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## UNIQUE SCOTTISH PARTNERSHIP WILL ENSURE JUSTICE FOR DISABLED PEOPLE



A unique partnership between the Scottish justice sector and disability organisations is launched today aimed at improving disabled people's access to justice. It follows the publication of a survey showing that more than 40% of disabled people and the people who support them do not believe disabled people have equal access to justice.



The partnership is the first time that public bodies will combine together as a sector to meet their duty to involve disabled people in policy making. The 6 month involvement and consultation programme will make it easier for disabled people to have their say because they are not limited to the exact remit of one justice organisation. It also aims to develop ways that disabled people can remain involved in the process of improving access to justice on an ongoing basis.



CROWN OFFICE AND PROCURATOR FISCAL SERVICE

The justice sector organisations involved include The Scottish Government, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, the Scottish Court Service, The Law Society of Scotland, the Scottish Legal Aid Board and the Scottish Prison Service.



Speaking about the partnership Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Communities, Kenny McAskill said, "We want to make sure every individual in Scotland can have, and believe they can have, access to justice when they need it. This survey shows that too many disabled people feel that they do not. I believe the new partnership will help all of the organisations involved work together to identify and improve the system and increase the confidence disabled people have in justice.



Capability Scotland is co-ordinating the involvement events with a range of disability organisations. A survey of its 1in4 Poll conducted by Scotinform during July found that 42% of disabled people had direct experience of the justice system. The most likely reason was being a victim of a crime, followed by witnessing a crime or acting as a juror. 38% of disabled people had been a victim of a crime and nearly one in ten disabled respondents said they had been involved in a tribunal such as employment, mental health or additional support needs.

Speaking on behalf of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Solicitor General, Frank Mulholland QC said: “This ambitious and exciting new programme will help us to identify, develop and coordinate measures to improve access to justice for all disabled people. We will continue to work hard to increase the confidence of disabled people in the criminal justice system, and to encourage and facilitate disabled victims of crime to come forward.”

Ian Smart, president of the Law Society of Scotland, said “Our justice system deals with thousands of individuals every year – some of whom are disabled. We recognise that, while efforts are made to ensure that the system is delivered fairly and in an accessible way, some physical, attitudinal and procedural barriers remain and that we need to do more to promote equal access and opportunities. “

The first involvement event will be held at Capability’s Head Office in Edinburgh today and will be followed by events hosted by disability groups from across Scotland in late summer and autumn. These co-ordinated focus groups are aimed at giving people with a wide range of impairments an opportunity to examine the specific issues and barriers which disabled people face when accessing the justice system. They will culminate in a national conference on November 16<sup>th</sup> in Edinburgh attended by the Justice Secretary Kenny McAskill.

The 1in4 Poll on Capability’s website will remain open for the duration of the involvement programme to give disabled people across Scotland an opportunity to have their say in improving access to justice in Scotland.

Richard Hamer, Director of External Affairs at Capability Scotland, explains: “This collaborative approach is an excellent opportunity to bring together all those with an interest in ensuring that the justice system is accessible to all.

“We hope this will be the beginning of a long-standing relationship which will draw on disabled people’s skills and experience to improve the Scottish justice sector for all.”

## **ENDS**

### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

Capability Scotland campaigns with, and provides services to, disabled children and adults across Scotland, supporting them to achieve equality and have choice and control in their lives. It has been commissioned by the Scottish justice organisations to manage the involvement process with organisations including:

- Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland
- Guide Dogs Scotland
- Inclusion Scotland
- Scottish Association for Mental Health
- Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability
- Scottish Council on Deafness
- Scottish Disability Equality Forum

Capability’s ‘1 in 4 Poll’ is a paper / electronic survey of around 500 disabled people, their families and carers. The poll closed on Monday 27 July and its findings are available in the attached report. A new poll about the justice sector is now open to all disabled people, their families and carers and is available until October at [www.capability-scotland.org.uk/justice](http://www.capability-scotland.org.uk/justice). The results of this poll will be included with the results of the 1 in 4 poll and the information gathered at the involvement events in a final report which will inform the discussions at the national conference in November.

### **1 in 4 poll highlights**

Of the 175 respondents to the 1 in 4 poll at the end of July 2009:

- 25% had a positive impression of the Justice System. Almost as many (24%) however were negative in their impressions of the Justice System

- 42% said they did not think that disabled people have equal access to justice system
- 44% of those with experience of the justice system had encountered disabling barriers. The two main barriers were attitudinal and institutional (such as the way the organisation worked), with one in five respondents saying they had encountered one of these types of barriers. 13% of respondents had experienced environmental barriers, such as access to buildings.
- 90% were satisfied with the letters/ leaflets they were provided with in their last experience of the Justice System.

**For more information please contact:**

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**Photographs of the first event will be available late afternoon 11 August 2009.**

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