

# **Independent Disability Advisory Panel: terms of reference**

This document sets out the terms of reference for the Independent Disability Advisory Panel.

## **Overview**

The Independent Disability Advisory Panel is chaired by Zara Todd, who reports to the Minister for Social Security and Disability.

The Panel is guided by the social model of disability and will take an intersectional, anti-racist approach.

We are committed to maintaining a safe environment and doing no harm through this work.

The Panel will run for 12 months, after which the model will be evaluated before any future advisory panel is taken forward.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this Panel is to facilitate a strategic forum that advises the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on health and disability policy and strategy. In these terms of reference, DWP is referred to as 'the department'.

The Panel will take a collaborative approach, working in partnership with the Secretariat.

## **Objectives**

The Panel has 4 objectives:

1. Facilitate a strategic forum to share guidance, feedback and recommendations on early policy development and ongoing delivery.
2. Improve policy outcomes for the health and disability community.
3. Champion lived experience as evidence within policymaking.
4. Use lived and professional experience to inform future research, departmental communications and engagement strategies, including how we connect out into more marginalised communities.

## **Scope**

This is an advisory group, and final decisions will remain with Ministers.

Advice is feedback such as opinions, suggestions and questions which are informed by evidence and are grounded in lived experience. Advice is conditional, non-binding and it can evolve over time.

All DWP health and disability policy is in scope of the Panel, including policies within the DWP and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) Joint Work and Health

Directorate. The only area not in scope is the Timms Review on Personal Independence Payment.

The Secretariat and the Chair will work with the Panel and the department to agree priority areas.

## **Panel principles**

The Chair, Panel membership and Secretariat have agreed the following principles:

- Accessible – the Panel Secretariat will ensure that all access needs are met so members can participate fully
- Participatory – workshops will be interactive and collaborative. Panel members will agree areas of focus in conjunction with policy teams
- Respectful – all participants, including Panel members and the Secretariat, will respect the views and experiences shared by others and remain open to learning from different perspectives
- Meaningful – the Panel will focus their time and resource on topics that are open to meaningful input
- Equal – every opinion matters. We value all contributions regardless of seniority or level of experience
- Inclusive – the Panel reflects a diverse range of perspectives and is committed to an intersectional approach
- Trauma-informed – the Panel will take a trauma-informed approach to how they operate and their recommendations
- Anti-racist – the Panel will take an anti-racist approach to how they operate and their recommendations
- Evidence-led – the work of the Panel will be guided by both quantitative and qualitative evidence, and the Panel will champion lived experience as evidence in wider settings
- Transparent – the Secretariat and the department will share information openly to enable holistic advice. The department will consider all the Panel's recommendations and provide feedback on how these may or may not be progressed
- Accountable – the Panel is committed to upholding the Seven Principles of Public Life – also known as the Nolan Principles
- Reflective – the Panel will continue to reflect on how best to proceed and be open to new perspectives and approaches

## **Panel roles**

### **Chair**

The Chair, Zara Todd, was appointed in August 2025 and has guided the development of the Panel.

The Chair's role is to:

- advise the department on health and disability
- lead the Panel and chair all workshops and meetings
- inform, design and agree workshop agendas with the Secretariat
- support Panel members in their role
- facilitate feedback and evaluation

### **Panel member**

The Panel members were recruited via an open expression of interest. Members will be expected to participate for 12 months commencing in January 2026.

Their role is to:

- advise the department and collaborate on ongoing policy development
- attend monthly workshops
- signpost to wider stakeholders and engagement opportunities
- provide feedback to help guide future engagement

### **Panel Secretariat**

The Panel is supported by an internal team of civil servants, called a Secretariat. The team is based across the department, to enable a holistic approach.

The team's role is to:

- support and enable the Chair and Panel members with the practicalities of their role
- provide timely updates to Panel members and maintain clear and consistent communication
- connect the Panel to the department and support policy teams to work with the Panel
- collect feedback and conduct the evaluation

### **Conduct of workshops**

The Panel will meet once a month. Policy topics will either be identified by the Panel or by the department.

Policies proposed by the department must answer the following questions before they are agreed by the Chair:

- at which stage of the policy cycle is this policy currently?
- can people still provide meaningful guidance or feedback on this policy?
- can the department show the Panel how their feedback or input has influenced the policy?

We will also present broader, strategic questions to the Panel for their input and discussion, to inform our longer-term strategy.

The Chair will agree the sequence of topics together with the Secretariat.

## **Information sharing**

Panel workshops will either be open or closed.

### **1. Open (standard meeting rules)**

Members can use the information they hear in a meeting, but they cannot reveal who said it.

Members can share the ideas discussed, but they cannot say who said them or what organisation they are from.

For open workshops, Panel members can share questions within their networks and share wider evidence and learning.

A summary note and recommendations of the meeting will be shared.

### **2. Closed (confidential)**

The confidentiality commitment is in place and members cannot share what was discussed.

Confidentiality means keeping information private and secure, and only sharing it with people who are authorised to know it. It is a core principle in professional, legal and ethical standards.

Recommendations from this meeting will only be shared once the policy is in the public domain.

## **Collective advice**

Panel members will work together to develop advice that reflects the collective judgment of the group, rather than individual positions.

The Panel does not have to agree, and they can put forward complex advice.

All perspectives will be considered when agreeing advice, ensuring recommendations are balanced, inclusive and representative of the group's discussions.

Advice from the Panel does not constitute an endorsement of policy.

## **Disputes and disagreements**

The topics under discussion will sometimes be of a sensitive nature, and not all Panel members will agree. For disagreements that cannot be resolved within the meeting, there will be a process of escalation via the Panel Chair.

The Chair is the first point of contact for any concerns that members have.

## **Monitoring and evaluation**

The Panel will operate for a period of 12 months, after which its model and approach will be formally reviewed.

Throughout this period, Panel members will be able to provide ongoing feedback to the Secretariat. Both Panel members and policy teams will be invited to complete an online survey at appropriate time points in order to capture their experiences, learning and perceived outcomes.

In addition, the Panel Secretariat, Chair, members and policy teams will have the option to contribute further insights through focus groups or in-depth interviews. This feedback will inform both an assessment of how the Panel has operated and an evaluation of its overall impact.

## **Terms of reference**

The group will review the terms of reference at regular intervals to ensure they remain fit for purpose.