



**'Employment'**  
**Report of the Lewisham People's  
Parliament April 2023**

**This report is written in plain English**

## **The Lewisham People's Parliament**

The People's Parliament is here to represent the views of people with learning disabilities who live in Lewisham. It is a project run by Lewisham Speaking Up and it is currently funded in various ways.

There are six Lewisham People's Parliament reps who are elected by other people with learning disabilities. They are paid above the London Living Wage for their work with Lewisham Speaking Up.

## **Background to this report on Employment**

This Lewisham People's Parliament was held to find out what people with learning disabilities think about employment in Lewisham.

Recent research by BASE (British Association of Supported Employment) shows that the employment figures for people with learning disabilities are lower than ever.

Just 4.8% of people who receive long term support from social care are in work.

Lewisham Council has a new SEND forum for employment. They want to look at how people with learning disabilities of all ages can have better chances of employment.

The aim of this People's Parliament was to hear directly from people with learning disabilities.

What do they think about work? How do they feel about working?  
What would they like to happen?



## The Parliament meeting



**Peter chairing the meeting**

The meeting was held in the Lewisham Council Chamber.

We would like to thank Lewisham Council for letting us have the rooms for our meeting.

We invited people to join us on April 21<sup>st</sup> and **39** people with learning disabilities came in person.

The meeting was chaired by People's Parliament rep Peter Cronin.

Peter welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through some ground rules.

He explained what would happen during the day.

Peter talked about his own experiences of work. He spoke about working at the Co-Op and about working for Lewisham Speaking Up.

Peter said that he thought it was important for all people with learning disabilities to have a chance of having a job if they wanted to work.

Peter introduced the guest speakers for the day

Our first guest speaker was Hazel Dales from Lewisham Council.



**Hazel from Lewisham Council**

Hazel explained that the Council have set up a new group to look at employment.

The group wants to look at what support there is to help people with learning disabilities find work.

This includes young people leaving school. It also include adults with learning disabilities of all ages.

Hazel said she wanted to hear what people had to say about employment. She said this would help the Council make plans to help people.



**Morgan from Building People, Changing Minds**

We also heard from Josiah and Morgan from Building People, Changing Minds.

Morgan spoke about doing a voluntary work placement at Lewisham Local.

Everyone had lots of questions for Jordan, which he answered really well.

Josiah asked if anyone in the audience was interested in doing a volunteer work placement.

Some people said yes and spoke to Josiah afterwards.

After the guest speakers had finished, Peter asked everyone to join the workshops.

## **The workshops**

There were 2 different workshops at the Parliament meeting.

They were:

- How does working affect your benefits?
- What do people think about employment for people with learning disabilities in Lewisham?

At our People's Parliaments we try to find out what people think about a subject. We ask what they would like to change about that subject.

This is what people with learning disabilities said at each of the 2 workshops.

## **How does working affect your benefits?**

### **What we say**

- Job centres have been hit by cuts
- People now feel more pressure to find work under Universal Credit than they did on the 'old' benefits
- Disability Employment Advisors at the job centre can give you good advice
- Not everyone knows that you have to make a new benefit claim when you reach pension age
- You can only work for 16 hours under some benefits
- You can work as many hours as you want under Universal Credit. It's more about how much you earn
- People were worried about changes to their benefits if they started working
- People found it hard to understand the system for reporting any work to do with their benefits



## **How does working affect your benefits?**

### **What we want to change**

- The way you have to tell the job centre about what work you do should be made easier
- Bring back 121 Disability Employment Advisers. Have meetings with them face to face and one to one
- It should be easier for people with learning disabilities to do some work and still keep some of their benefits
- If you get a job and it finishes, it should be easier to get back the benefits you had before

## **What do people think about employment for people with learning disabilities in Lewisham?**

### **What we say about being in work. Being in work means:**

- Feeling valued
- Having more self esteem
- Feeling like I'm a normal human being
- Being more in control
- Helps your mental health
- Gives you a routine
- Good being part of a team
- Feeling more fully alive
- I can buy what I want
- Meeting new people
- It's nice having a paid job

### **What we say about work in general**

- There was applause for the Mayor's commitment for more employment for people with learning disabilities
- I'm sick of voluntary work
- It's a challenge being a freelancer as sometimes I have work and sometimes not. I have to watch what I spend.
- I don't want a job, I like the voluntary work that I do now

## **What we say about work. What helps?**

- Having a job coach
- Getting help with on the job training
- Having a supportive family
- Having a work buddy
- Having someone to help you start the process of working
- Having help with job applications would help. Can feel brutal and nasty; not a good experience
- Support needs to be consistent and matched to the needs of the person
- Having an individual profile about your disability and what you find hard

## **What we say about work. What needs to change?**

- Job centres do not help disabled people enough to find work
- No 'one size fits all' approach – each person to be recognised as an individual
- We need support if everything is online. It's no good if they say all of the jobs are on the computer if you can't use it
- We need a system of support that actually helps disabled people find work
- Covid should have been the time to change the system
- The attitude in society need to change towards disabled people. There is too much stigma towards disabled people on benefits

## **Summary**

People with learning disabilities had a lot to say about employment. Some of the main themes of the discussions in the workshops were:

- People with learning disabilities find the system around benefits and work confusing

- There were mixed views about how much job centres can help people with learning disabilities to find work
- There should be more individualised support for people with learning disabilities who want to work
- People who want to work value having a job and the extra quality of life it can bring
- Help needs to be about more than just finding a job. People want ongoing support once they have a job

Our experience at Lewisham Speaking Up is that a supported employment model works well for people with learning disabilities. We would welcome the development of more supported employment in the borough.

Support that is individualised and goes beyond just finding a job is needed. Support also needs to be for the employer as well as for people with learning disabilities.

We need a benefits system that supports people with learning disabilities to try out work without fear of losing their benefits. There needs to be a clearer alternative to the digital pathway available at job centres.

### **What Next?**

These are the things that the People's Parliament will do next:

- Send this report to Local Members of Parliament, Lewisham Council, service providers in Lewisham and other people who may be interested
- We will continue to work with the Lewisham Council SEN employment forum. We will support people with learning disabilities to be a part of the forum and to understand what is going on in Lewisham

For more information or to discuss anything to do with this report contact Lewisham Speaking Up.

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