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Solicitor Team
UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry

15th December 2022

C19 Public Inquiry – Rule 9 Response
Your reference: M2/R9R/DRUK/TJS

We write further to the Inquiry's Rule 9 request dated 7 November 2022. We set out our responses to the Inquiry's request for information below. In accordance with the Inquiry's email of 16 November 2022 we have prepared our responses without substantive legal advice and, in particular, have not yet provided to our legal team all documents we consider relevant for them to review and advise accordingly whether these, or other documents, ought to be provided to the Inquiry team. However, we trust the following assists and we are able, in due course, to provide a statement to the Inquiry and further submissions on the issues raised in the Inquiry's Rule 9 questionnaire.

1. A brief overview of the history, legal status and aims of the organisation or body. Please explain whether the work of the organisation or body is UK wide, or is instead confined to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland only.

Disability Rights UK ('DR UK') was founded in 2012 and is a leading national disability organisation led by Disabled people. The majority of the trustees and staff are Disabled people. DR UK has a substantial reach on social media, with over 65,000 Twitter followers. DR UK's work is rooted in the experiences of Disabled people and it gives a voice to the concerns of Disabled people, through campaigning for central and local government improvements in policies and services, providing information and advice to Disabled people and influencing organisational change.

DR UK works with Disabled People's Organisations and government across the UK to influence regional and national change for better rights, benefits, quality of life and economic opportunities for Disabled people. It has organisational members in England, Scotland and Wales but not in Northern Ireland.

2. A brief description of the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents.

We seek to represent the concerns of the 14 million Disabled people living in the UK. We're a pan-disability organisation, and focus on the removal of societal barriers to enable the full inclusion of Disabled people.

We are part of the DPO Forum for England and seek to represent the views of all Disabled People's Organisations in England.

DR UK has 105 organisational members, 46 of which are led by Disabled people, that serve Disabled people in their local areas.

3. A brief overview of the work of the organisation or body in supporting or representing the relevant group(s) between January 2020 and Spring 2022 as it relates to the response to Covid-19 of (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive.

DR UK raised awareness of the issues faced by Disabled people in the context of the pandemic and attempted to influence the government response to the same by corresponding with central and local government, engaging with the press, conducting surveys and publishing reports, attending Disability Strategy meetings with the Minister for Disabled People and making submissions to parliamentary committees.

In response to the pandemic, DR UK set up the Our Voices group, which is a group made up of CEOs and policy staff from DPOs across England. The group met weekly during the pandemic to discuss the impact on Disabled people locally and regionally, to share experiences and ideas as well as to present a collective voice to government.

Throughout the pandemic, DR UK maintained a dedicated section on its website detailing information, advice and the latest guidance issued that directly impacted on Disabled people. The page has been visited by tens of thousands of people. The organisation has encouraged those in its network to raise concerns about Disabled peoples' rights in the context of the pandemic to their local MPs and Local Authorities and provided template letters for that purpose.

4. A list of any articles or reports the organisation or body has published or contributed to, and/or evidence it has given (for example to Parliamentary Select Committees) regarding the impact on the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents of the response to Covid-19 by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please include links to those documents where possible.

In April/May 2020, we gave evidence to the Environment, Rural Affairs and Food Committee's consultation about the access to food for Disabled people during the Covid-19 Pandemic. We also provided oral evidence, and attended regular meetings with them between April 2020 to around August 2020.

We also gave evidence to the Womens and Equalities Committee in April/May 2020, regarding the impact of the Covid-19 on Disabled people. We were referenced in their report, '*Unequal Impact? Coronavirus, disability and access to services*'¹. We raised various concerns on the impact on social care, education and mental health for Disabled people.

DR UK submitted written evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee in December 2020², setting out the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Disabled people's employment rates.

¹ Available at:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4068/documents/40461/default/> ² Available at:
<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/19118/pdf/>

On 29 March 2021, DR UK provided a response to the Government's consultation on

COVID-Status certification. DR UK expressed the impact of certification on inequality, and issues relating to the accessibility of a certification system if it was to be introduced.

Last year, DR UK worked with the University of Leeds on a project that the Cabinet Office had asked them to carry out. We collated various reports and studies relating to the impact of the pandemic on Disabled people. When we asked the University for an update on the project, we were told that the University had asked the Cabinet Office whether they can lift the embargo on projects cancelled by the previous Government. We therefore have not had any sight of the final outcome of our work.

5. The view of the organisation or body as to whether the group(s) it supports or represents was adequately considered when decisions about the response to Covid 19 were made by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please also explain the reasons for the view expressed by the organisation or body in this respect.

We provide these comments to assist the Inquiry with our views which are formed on the basis of our experience and knowledge of events to date and with only limited legal advice. However, they are only preliminary comments provided without sight of disclosure or evidence.

We do not believe that Disabled people across the country were adequately considered when governmental decisions were made. In particular, we consider that the Government failed to consider the importance of consulting with Disabled people and organisations representing Disabled people, especially where Disabled people were disproportionately affected by Covid-19. We consider that co-production could have prevented many of the issues Disabled people have faced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Government failed on many occasions to implement provisions of the Equality Act 2010, despite DR UK and other DPOs drawing this failure to their attention. This led to regulations being made without taking into the account the need for reasonable adjustments, and Covid-19 related communications not being provided in accessible formats.

6. Whether the organisation or body raised any concerns about the consideration being given to the group(s) which it supports or represents with (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive, when the Government(s) and/or Executive were making decisions about their response to Covid-19. Please provide a list of any such correspondence or meetings with the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or the Northern Ireland Executive, including the dates on which the body or organisation wrote or such meetings were held, to whom the correspondence was addressed or with whom the meeting was held, and any response received from the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or Northern Ireland Executive addressing such concerns.

Please see the enclosed non-exhaustive chronology.

7. A brief summary of the views of the organisation or body as to any lessons, if any, that can be learned from any consideration which was given to the group(s) that the organisation or body supports or represents by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive when they were making decisions about their response to Covid-19.

We provide these comments to assist the Inquiry with our views which are formed on the basis of our experience and knowledge of events to date and with only limited legal

advice. However they are only preliminary comments provided without sight of disclosure or evidence.

Our preliminary view is that it is essential for Governments to consult with Disabled people, before making decisions which are likely to impact them. The Government should develop a co-production and engagement strategy from the outset with Disabled People's Organisations at national and local levels, across all policy and service areas.

We also consider that Governments must deliver public health communications in a way that meets the accessibility requirements of Disabled people.

The Government needs to be more rigorous in its implementation of the Equality Act 2010 across services and communications.

Furthermore, we consider that it is necessary for Governments to improve disability data collection, including impairment-specific data, to reveal the true level of inequality so that Government bodies can make informed decisions and prevent this inequality from perpetuating. This includes the need to obtain improved data on people in social care, and how to effectively access them.

The Government also needs to consider granting improved funding for trusted Disabled People's Organisations, so that in times of crisis, Disabled people have trusted intermediaries that they can turn to for advice and support.

If you require any further information at this stage, bearing in mind the above-mentioned caveats, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us via our legal representative, **NR**

NR at Bhatt Murphy Solicitors.

Yours faithfully

Disability Rights UK