

PRESS RELEASE: Snap Election Risks Excluding Disabled People

With just 7 weeks notice, a snap election has been called for 8th June 2017. A snap election by definition means that everything happens quickly. From our experience as a grassroots Deaf and Disabled people's organisation, we know that a fast pace can exclude Disabled people.

We have some major concerns at this early stage of a snap election. One of the issues is ensuring that Disabled people are registered to vote and can use a postal or proxy vote if they need to. Sometimes people need support to register, especially after changes to voter registration in 2015. There is still time to register to vote until the middle of May. We urge Deaf and Disabled people to register and use their vote! You can register online <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote> or contact the Council.

Another concern is that we want to ensure Disabled people have the same access polling stations as any other person. We worked closely with Merton Council during the last General Election to improve accessibility to polling stations in the borough, but with such short notice, it will be difficult to get all the venues needed to use as Polling Stations, and this may have implications for accessibility.

Thirdly, we're concerned that there isn't enough time to make sure that the different party manifestos are available in a range of accessible formats. We've checked party websites, and currently old manifestos are from 2015 and not all parties even have accessible versions readily available!

Our final concern is to ensure that Parliamentary Candidates listen to disabled people and consider the many issues that currently impact on Deaf and Disabled people's lives. We are concerned that this election might be dominated by Brexit, when so many of our members and local Disabled people have many other very important issues to raise, which are often forgotten about.

Roy Benjamin, Chair of Merton Centre for Independent Living said "we will do everything we can to ensure the many issues faced by Deaf and Disabled people in Merton are brought to the attention of all local candidates".

As an organisation, Merton CIL are independent and this is very important in supporting our work to ensure Disabled People can participate in the democratic process, and that Disabled people have a voice. Deaf and Disabled people's votes matter and we want to ensure that Disabled people and their families, supporters and friends can find out what Parliamentary

Candidates will do to address issues concerning Disabled people in the borough, make informed decisions about how to vote.

We will be contacting candidates to ask for their responses to key issues affecting Disabled people, and we hope to organise local hustings events with our partners, where Deaf and Disabled people can quiz the candidates directly.

As a grassroots organisation controlled and run by Deaf and Disabled people, we are now hard at work to ensure the voice of Disabled people will be heard at the election called for 8 June!

Date: 19/04/2017

Notes for the Editor:

Merton Centre for Independent Living is a grassroots, user-led Deaf and Disabled people's organisation run by Disabled people, for Disabled people, across the full spectrum of disability. We deliver a range of services to Deaf and Disabled people in London Borough of Merton. As an organisation we are not politically aligned to any party.

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