

THE REALITY OF DISABILITY HATE IN BRISTOL

2026



The Reality of Disability Hate Crime in Bristol 2026

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Part 1: Sharing Experiences

What is this Report about?

Lots of Disabled people tell stories of how they have been treated badly. This could be by people calling them names, physical attacks or treating them in a less fair way than non-Disabled people. The name for this is “Disability Hate Crime”.

The group who support Disabled people who are victims of Disability Hate Crime is called WECIL (West of England Centre for Inclusive Living). WECIL started doing this from April 2026.

It is very important that WECIL hear from Disabled people in Bristol about how Disability Hate Crime is happening to them and what can be done to help them. This report does that.

How did Disabled People help with this Report?

There were four meetings in February and March 2026:

1. One meeting was for Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised Disabled people.
2. One meeting was for Disabled people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual + (LGBTQIA+).
3. One meeting was for Disabled people with Learning Difficulties.
4. One meeting was for any Disabled person who wanted to take part.

Overall, 34 Disabled people came to the four meetings. Everyone who came was offered either cash, a voucher, charity donation or no payment for their time – the choice was made by the Disabled people themselves. All the different access needs people had were met.

All the meetings asked the same questions. These were:

- “What is happening for you currently in terms of Hate Crime and Discrimination”?
- “If you could wave a magic wand to improve things for Disabled people in Bristol, what would you suggest”?

Who wrote this Report?

BDEF (Bristol Disability Equality Forum) and Alun Davies (Disability Equality Consultant) were asked by SARI (Stand Against Racism & Inequality) to hold 4 engagement meetings. BDEF took the lead on planning, facilitating and advertising the meetings with Alun Davies also facilitating the meetings and leading on writing the report with BDEF's review. BDEF regularly works on community engagement and bringing Disabled people into conversations in Bristol whilst Alun Davies consultation work focuses on advising on Disability Equality issues nationally.

How is the Report set out?

The report has been set out under the themes that came out of the meetings. In the first part of the report, there is a summary under each theme of what was said, and then a list of the changes people said they wanted to see happen. The second part of the report is more detail of what people said set out under each theme.

Images from the Events



Disabled People with Learning
Difficulties Session



General Disabled People
Session



LGBTQIA+ Disabled People
Session



Black, Brown and Racially
Minoritised Disabled People
Session

Feedback Themes

There were a number of themes that came out in the four conversations. Through what was discussed in these meetings, a lot of people mentioned very similar things happening.

Summary of themes by session

Whilst the key ideas and changes will be looked at below, we thought that it was useful to understand which themes were highlighted in each session.

Firstly, the conversation that was held with LGBTQ+ Disabled people largely focused on barriers that they had experienced in workplaces. From hyper-local independent businesses to statutory bodies, there seemed to be common experiences shared between group members. These largely focused on discrimination in work due to their identity as a Disabled person, with some experiences shared also mentioning sexuality, gender and visa status. There was a lack of understanding felt by attendees on workplaces knowing relevant legislation and providing a safe space to report discrimination or harassment.

Secondly, in the session held with Disabled people with Learning Difficulties, the conversation largely focused on community safety, targeted harassment and statutory authorities' response. Group members in this session spoke about harassment on public transport, on local spaces, in their housing and on the street. They also highlighted a struggle with reporting incidents due to negative previous experiences such as being dismissed, not being told what action had been taken, not knowing who is the best to report the issue to.

Thirdly, the group for Black, Brown and racially minoritised Disabled people focused mainly on the experience of young racially minoritised Disabled people in school and the parents involved (especially when they are Disabled people themselves) but there was also discussion of public transport in the city being a major area of racial and Disability harassment.

The issue that all groups talked as much about were the lack of awareness of Disability, especially hidden impairments, the Police's role and responsibility and the need for training generally but particularly with people working on public transport.

Reporting and Understanding Disability Hate Crime

The main things people said in the groups were:

- Information is not accessible.
- People do not understand what exactly Hate Crime is and how it is different from bullying.
- People do not understand how to make a complaint about Disability Hate Crime.

Changes that were suggested to make this better:

- There needs to be better education about Hate Crime for Disabled people.
- There needs to be accessible information explaining how to report a Disability Hate Crime and describing what happens when a crime has been reported. WECIL need to write this information and get it circulated widely.
- There needs to be clear accessible information on what counts as a Hate Crime.
- There needs to be awareness-raising of Disability Hate Crime in schools, bus companies, housing providers, workplaces.
- There must be help with building confidence to challenge abuse safely.
- A clear explanation must be given of how a complaint about Hate Crime was recorded. Was it recorded as a Hate Crime or something else as this will change how it will be responded to.
- People need to be told their report was received and it is being dealt with.
- There needs to be a way that a mistake in recording can be changed.
- Regular updates need to be given to the person who made the complaint about what action was taken so people understand what has happened.

Awareness of Disability and Disabled People

The main things people said in the groups were:

- Non-Disabled people seem to be less tolerant and understanding of Disabled people than they used to be.
- There is a real lack of understanding and discrimination towards people with a hidden impairment or conditions.
- Places where Disabled people go and businesses, organisations or companies Disabled people use often do not understand Disability or what they should be doing to make their services accessible to all Disabled people.

Changes that were suggested to make this better:

- There need to be campaigns aimed at the general public to make them more aware of Disabled people's experiences, challenges and issues.
- There needs to be greater understanding of conditions and impairments that are not visible.
- There needs to be clearer public awareness and stronger city-wide messaging that all Disabled people are different and can have impairments or conditions that are hidden.
- Improve the way Disabled people are treated by challenging negative ideas and stereotypes.
- More Disabled people to be in public spaces so it becomes the usual thing and people get used to having Disabled people around.
- There must be a more visible, better resourced Disability Awareness event or celebration similar to LGBTQIA+ Pride and Black History month.

Legislation, Services and Training

The main things people said in the groups were:

- Current legislation does not stop Disability Discrimination and Hate Crime, and there are no clear penalties for Disability Hate Crimes and for Discrimination by employers or public bodies.

Changes that were suggested to make this better:

- All the organisations and groups that Disabled people have contact with or get services from must make all their staff go through the following training which must have been co-produced with Disabled people:
 - Disability Equality
 - Anti-racist
 - Understanding hidden impairments or conditions
 - Communicating with Disabled people
 - Cultural awareness of specific communities
 - LGBTQIA+ Awareness training
 - Reasonable adjustments
- Disability Equality training based on the Social Model of Disability needs to be developed and made available to anyone and everyone.
- Make sure managers, care providers and professionals treat Disabled people with respect.
- Deal with discrimination inside services. Discrimination does not just happen outside on the street.

Education

The main things people said in the groups were:

- Behaviour policies are often used to discriminate against Disabled students.
- Many schools do not make adjustments or make what they do accessible to Disabled parents.
- There are not enough positive role models of Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised people or Disabled people as teachers.

Changes that were suggested to make this better:

- There must be more recruitment of Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised staff members in schools and/or community advocates.
- There must be clear, accessible complaints procedures including translated versions.
- Any policies such as Special Education Needs And Disability (SEND) that are there to help Disabled children and young people must be followed more than behaviour policies.
- Schools need to have quiet/sensory spaces.
- SEND passports need to be updated on a regular basis.
- Schools must meet their Public Sector Equality Duty.
- There needs to be training on how to talk about racism with children; age-appropriately, accessibly and confidently.
- Engage and work positively with Disabled parents as experts with experience of having gone through the school system themselves, not burdens.
- Schools need to provide reasonable adjustments for Disabled parents where needed.
- Schools must take the lead in asking Disabled parents what they the school need to do to make things accessible.

Travel on Buses

The main things people said in the groups were:

- Many Disabled people get verbal abuse from drivers and other passengers on buses.
- Drivers will not ask people to move things to make wheelchair spaces available.
- The way you can complain about First Bus is not accessible, easy to understand or to get a reply from.
- Changes are made on First Buses without asking Disabled people for their opinion (recent reduction of Wheelchair spaces).

Changes that were suggested to make this better:

- There must be quick responses to all complaints to First Bus to the person who complained.
- The way you can complain to First Bus must be much clearer, easier to access and simple.
- If a driver is told off or loses their job after the complaint, the person making the complaint must be told.
- All drivers must be trained in anti-racism, Disability Awareness, how to talk appropriately to Disabled people, and hidden and visible impairments and conditions.
- Community groups such as BDEF should be involved in developing training for drivers.
- It is up to the bus driver to manage queues on the bus properly and make sure all passengers are safe (including Disabled passengers) and that the spaces for people using wheelchairs are not taken up by buggies.

Police Services

The main things people said in the groups were:

- Some Police officers do not understand Disability issues and can treat Disabled people unfairly.
- Some Police officers do not take Disability Hate Crime seriously.
- Some Police officers do not listen to or take seriously what Disabled people have to say.

Changes that were suggested to make this better:

- There need to be more accessible and different ways of Disabled people communicating with the Police and them communicating with Disabled people.
- The Police should take all incidents seriously including verbal abuse, on-line abuse and Disability hate that is not classed as a crime.
- There needs to be better follow-up after the Police take a case on.
- The Police should work harder to build local trust with community groups and parents.
- Disabled people need to have the chance to talk with and put questions to everyone involved in dealing with and working on Disability Hate Crime. This must include the Police, Hate Crime leads and Safeguarding leads.

Online and Digital World

The main things people said in the groups were:

- Many Disabled people do not feel safe in the digital world because of bullying.
- There are no obvious ways for people to complain about bullying in the digital world as it is unclear who is responsible or moderating spaces.

- There are different rules in different countries that make it very hard to report or challenge things online.

Changes that were suggested to make this better:

- There needs to be much stronger checking of what people are saying to each other on the web, clear rules about what can and cannot be said, and quick action if someone is horrible to someone else.
- There need to be safe online and digital spaces for Disabled people.

Support Networks and Advocacy

The main things people said in the groups were:

- People can feel very alone and isolated.
- People do not feel confident about reporting a Hate Crime when they are on their own.
- Where there are groups, they do not do what people really need.

Changes that were suggested to make this better:

- There need to be spaces where Disabled people can support each other and develop confidence. These should not just be “coffee groups”, but groups with purpose, learning and empowerment.
 - Ideally the service should be provided across WECIL, BDEF, SARI and the Law Centre.
- Improve emotional and practical support.
- Being able to access support workers or Personal Assistants (PA's) during social situations is important.
- There needs to be an advocacy service that is for and by Disabled people, timely and empowering.

Employment

The main things people said in the groups were:

- Many employers use a person's impairment or condition against them and see them as not as "able" as non-Disabled people.
- Many employers do not understand or do not use reasonable adjustments and Access to Work properly.
- There is a lack of understanding and prejudice towards hidden impairments.

Changes that were suggested to make this better:

- Disabled people and organisations representing employers in the city must work together to develop a set of standards for the recruitment and retention of Disabled people that all employers will be asked to sign up to. Any employer who does not will be named and shamed.
- There needs to be much better awareness-raising with employers about reasonable adjustments.

Housing and Community Safety

The main things people said in the groups were:

- Spaces where Disabled people live in the city do not always feel safe.
- When Disabled people live in social housing, it is difficult to know who to report to who will be able to offer support.
- Disabled people - especially those with visible impairments or learning difficulties - are being physically targeted, often in broad daylight and particularly in Broadmead.
- Many Disabled people felt alone, unsupported or emotionally exhausted.

Changes that were suggested to make this better:

- Housing providers should provide equipment to help make houses accessible, provide anti-racist and Disability Equality training for staff, and treat health and safety concerns seriously and quickly.

Overall, Disabled people from different locations, cultures, communities and identities – whilst differing on some things – had a lot of shared experiences which can be used to determine what is needed from the Disability Hate Crime service. This is to make sure that those parts of the Disabled people community who previously ‘haven’t been in the room’ are actively included and the service works for.

What things should WECIL be doing when they take over the Disability Hate Crime service?

From these sessions, thirteen actions have been created for WECIL to take forward to begin to address what Disabled people have described through these engagement meetings:

Action 1: Find a way of telling a person who has made a Disability Hate Crime complaint what is happening.

Action 2: Organise 2× per year public forums where Disabled people can directly question senior police leaders.

Action 3: Develop a simple, visual reporting map, available in Easy Read, video, and audio formats.

Action 4: Bring together all the organisations to write down a way they will all work together making it clear who does what and how they can work together easily and effectively.

Action 5: Deliver or commission Disability-specific Hate Crime training across organisations such as Housing, Social Care, Transport and Education.

Action 6: Co-design with Disabled people a process for supporting victims which will include peer support.

Action 7: Find funding to provide advocacy services for Disabled parents when they have issues with their child's school.

Action 8: Develop training courses co-produced with Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised Disabled people.

Action 9: When giving advice to organisations on how to improve, base this on lived experience.

Action 10: Work with organisations to make sure there is one way for people to work with all organisations and that all organisations are working better together.

Action 11: Use community reporting to check that organisations are doing what they say they will and that they are getting better at providing services.

Action 12: Develop advice and guidance for schools about how to work with Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised and/or Disabled parents better.

Send everyone who came to the meetings a copy of this report in accessible formats and every six months get in touch with everyone who came to let them know what is happening.

Part 2: Wider Comments

Whilst the main feedback has been captured above, this section captures all the comments that were made (still grouped by theme) to understand the depth of detail participants talked about.

Themes Extra Feedback

Reporting and Understanding Disability Hate Crime

- Many people did not about services such as SARI and WECIL before they came to this workshop.
- It is confusing having quite a few different ways of reporting Disability Hate Crime. It is not clear which one you should use and when.
- Many people are frightened that their complaint will not be listened to or taken seriously.
- Many Disabled people have to deal with so much discrimination that it leaves them very tired and not having the energy to take on new battles.
- Many Disabled people feel worried that if they do make a complaint, they will then be treated badly because they made the complaint.
- The Police and other services often do not put their communications into accessible formats such as Easy Read.
- Lots of people:
 - Do not understand what a Hate Crime is and how that is different from bullying.
 - Do not understand how Hate Crime is recorded.
 - Do not know the way to report disability Hate Crime.
 - Do not know who you report to if it is not the Police.
 - Do not know what happens after a report is made.
 - Feel alone and not supported when an incident happens.
- People are worried if they tell the Police, the Police will not do anything or will not record it properly as a Disability Hate Crime.

- People are worried there will be no follow-up after reporting.
- People did not know where to report Race Hate or Disability Hate Crime.
- People did not know the difference between Hate Crime and discrimination.

Awareness of Disability and Disabled People

- Some people with a hidden impairment or condition had had very hurtful things said about them in a public situation because the people around had not understood they had a hidden impairment and reacted wrongly.
- The lack of understanding and awareness of hidden impairments or conditions can have an adverse effect on people's confidence and self-esteem.
- There should be more examples of people with a hidden impairments and conditions on the TV.

Legislation, Services and Training

- When reports and recommendations, such as the ones in the Stephen Bubb report, are not actioned, confidence is lost by communities.

Education

- People also did not know about Special Education Needs and Disability or about schools' complaint procedures.
- Some schools are not treating Hate Crime seriously or dealing with it properly. A lot of the time they dismiss it as "that is what children are like".
- Schools' behaviour management policies are often used rigidly with no adjustments for Disability.
- There is a lot of racial stereotyping in schools.

- Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised Disabled girls are particularly misunderstood.
- There are no quiet spaces, no sensory spaces, no Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) consistency.
- Some schools often do not respond to complaints or issues from Black, Brown or Racially Minoritised and/or Disabled parents.
- Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised Disabled children with Autism are labelled as “bad” and “aggressive”. This is stereotyping.
- Parents are often forced into dual roles of emotional support plus being an advocate, leaving them overwhelmed.
- Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised Parents feel the need to “tone down” emotions for fear of being labelled aggressive.
- Schools rely on parents knowing how the system works.
- Migrant families face language barriers with many schools failing to provide interpreters.
- Migrant parents have a lack of knowledge about UK school structures or complaints pathways which causes barriers.
- There are few Black or Brown and/or Disabled teachers to be positive role models.
- The lack of cultural awareness leads to harmful decisions such as asking Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised children to play inappropriate roles in activities.
- Schools overlook Disabled parents' needs entirely including mobility, fatigue, mental health, transport, medical conditions.
- Disabled parents are not believed until a “professional voice” advocates for them.
- There is ongoing bullying by other children and young people.
- Physical harassments and attacks are frequent by other children and young people.
- Parents get involved to try and help, but the victim of the bullying is not always told what happens.
- Many schools do not seem to be following the law such as the Public Sector Equality duty.

Travel on Buses

- Disabled people have felt intimidated by drivers asking them to prove they are Disabled people, not putting the ramp down for someone to get on, and not moving buggies away to give space for a wheelchair to get on board.
- Disabled people with Learning Difficulties have faced Hate Crime on buses including verbal abuse from drivers and passengers, bus drivers not doing what they should to meet access needs and little or no support from other passengers.
- There are problems with complaining about the treatment on buses as the CCTV evidence is only kept for a few days, the complaints process is not accessible, and the person who made the complaint is not told about what happened to their complaint.
- A driver ordered a Black Disabled woman with crutches to “move to the back of the bus” not understanding the physical barriers this presented along with the historical racial context this brings up.
- A driver shouted at a Disabled person, “You people always want to get away with everything”.
- Drivers often refuse to move buggies from wheelchair spaces.
- Disabled children have been unable to get on a bus because of pushing/crowding.
- The First Bus complaints system is hard to understand and there is never any feedback which leaves people feeling undervalued and victimised.

Police Services

- Some people felt that the police were not interested in protecting Disabled people.
- Some people had a lack of faith in the system and felt that complaints were not taken seriously.
- Feelings that police training around Disability Hate Crime is a tick box exercise.

- Some people felt there was especially a lack of understanding in the Police of hidden impairment and conditions.
- Some people felt the views of the Police were taken more seriously than the views of Disabled people.
- Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised Disabled families are trusting the Police less and less.
- The Police are not trained how to communicate properly with Disabled people.
- Parents fear reporting incidents involving their children due to past experiences.

Online and Digital World

- Many people have had horrible things said about them and to them on the internet.
- There does not seem to be anyone who can control or stop what is said on the web.
- Online spaces covers a lot of different countries and it is very difficult to have laws that cover everybody.
- There are no “safe spaces” for Disabled people online.

Support Networks and Advocacy

- There are not enough advocacy services and sometimes they do not understand how to work properly with Disabled people.
- Many of the support groups that are around are social groups and do not provide proper emotional support.

Employment

- Someone had been unfairly dismissed because they were a Disabled person and had been refused jobs at interview as soon as they spoke about their impairment or condition.
- A person who told their employer privately about their impairment or condition had that information shared without their permission.

- Requests for reasonable adjustments were handled badly including ignoring what Occupational Health were recommending, managers saying they already did what was requested but without discussing it, and requests for reasonable adjustments being used as reasons to make someone's situation even more difficult.
- Someone with a hidden impairment was treated as "slacking" or "not keeping up."
- Disabled people were told off for taking very short breaks but non-disabled colleagues took much longer breaks and nothing was said to them.
- Managers laughed when a Disabled person had a "meltdown".
- Someone was placed on disciplinary or performance review straight after asking for adjustments.
- Disciplinary threats were used to control behaviour or discourage taking sick leave.
- Many people could not work out, or were not told, which of their identities they were being challenged about.
- Many people would now not tell their employer about their impairment or condition because of being treated badly when they had done that before.
- One person was scared that bringing an employment case of Disability discrimination could risk their visa and financial stability.
- A common theme experienced was a lack of information about what Disability Hate Crime or discrimination is and how it could be dealt with in employment.
- Employers did not explain grievance procedures, reasonable adjustment policies, or how people could get support from outside the company.
- Managers could control whether someone could progress something within the organisation without any comeback.
- People were left with the strong impression that if they went to Human Resources they would be fired. Sometimes being sent to Human Resources was also used as a threat rather than something that could be a support.

- People were frightened of being victimised if they spoke up.
- People often felt they were left on their own with no-one in the company supporting them or interested in their case.
- In many smaller companies there was no Human Resources, no policies and no processes to take issues forward.
- There are issues about going to employment tribunals. These include the tight timescales in which to put in a claim, the costs of going to a tribunal, and having to go through a tribunal on your own.
- People had experiences of employers saying they were good about employing Disabled people but not being able to show it.
- Many employers do not know about reasonable adjustments, and where they do they do not always provide the right adjustments.
- Some people have been bullied at work.
- Some people have not found Trade Unions very helpful, supportive or knowledgeable on Disability related issues.

Housing and Community Safety

- Many people felt alone, unsupported or emotionally exhausted.
- Many people reported being targeted for attack and harassment in their own homes.
- A neighbour pretended to be a housing caretaker and took money by tricking a Disabled person. This left the person feeling very uncomfortable in their own home. They also did not know who to report the situation to and there was no follow-up from the Police after reporting the incident.
- There are a lot of racialised assumptions and stereotyping (e.g., neighbours blaming Somali families for theft).
- Black, Brown and Racially Minoritised Disabled children are targeted by neighbours or peers.
- Housing services fail to provide basic safety adaptations including parents told to buy equipment themselves.

- There is a lack of interpreter support in tenancy or safeguarding situations.
- Attacks included mugging and assaults and stealing money from someone getting money out of a cashpoint.
- Central Bristol (e.g., Broadmead, city centre) was repeatedly described as unsafe, especially for Disabled people.
- Many Disabled people now do not visit areas where they previously felt safe.
- There is an increase in horrible things being said to people who use Disabled parking spaces or who have blue badges.
- Neighbours sometimes challenge people's right to Disabled bays or accuse them of "not being Disabled enough".
- There is a growing expectation from the public for Disabled people to "prove how Disabled they are".

Report Produced By:

