

# Improving the Life Chances of -Disabled People - comments on PMSU analytical report August 2004

## Introduction

The LGA was formed on 1 April 1997 from the belief that one voice was needed to present the case for local government. As the national voice for local government, the LGA speaks for just under 500 local authorities representing over 50 million people and spending £65 billion a year on local services. We exist to promote better local government and represent the local authorities in England and Wales.

This response draws on discussions with members of the old LGA Equalities Executive (all of whom are local councillors) and with key officers, and has been signed off by lead members of the Supporting People Board (the successor body to the Equalities Executive).

## Main points in response to the Analytical report

Overall, the project and the interim report are welcome. It is important that Government takes a holistic approach to tackling barriers and there are encouraging signs in the interim report of the importance of local discretion (although this could be developed further).

This response highlights a few areas which seem to require further analysis or comment.

The report mentions the proposed new **Commission for Equality and Human Rights** but does not attempt an analysis of what benefits (or difficulties) this might bring in improving the life chances of disabled people and particularly in challenging multiple barriers. With the publication of *Fairness for All*, there ought to be scope in the next stage of the project to contemplate this further. The LGA in its response to *Fairness for All* has welcomed the new Commission but suggested that it will be more effective if backed by a Single Equalities Act as a means of simplifying and rationalising the existing range of legislation. This element might also be brought into further analysis.

Referring to Page 42, the broad concept of developing a national framework set around **minimum standards** and with scope for local flexibility and local priority setting is a model which is familiar to local government from a number of policy settings. The LGA will wish to see that the degree of local discretion is maximised and that the national framework or standards be developed in consultation with local government. The interim report logs concerns about "postcode lotteries" and inconsistency between localities but this should not lead to recommendations which work against local discretion - a degree of variation between localities is inevitable and desirable, so long as minimum

234

Submission

standards are met.

Much of the analysis in the paper looks at key life stages or transitional moments, particularly where disabled people are, or might be, let down by poor interagency working or poor information exchange. The paper makes some reference to “emerging examples” of effective **transition planning** by local authorities (page 97). The LGA recommends that this be explored further in later phases of the project and would be willing to talk further with the PMSU about how further examples could be found. We would also refer you to *Access To Services*, jointly published by the LGA and Disability Rights Commission in 2003, which takes as its main focus Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act. Some of the key points made in the paper are:

- That overall responsibility for disability equality should be at senior officer and member level, with specific roles allocated.
- Consultation networks with organisations run by disabled people should be established or enhanced.
- Adopting the social model of disability as the principle central to the development of a disability equality strategy.
- Developing three key officer roles focussing on the strategic role, the access role and the community development role.

There is a recognition that **central Government** also has a challenge to “join up”, The impact of conflicting direction to delivery agents from different government departments (such as, for example, performance management frameworks which inhibit partnership working by setting conflicting priorities) could be further explored.