



“We’ll be sicker, sadder, ill-er and poorer”

Sydenham Garden’s position on the Government’s welfare reforms, July 2025

We are deeply concerned about the Government’s welfare reforms as set out in the UC and PIP Bill. We know from our community that the system is already failing them; it’s inaccessible, intimidating and insufficient. People are already struggling to make ends meet, what with the ever-rising cost of living and the additional costs that being disabled incur. Financial worries compound on people’s physical and mental health problems and so we remain very worried about the long-term impacts of these changes.

That these changes will not be coming into effect until 2026 provides little assurance for our service users. Those we spoke to were very concerned about the support that would be available for their children - some of whom were young carers or already struggling to access support for their own disabilities and health issues.

We also know that there are those in our community who are already not receiving any support at all because the application process is too complex or confusing or their caring roles leave them with no time to advocate for themselves. These community members will also face a more stringent system as they are not current benefit claimants because the application process is so difficult and daunting.

More needs to be done to make our welfare system work for those who need it; people already struggling with their health, exhausted from caring responsibilities, and in need of proper

support to facilitate their access to what they are entitled to. Without this, we are facing the bleak prospect of more people becoming 'sicker, sadder, ill-er, and poorer' - as one of our community members put it - and services like ours struggling to support growing numbers of those in dire need with no additional support.

Pathways to Work: Sydenham Garden's Response Summary

Who we are

We are Sydenham Garden; a charity in Lewisham that helps people who are struggling with mental health problems and dementia.

We help people through:

- Gardening activities
- Art and creative activities
- Being part of a supportive group

We started in 2002 when a small group of residents, supported by a local GP, identified a need in our local community for better mental health support.

People join us for 12 months and work on nature and arts-based projects in our gardens. We help over 360 people each year, with help from over 70 volunteers.

Why we did this work

We found out the Government was considering making changes to benefits like Personal Independence Payments (PIP). They published a consultation to find out what people thought about some of their changes.

What is a consultation?

A consultation is when the Government asks people what they think about planned changes before they make them.

We were worried about how these changes would affect the people we work with, and so we wanted to respond to this consultation so we could share our community's experience with the Government.

What we did

We wanted to hear what people thought about the proposed changes to benefits.

We did this in 3 ways:

1. **Comments box** - People could write down their thoughts anonymously and put them in a box in our reception area
2. **Phone and email** - People could leave voice messages, pictures or send emails

3. **Group meeting** - We held an event where we talked about the proposed changes and we took their feedback and ideas on how things could be improved.

We then wrote a response to the Government with everything we learned.

What we found out

1. People were really worried out these changes

When we talked to people about the Government's plans, they were very anxious about:

- How the changes would affect them
- How the changes would affect their children
- How the changes would affect people they care for
- These worries can impact on people's mental health and make them more unwell

2. Life is already hard

People told us that:

- Life on benefits is already very difficult - both in terms of applying and providing evidence, and managing on the amount of money received
- People are struggling to pay for basic things
- The cost of living keeps going up so things are already getting harder
- People are already finding it hard to make ends meet each week

3. Being disabled is expensive

People with disabilities have to pay more for things like:

- Higher energy bills (e.g. needing more heating, showers taking longer, being at home more)
- Food deliveries, ready meals and pre-prepared food
- Higher transport costs (e.g. taxis)
- Medication
- Special equipment

4. People are worried about family and carers

People told us they were worried about:

- How changes would put more pressure on their carers
- How their children might have to take on more caring roles
- Or, if carers themselves, how they would advocate for family members who are too unwell to speak up for themselves

5. There are people who already aren't getting the help they need

We found that:

- Some people who need benefits are not claiming them because the system is too complicated
- There are vulnerable people who won't be heard in consultations like this
- Children are already having to help care for family members

6. Some things could help

People also shared things that they thought could help the system be easier to trust, engage with, and get support from:

- Share and record information digitally (with people's permission) so they don't have to repeat themselves
- Design the system with the people who need to use it
- Actively seek ways to make the application process less daunting (e.g more training for staff, more in-person and face-to-face support)

7. These changes will impact on services too

We are worried that:

- These changes will make more people need help from charities and community groups
- We don't have enough funding to help all the extra people who will need support
- Local councils and other organisations are already struggling with financial pressure
- The health and social care system is already struggling under growing need of our population - this will only make that worse.

Our position

Sydenham Garden is very concerned about the Government making any proposed changes to the current benefits system until there is a better understanding of the needs of those who rely on that system, and the barriers facing those that should be able to access that system but currently can't.

Before making any changes to benefits, the Government should:

- Make the benefits system easier to understand and use
- Help more people claim the benefits they are entitled to
- Make sure people trust the system more

We are still worried about:

- People who will need benefits in the future
- People who should be getting benefits now but aren't claiming them because the system is too hard to understand

What we're doing next

We will keep:

- Sharing what our co-workers think with decision makers
- Highlighting that the current system is already failing people
- Pointing out that from November 2026, new claimants will face big difficulties

We believe the Government needs to fix the current problems before making any more changes.

This report was written by Sarah Wayman for Sydenham Garden based on conversations with the people we support about proposed welfare reforms. A full version of our formal consultation response is available by emailing lowell@sydenhamgarden.org.uk