking photographs and the **staff of Portcullis House.**

Thank you.