



## **Press Release**

**30 March 2009**

### **MINISTER GETS A GRILLING ON WELFARE REFORM AND EQUALITIES**

DISABLED people gave Scotland Office minister Ann McKechin a grilling over the government's proposed welfare reforms today. (Monday)

The group, which included people with mobility, sensory and communication impairments, voiced their concerns to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Capability Scotland event.

The Glasgow North MP visited the charity's Edinburgh head office to meet around 25 people, including Capability service-users and representatives of disability organisations, such as Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living.

She spoke about the forthcoming Welfare Reform Bill, which is currently going through the Westminster Parliament and the Equalities Bill, which will clarify existing equalities legislation into a single act.

Ms McKechin said: "Disabled people should enjoy the same rights as other people in society. Today the UN Convention in Disabled Rights is being signed – and the UK government want to put in place measures, legislation and rights that will put that into effect."

She told the event that social care budgets should be put in the same pot as other allowances and grants to give maximum flexibility to disabled people. However Robert Freer from Glasgow raised concerns that disabled people were being 'short-changed' by policies meant to empower them.

For example, he said some free services, such as chiropody, which had already been withdrawn from disabled people in his area would then have to be bought directly by them.

Ms McKechin said that under the Equalities Bill, public authorities would have a duty to report how they meet their equality duties and would also have to consider equality in their procurement contracts. Employers could also use positive action to employ more disabled people and increase the diversity of their workforce.

She said: "This is about moving forward with the rights agenda, not about reducing the level of service people are entitled to. We do not want it to be seen as an excuse for local authorities to engage in a cost-cutting exercise."

Richard Hamer, Capability's Director of External Affairs, said: "We welcome the opportunity for disabled people in Scotland to voice their very real concerns about the Welfare Reform Bill.

"We need to ensure there is enough personalised support for disabled people wanting to move into or return to work – particularly in the current economic downturn - and also enough protection for those who are unable to work because of their impairment. Other factors –such as a lack of accessible transport – should also be considered as these can keep disabled people out of the labour market."

## **Ends**

For more information please contact Carol Stewart on 0131 347 1052 or 07841 782708 or Susie Fitton on 0131 347 1025.

## **Notes to Editors**

Capability Scotland campaigns with, and provides services to, disabled children and adults across Scotland in order that they achieve equality and have choice and control in their lives.