

## **Equality For Disabled People by 2025**

Thank you very much everybody. I am delighted to have the opportunity of being here today at the greatest football team in the world.

The only football team that neither has an owner nor manager. I may be more available over the next three or four weeks depending on what Gordon decides to do of course...

It's a really important Conference to engage with people, about equality for all disabled people by 2025, and at the heart of the kind of society we believe that we ought to have in this country is the notion of that equality for disabled people, and as a part of the journey along the way to achieving that, a clear strategy for a much greater opportunity for all disabled people to have independent living.

There is difficulty with the term. I think we need to be very clear about what it means and does not mean and that it means very different things perhaps for different people.

But I think the central message is maximum power and control in the hands of disabled people, and their families. The professionals and organisations need, therefore, to work in very, very different ways than they have worked historically in terms of power.

So it has major implications for the relationship between the state, statutory organisations and the role of the third sector, and the voice and controls for disabled people and also for their family members.

No longer do we want to see public policy or services, imposed on disabled people on a take or leave it, one size fits all basis.

The whole aim is to reorganise public services, so we put those people who use those services in the driving seat. Our job is to organise appropriate, personal, respectful levels of support to ensure that disabled people have the equality that they want and they deserve.

A disabled person said to me not that long ago "what I want is a life, not a service".

And if you think about the implications of that statement, it changes the whole way we do support for people because that person said "I do not much care which organisation is involved in my life and I don't care how you label the service, but I want the same as you want; I want a nice place to live, and I want a job and a decent social life and quality relationships. Your job is to find out what I want, to give me the power and control to make the choices over the nature of the services and the provider of those services and then to help me and support me where I need help and support".

Now this all sounds wonderful but there are also realities that we have to take account of. One reality is that some people need more support than others. That is just a reality.

The other reality is that for some people, family members, are absolutely crucial in being best placed to make decisions with people, and sometimes on behalf of people depending on those people's situations. So I think we sometimes forget the fact that of course disabled people themselves must have maximum autonomy and control but we must never ever forget the pivotal role of carers

and families that are usually better placed than professionals to express views on people's best interests and people's preferred services.

The other reality, of course, is resources. There is no society where there are infinite resources. There is always going to be finite resources and difficult choices that have to be made and there is always going to have to be a shared responsibility between the state, the family and the individual.

The question going forward is what is fair in terms of that shared responsibility? You know the current system was built from an entirely different age. We now have a society where older people are living longer and longer and by doing that they are having more and more difficult challenging conditions like dementia and Alzheimers. Disabled people are having longer lives and rightly expect to live those lives as full and equal citizens. All of that is placing major pressures and asking new questions of our system.

I believe we have got to be positive and we have got to be optimistic and we have to have ambition and vision and that has to be underpinned by passion. There are always constraints, always obstacles and always barriers. People will always spend their time identifying why you can't do something rather than how you can make it happen. I believe, together, whether we are government ministers, civil servants, people running public services on the ground and people working in the voluntary or community sector and organisations representing disabled people and their families: our job together is to be bold, ambitious and optimistic.

In the context again of social care, the personalisation of services is absolutely crucial. The notion of individual

budgets is not temporary or a bit of an experiment - it's the future. The idea that people will have clarity about the amount of money that they have available to them; they will then make the decisions about how that money is spent and that the options available to people will not just be a narrow rigid menu but the options available to people will be the kind of menu that the individual with their budget wish to control, determine and shape.

So it's a very, very different vision from the kind of system, the kind of society, that we have had before. We also have to win the hearts and minds of professionals. You know it's no good changing systems and just simply reforming public services

You have to truly get people's hearts and minds to believe that this is the right thing to do and also for them to understand it's not actually a threat to good professionals. These good professionals wanted to go into this work in the first place, to enable and empower and support people, not to control people.

So this is not a threat to highly skilled very committed professions wherever they work but it's about those professionals, in my view, going back to what they should have been doing all along.

Also I think we have to remember that if we are going to give people maximum control and power, we also have to put in place systems that support people to have that control and power. You have to ensure that you have advocacy support, individual advocacy support, people who can be there as advocates and you have to build networks in terms of community support, and you have got to use the expertise and the skills and the passion that individuals and families bring to this whole agenda.

We have a commitment, of course, to a user led organisation in every community by 2010. I think having a user led organisation in every community by 2010 is a massive opportunity to influence and to shape change, because there is a tendency to think that change is all about structures, it's all about organisations, it's all about leadership and all about commissioning and all about targets, and it is. But actually having strong, powerful and sustained demands - voices, pressure on the system, from those people who use those services, from those people who need those services, is equally an important factor in changing the way that those services operate.

You can spend all your time, in my view, reforming systems focusing on leadership and management, on targets and incentives and regulations but also if you don't have a strong user and family voice, influencing and demanding and forcing and working with your system to achieve change, there will always be limits to your capacity to make a difference.

These are really exciting times. It does not mean it's not difficult, because it is. You know if we spent a significant amount more on public services over the next few years, which we will do, we will only be actually coping with the additional number of people who will be coming through.

There are a lot of issues for us to resolve together.

It has to be done in a spirit of partnership. No-one partner can achieve the change that is required; it has to be about the government and the state, it has to be about the local delivery and commissioning organisations in the statutory sector. And it has to be about a very active voluntary sector and about the power of disabled people and their advocates and families demanding and forcing shape and holding the system to account.

Thanks very much everybody for giving us your day to take part in this process. It's very important to us that we hear the views of real people in the real world. I will be delighted to answer any questions or receive any comments that people wish to make, thank you very much.