



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Ms Nicola Dodgson
Green Party Candidate, East Surrey

10 February 2015

Dear Ms Dodgson,

Thank you for your letter concerning support for people with disabilities, and congratulations on your selection as the Green Party candidate.

Firstly, I agree that it is vitally important that we invest in supporting those with disabilities in our community. I am proud that, despite the tough financial decisions we have had to take, this Government is continuing to spend £50 billion a year on disabled people and their services. As a percentage of GDP, the UK spends a fifth more than the EU average on disability benefits, significantly higher than in Germany, France, Italy and Spain.

Of course, this is about more than money. As you point out, it is essential that those with disabilities can access the skills and opportunities they need to fulfil their potential. Locally, I commend the Orpheus Centre for the excellent work they do to enable their students to gain independent living skills, and I am always pleased to support the Centre in any way that I can. At a national level, support measures are in place to help people achieve their ambitions – from the introduction of personalised Education, Health and Care Plans for young people, through to the extra help available under the Access to Work Scheme or from Disability Employment Advisers. You may be interested to know that the number of disabled people in employment was up 116,000 in 2014, with disabled people moving into jobs or training opportunities at a rate of 150 placements every working day.

Accurate assessment is critical to give people support appropriate to their needs. To be clear, anyone who cannot work or prepare for work will be given the highest level of support. But it is not fair to simply write disabled people off, which is why over 1.35m people parked on incapacity benefit under the last Labour Government have started reassessment, 720,000 of whom are now preparing or looking for work. I can assure you that the Government has made numerous improvements to get the assessment process right, accepting over 75 recommendations from 4 independent reviews, reforming the appeals process, and introducing Mandatory Reconsideration.

As you will be aware, the reforms introduced by this Government are designed to make our welfare system simpler and fairer. Under the current arrangement, which includes the Independent Living Fund (ILF), it is difficult for local authorities to ensure they are supporting all disabled people in a consistent way. Those using ILF funding have a wide range of needs, and at present the balance between ILF and local

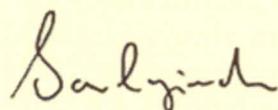
authority support often depends on when users applied to the ILF and where they live. From April 2015 this responsibility will lie solely with local authorities in England, who have a duty to ensure that the eligible care and support needs of current ILF users are met.

On the specific issue of possible changes to residential care services across Surrey, including Dormers in Caterham, you will be aware that this is a matter for Surrey County Council. I will continue to communicate the views of constituents who have raised this issue with me to the Strategic Director of Adult Social Care Services at Surrey County Council, who has assured me that these comments will receive the full and serious consideration they deserve.

Finally, it is important to recognise that to continue to deliver better public services, we need a strong economy and sustainable Government finances. I am proud that over the last five years we have seen the deficit halved, 1.75 million more jobs created, and taxes cut for 25 million people, including lifting 2.4 million people out of tax altogether. Only the Conservatives long-term economic plan will ensure that this continues to be the case.

Thank you again for taking the trouble to write to me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Gyimah', written in a cursive style.

Sam Gyimah MP