

Disability – What’s new and could it affect YOU?

A Refresh seminar from the Rock Community Project

Speaker: Anne McGuire, MP

4th November 2005

“New laws coming into force by December 2006 will require all public bodies in Britain to lead by example and integrate disabled people in their policy-making from the outset as well as promote 'equality of opportunity' for disabled people. This is similar to existing duties under race legislation and will be an important driver to achieve equality for millions of disabled people. Over 40,000 public bodies in Britain are likely to be affected in some way.

24% of the adult population will be covered by the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act, which will apply not just to people with impaired mobility or vision, but also other conditions such as HIV, Multiple Sclerosis insulin dependent diabetes and cancer. It will be unlawful for local authorities to treat their disabled members less favourably.

This could oblige Local Authorities, for example, to ban street furniture such as “A” board advertising. The need is to persuade everyone to think “disabled”.

In answer to a question about the interface between Westminster, Holyrood and Stirling, Anne pointed out that the DDA applied to them all.

Brian Morrison of Employability Stirling explained the role of this department of Stirling Council in supported Employment of disabled people. (see Stirling Council Website <http://www.stirling.gov.uk/index/business/training-homepage/employability>)

In response to questions about the employment of disabled people, Anne pointed out that although recruitment of a disabled person could seem daunting, in fact the circumstances were the same as anyone else, and help could be available with any necessary adaptation costs. Many application processes provide opportunity to disclose a disability. However, a straw poll of the audience found that the vast majority believed that ticking the “disabled” box on an application form would be likely to be detrimental to the application. One of the audience noted that people suffering from mental disability found it particularly difficult to gain equality of opportunity.

Note:

The duty to promote equality duty comes into force on Monday 6 December 2006 and will mean that as public authorities carry out their activities, they need to have 'due regard' to the need to:

** eliminate discrimination against and harassment of disabled people;*

** promote equality of opportunity for disabled people;*

** promote positive attitudes to disabled people; and*

** encourage disabled people to take part in public life.*

This includes a requirement for a Disability Equality Scheme that sets out:

** how disabled people have been involved in drawing up the scheme;*

** how the public authority will assess the impact of existing and proposed policies and activities on disabled people;*

** the steps the public authority will take to improve outcomes for disabled people;*

** the way the public authority will gather evidence on whether outcomes are improving for disabled people; and the way the public authority will use the evidence they have gathered*