

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP

Chair, Health and Social Care House of Commons Select Committee

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP

Chair, Science and Technology House of Commons Select Committee

cc Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP

Chair, Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on Human Rights

18 December 2020

Dear Mr Hunt and Mr Clark

We are Ian Davies, self-advocate and founding member of Northamptonshire People First, and Chris Hatton, Professor of Social Care at Manchester Metropolitan University.

We are writing to you about the spoken evidence session you held on 1st December as part of the joint Coronavirus: lessons learnt inquiry. This session was to learn about how people with learning disabilities had been supported through the pandemic and what could be done better in the future. We are pleased that you held this session as part of your larger inquiry and we hope that your inquiry report will make recommendations to support people better as the coronavirus pandemic carries on.

We are surprised and frustrated that your session did not include a person with learning disabilities as an expert witness in the spoken evidence session. We understand that there was a short video at the start of the session from Ann, a person with learning disabilities. This video is not part of the official transcript of the session

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/1309/pdf/> and is not included in the Parliament TV recording of the session

<https://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/bae6245a-5506-4278-97fa-066ab8cf7b51> . This means that no person with learning disabilities was

officially included in the spoken evidence session, and there was no person with learning disabilities on the expert witness panel to answer questions from MPs.

Before the session one of us (Chris Hatton) was asked to be part of the expert witness panel. Because there was no person with learning disabilities invited to be part of the expert witness panel, we both (Ian Davies and Chris Hatton) agreed to make an offer that we could give joint evidence to the session. This was rejected on the grounds that there wasn't time for this, and a second invitation was made to one of us (Chris Hatton) without the other (Ian Davies). We were sad and angry about this rejection, and neither of us attended the session as an expert witness.

We believe that when any select committee session is about people with learning disabilities, then a person with learning disabilities should give evidence as a full expert witness with equal status to other expert witnesses. Other select committees, like the Human Rights Committee, have very successfully included a person with learning disabilities as an expert witness in a spoken evidence session.

We think the chairs of all the select committees should get together to agree that they will include people with learning disabilities as expert witnesses in spoken evidence sessions about people with learning disabilities. They should also take advice from people with learning disabilities about the best ways to include people so they feel comfortable being an expert witness, and come up with some rules and guidance to help select committees do this.

Thank you for reading this letter. We hope it will help you and other select committees to get better evidence by including people with learning disabilities as expert witnesses.

Yours sincerely

Ian Davies and Chris Hatton