

# Statement to Parliament: Response to advice on the use of wheelchair spaces onboard buses

Government believes that where people live, shop, go out, or park their car should not be determined by their disability and recognises the importance of accessible transport networks in supporting disabled people to live independent lives and fulfil their potential.

In January 2017 the Supreme Court handed down its judgment in the case of Paulley vs FirstGroup PLC, concerning the “reasonable adjustments” which must be provided by bus operators to enable wheelchair users to access the on-board wheelchair space.

The Supreme Court judgment states that FirstGroup’s policy with regard to use of the wheelchair space was insufficient to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, and that bus drivers should be required to do more than simply request that a person vacates the wheelchair space, including suspending the journey if needed. The judgment did not provide clarity on precisely what action a service provider should require its drivers to take or how the needs of both passengers in wheelchairs and other bus users, disabled or otherwise, should be taken into account.

In order to understand the implications of the judgment for disabled people, the bus industry and other passengers, and to identify actions for government and others to take to ensure that required adjustments can be provided on buses we established a stakeholder ‘Task and Finish Group on the Use of Wheelchair Spaces on Buses’ (the group).

The group’s report to ministers stated that:

Our view is that drivers need to play an active role in ensuring that the wheelchair space is made available for passengers in wheelchairs, which includes requiring other passengers to move where necessary, but that drivers also need more powers than they have currently to enable them to do this effectively.

The group agreed that that whilst wheelchair users should be granted access to the on-board wheelchair space they may not be the only passengers who rely on using it, but that where other passengers do not have such a need they should be expected to vacate the space in order that it can be occupied by a wheelchair user.

The group made 4 specific recommendations:

1. That the Public Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors,

Conductors and Passengers) Regulations 1990 (the Conduct Regulations) are amended to enable drivers to remove passengers from the bus who unreasonably refuse to move when requested from the wheelchair space

2. The associated guidance is amended to better reflect the behaviours expected from drivers and passengers with respect to use of the wheelchair space
3. Further work is conducted to consider how best to raise public awareness of the behaviours expected from passengers with respect to the wheelchair space, for example a public awareness campaign, or improved signage on buses
4. That conditions of carriage and disability awareness training best practice guidance are updated to reflect the fact that passengers will be required to move from the wheelchair space should it be required by a passenger in a wheelchair

I am grateful to the group for their careful consideration of this complex issue.

Government agrees with the group that the wheelchair space should be available to those who need it and that the balance of measures proposed, supporting bus drivers to facilitate access to the wheelchair space, and creating an environment where the needs of disabled passengers are recognised and respected should help to overcome the barriers still faced by some disabled people when using bus services.

In [accepting the group's recommendations in principle](#) we will begin a process of further engagement to understand the specific experiences of a range of stakeholders affected by the wheelchair space issue, including wheelchair users, parents travelling with young children, and bus drivers – with a view to bringing forward a package of measures in 2018, informed by the group's recommendations and our further consideration, to support access to the wheelchair space.

Disabled people make 10 times as many journeys by bus as by rail, and it is essential that the services they rely upon to access education, employment, social and leisure activities are accessible to them. We hope that in supporting access to the wheelchair space for those who need it we will help many more disabled people to travel with confidence.

Copies of the Task and Finish Group's report to ministers and accompanying letter have been placed in the House libraries.

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# News story: £450,000 of HS2 government funding to deliver woodland hub for communities in heart of Buckinghamshire

- HS2 Minister Nusrat Ghani announces £450,000 grant for Wendover Woods Recreational Development project near Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire
- Minister Ghani visits site today (8 March 2018) to see how it will benefit from a share of £40 million HS2 Phase One Community and Environment Fund

Plans for a new woodland hub with an adventure trail, café and parking for 600 visitors at Wendover Woods have been made possible thanks to a £450,000 government grant, HS2 Minister Nusrat Ghani announced on a visit to the area in Buckinghamshire today (8 March 2018).

Ms Ghani visited the Wendover Woods recreational development project near Aylesbury to see plans for a £4.45 million redevelopment of the site, one of the largest areas of publically accessible open spaces in the region. The £450,000 grant is the largest funding award given to any single project so far from a £40 million HS2 Phase One Community and Environment Fund (CEF) and Business and Local Economy Fund (BLEF).

Nusrat Ghani, HS2 Minister, said:

HS2 will be the backbone of our national rail network – supporting growth and regeneration and helping us build a Britain fit for the future. Whilst we know there will be disruption as we deliver one of Europe’s biggest infrastructure projects, we are absolutely committed to minimising the effects of building the new railway.

It is great to see so many exciting local projects such as the Wendover Woods recreational development project benefit from this fund, helping even more people access and enjoy our beautiful countryside. Funding such as CEF and BLEF will help to ensure that the legacy of HS2 is shared by everyone for generations to come.

The funds were established to support a diverse range of projects, from refurbishing community centres, nature conservation and measures to drive jobs and local economies, along HS2’s route from London to the West Midlands. A further £5 million has also been made available to help communities along the HS2 Phase 2a route from the West Midlands to Crewe, bringing the total available funding to £45 million.

The first round of funding in January, announced by the minister during a

[visit to Crewe](#), gave more than £245,000 of grants. These include funding for the renovation of Steeple Claydon Methodist Church in Buckinghamshire, helping a pre-school in Northamptonshire build their first playground and setting up schemes in Camden to engage residents in environmental and health issues.

Cathy Elliott, independent chair of CEF and BLEF said:

This latest round of funding is another milestone for us and I'm delighted to be showcasing the Wendover Woods recreational development project to demonstrate how this money can benefit communities along the line of route for many years to come. More funding is available for eligible applicants throughout the construction of HS2 Phase One and we look forward to announcing many more funded local projects in the future.

Joanne Mason from the Forestry Commission said:

Wendover Woods is a hugely popular recreation resource for families living across the Chilterns and further afield. This grant from the HS2 CEF fund will enable much needed new toilets, seating and expanded café facilities to be established ensuring that the forest can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

HS2 Ltd chief executive Mark Thurston said:

As we deliver HS2, we have the opportunity to leave a positive legacy for the communities along the route of the railway. Our Community and Environment Fund, and its twin Business Fund, are starting to support important local initiatives, including building renovations and environmental projects. We're encouraging local people to come forward with other opportunities, such as community-led nature projects for people and wildlife which could contribute to the 'green corridor' we're creating alongside the railway.

This grassroots activity is in addition to the national benefits of HS2, which will rebalance the economy by connecting 8 out of our 10 biggest cities, increase rail capacity on the current system and reduce journey times, while also creating thousands of jobs across the UK.

The CEF and BLEF funds are managed for the government by Groundwork UK, who published its [annual report](#) today.

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# News story: First year celebrations for the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network

The event, held during National Apprenticeship Week 2018 at the House of Commons, welcomed Helen Grant MP and Chair of the [Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network \(ADCN\)](#) along with existing and new member employers and apprentices. Addressing the audience alongside Helen Grant were Neil Bentley from WorldSkills, Jodie Williams from Yorkshire Water, Gp Capt Steve Dharamraj from the Royal Air Force and Mike Thompson from Barclays, Elaine Billington from United Utilities and Claire Paul from the BBC, alongside Sue Husband, Director of the National Apprenticeship Service.

Speaking at the event, and discussing the impact of the network since its launch during National Apprenticeship Week 2017, Helen Grant MP said:

It is wonderful to celebrate the impact of the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network over the past 12 months. We now have over 50 employers in the network who are all committed to ensuring that their workforce includes apprentices, from all backgrounds, as well as pledging to tell other employers about the powerful impact apprentices can bring.

I am delighted that the hard work we have undertaken to increase the number of apprentices from diverse backgrounds is making a difference and our impact report, launched today, highlights this success.

Having so many ADCN members in the room, alongside new members, is great for the network and for apprenticeships and it's great to celebrate our success as part of National Apprenticeship Week 2018.

National Apprenticeship Week 2018 – themed 'Apprenticeships Work' – is the 11th annual week-long celebration of apprenticeships and during the week employers and apprentices from across England will come together to showcase the success of apprenticeships whilst encouraging even more people to choose apprenticeships as a pathway to a great career.

New members of the ADCN were also announced today – including Channel 4, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, and ITV.

Gp Capt S J Dharamraj from Commandant Royal Air Force Central Training School said:

Diversity is of absolute paramount importance to the RAF, and indeed to our apprenticeship programme.

Greater Diversity in our workforce allows us to draw on a range of different experiences, select the best recruits, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, and better reflect the society we seek to protect. Improving diversity and inclusion is in itself a challenge but we are working hard through our outreach programmes and our own diversity champions to ensure we inform communities of what an apprenticeship provides to the RAF and the benefits that apprenticeships can bring to them – in sum, what it means to be an RAF apprentice.

We are proud to stand up as a champion, and work with other members of the network to ensure we deliver lasting and positive change.

The event concluded with news that the new parent's apprenticeship information leaflets are now being produced in Polish and Punjabi. The event also highlighted developments to show the Disability Confident logo on apprenticeship vacancies on [find an apprenticeship](#), the service for searching and applying for apprenticeships. This will help support Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LLDD) by giving them the facility to search for appropriate apprenticeship opportunities and will be fully functional by April 2018.

Sue Husband, Director of the National Apprenticeship Service concluded:

The 11th National Apprenticeship Week is well underway and it is magnificent that we can recognise the employers committed to apprenticeships diversity as part of our week long celebration of all things apprenticeships.

It is important that workforces reflect the community they serve and these employers are working to ensure that the reach of apprenticeships is extended to diverse groups. Apprenticeships work – for individuals, employers, for local communities and for the economy – and the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network is working hard to make sure this message is being spread to secure a more diverse workforce for the future.

You can find images from the event on the [National Apprenticeships Service Flickr page](#).

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**[News story: Dstl supports new science](#)**

## challenge for girls in Salisbury

As the world marks International Women's Day, staff at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) Porton Down have been leading the way in an initiative to inspire girls to take up careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

The Salisbury Soroptomist STEM challenge put to girls in years 8 and 9 in Salisbury schools was to research, design and develop a sustainable prototype to improve life for people living in poverty in the developing world. The teams entering this first year of the event in Salisbury have produced some innovative ideas for supporting vulnerable communities.

Organisers are part of the Soroptomist International, a global women's voluntary organisation, which is setting up a new club in Salisbury.

Lisa Scandling, who has worked at Dstl as a scientist for 30 years, is one of the organisers of the challenge. She said:

This challenge has been enthusiastically supported by Dstl, and it fits in well with Dstl STEM initiatives. Dstl has provided judges and mentors for the event, and it's a fantastic way of working with the local community to inspire more girls to follow STEM careers.

The Soroptomists focus on transforming the lives of women and girls, locally, nationally and globally, through education, empowerment and enabling initiatives. We hope that the challenge will encourage pupils to look at how they can use their talents and skills to help others too.

The final judging and award ceremony will take place at South Wilts Technical College on March 19, when the winners will be announced by the Mayor of Salisbury.

More information on the event can be found on the [Soroptomist International website](#)

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## News story: Government takes action to tackle domestic abuse

Domestic abuse comes in many forms, shattering the lives of victims and their families, and in recognition of this the government has put forward proposals for new laws which would transform our approach to this terrible crime.

[The consultation launched today](#) (Thursday 8 March) by the Prime Minister Theresa May, Home Secretary Amber Rudd and Justice Secretary David Gauke, will seek views on measures to be included in the government's draft Domestic Abuse Bill.

To ensure we get this landmark legislation right we now want to hear from all those who have been affected by abuse, from survivors, frontline professionals, charities and the public, to gather views on how, together, we can best put a stop to it once and for all.

Our tough new approach includes new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders to better shield victims against further abuse by enabling courts to impose a range of conditions on abusers. These could be compulsory alcohol treatment, attending a programme to address their underlying attitudes or addictions, and using electronic tagging to monitor them. Under the proposals, breaching the order would become a criminal offence.

We have also proposed the creation of a statutory aggravating factor in sentencing, similar to those already in law for hate crimes, for domestic abuse to toughen sentences when it involves or affects a child, and the creation of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner to hold the government to account. Economic abuse will be recognised for the first time as a type of domestic abuse, covering controlling circumstances in which victims have finances withheld, are denied access to employment or transport, or are forced to take out loans and enter into other financial contracts. Our recognition will improve understanding among frontline professionals, law enforcement officers and prosecutors so we can take action more quickly and effectively to better support victims.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

This year we celebrated the centenary of achieving votes for women in this country, and today we recognise International Women's Day. But while we have made great strides towards equality and opportunities for women, the fact there are still thousands of people suffering from domestic abuse shows how much work we still have to do.

Domestic abuse takes many forms, from physical and sexual abuse, to controlling and coercive behaviour that isolates victims from their families and has long-term, shattering impacts on their children. The consultation we are launching today includes a number of proposals which have the potential to completely transform the way we tackle domestic abuse, providing better protection to victims and bringing more perpetrators to justice.

We know that domestic abuse affects those from all walks of life. Victims can be young and old, male and female, and I hope as many people as possible will come forward to give us their views and share their experiences, as we seek to put an end to this abhorrent crime for good.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

It is appalling that in twenty-first century Britain, nearly 2 million people every year – the majority of them women – suffer abuse at the hands of those closest to them.

Through this Bill I want to fundamentally change the way we as a country think about domestic abuse, recognising that it is a crime that comes in many forms – physical, emotional, economic. This is about creating a society that protects individuals and families at the earliest opportunity, before such abuse has a chance to escalate.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to transform our entire approach to this terrible crime. I call on everyone, but especially those who have suffered abuse in any form, to speak out and help shape the way we approach this crime for years to come.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

The damage caused by domestic abuse can last a lifetime. We have a duty not only to support those affected but to prevent others falling victim in future.

We continue to improve the way domestic abuse is dealt with throughout the justice system, but there is undoubtedly more we can do.

By proposing to give courts greater powers, from a new protection order to tougher sentences, we are sending a clear message that domestic abuse in any form will not be tolerated.

As part of the consultation the government will also be seeking views on how to allocate some of the £20m funding announced last year.

Studies have shown that adults who as a child witnessed domestic abuse are far more likely to experience abuse by a partner as an adult, and so an £8 million fund will be allocated to support children who witness domestic abuse, and help with their recovery through locally commissioned projects.

Meanwhile £2 million will be dedicated to supporting female offenders who have been victims, as over 60 per cent have indicated they have experienced domestic abuse.

As part of these important initiatives designed to make tackling domestic abuse everybody's business, £2 million will be used to extend a healthcare pathfinder pilot across further hospital trusts and help direct domestic abuse victims to the full range of services they need.

This government is also completely committed to developing a sustainable funding model for refuges, and to ensuring that there is no postcode lottery when it comes to provision across the country. That is why we are reviewing the way in which refuges and supported housing are delivered.

We have heard the need for sustainable funding for refuges which is why we asked all the charities and organisations working on the frontline to feed in their expertise and come forward with their ideas as to how best to deliver this on the ground. That process is ongoing – and we have been clear no options are off the table as we work with them to ensure women requiring support in their time of need are not let down.

Yesterday changes also came into effect making it easier for the estimated 12,000 survivors of domestic abuse living in refuges to register to vote anonymously. They will now be able to register to vote without their name and address appearing on the electoral roll, and without the fear of their former partners finding their address.

Suzanne Jacob OBE, Chief Executive of national domestic abuse charity SafeLives, said:

This is a true opportunity to have a national conversation about how to end domestic abuse, for good. We are ambitious for women and girls – we want every single one to be able to live safely at home and in their own relationships.

We welcome the focus on the urgent need to hold perpetrators to account and to prioritise the needs and safety of women and girls. The time for piecemeal sticking plasters is over, we need radical change, and we will stand side-by-side with survivors to make this happen.

Katie Ghose, Chief Executive of Women's Aid, said:

We are delighted that the government is marking International Women's Day by launching the consultation on the landmark Domestic Abuse Bill. We want to make sure that the Bill makes a real difference to the lives of survivors of domestic abuse. We will be working with survivors, members who deliver life-saving domestic abuse services and the wider violence against women and girls sector to ensure that the law, policy and practice makes domestic abuse everyone's business. We want to see the Bill encompass and go beyond changes to the criminal justice system to include policies on housing, education, health, immigration and the welfare system to name but a few, to ensure that every survivor and her child can safely escape domestic abuse.

The consultation will also seek views on legislation, as well as other steps that can be taken to tackle the harms caused by domestic abuse and support

victims and survivors to rebuild their lives. These include:

- Potential for the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, known as Clare's Law, to be enshrined in legislation. This allows police to disclose information about previous violent offending by a new or existing partner and build better protection for victims, and has already been rolled out operationally across the country.
- Proposals to give domestic abuse victims the same status in court as those who have suffered modern slavery or sex offences, so that they would be automatically eligible for the range of special measures available in criminal proceedings, such as giving evidence behind a screen or via video link.

Sandra Horley, CBE, Chief Executive of national domestic violence charity Refuge, says:

Refuge applauds the intentions of the government to put survivors at the heart of its efforts to stamp out domestic abuse.

We have worked closely with the government up to this point and look forward to continuing to do so, especially on a new national model for refuges. It is very welcome news that the government has announced its commitment to sustainable refuge funding alongside the launch of the consultation.

As the largest provider of refuges, supporting more than 6,000 women and children a day across our services, we believe that guaranteeing the life-saving and life-changing services needed by victims of domestic abuse will go a long way towards protecting and supporting the people at the very heart of the proposed Bill.

Jo Todd, founding Chief Executive of domestic abuse charity Respect, said:

This is a once in a generation opportunity to create a step-change in how we deal with domestic abuse. I look forward to reading the consultation and hope to see every strand focus on the needs of survivors and their children, and the creation of safe, effective responses to perpetrators.