

## **RADAR's MP Dialogue Scheme Parliamentary Reception, 1 April 2009, 5-6pm**

### **JONATHAN SHAW:**

Good afternoon everyone and thank you very much, John [Barrett MP], to you, for hosting this reception. John was of course up very early making all of the sandwiches and cakes we can all enjoy. He told me that earlier on.

Thanks to HSBC and Royal Mail for their support to RADAR and for all the work they do. I want to make some comments on the previous speaker's remarks. To begin with, I think that David [Stocks], your speech was one of the finest that I've heard coming from someone who talked about how you've become comfortable now to be able to speak about bipolar.

Well, that in turn makes a lot of other people, who haven't got a mental health condition, or don't know about mental health, much more comfortable as well, because they then feel they can ask questions. So, it's a two-way process and through your empowerment and the work you did with Brian [Jenkins MP], it means that you're able to teach us, those people who haven't got mental health conditions. So I think it's all beneficial, and the more we can understand, the better dialogue we have, and that helps us to move forward on the equality agenda.

Now, I think the work that's been undertaken through the dialogue scheme and the guide to disability for MPs is very worthwhile and assists us in how we go about forming policy, because it has to be the case that we involve disabled people. There are over 10 million disabled people in Great Britain, so whether it is at a local level, a regional level or a national level, as John referred to, each and every one of those institutions has to look at how they're involving disabled people.

One example of what I've changed since becoming Minister for Disabled People is the Life Chances Group - a group of Ministers with responsibility for meeting the goals and ambitions of equality for disabled people by 2025. That group didn't have any disabled people on it. It does now, and we actually have themed

discussions. And what a difference it makes, not just to the Ministers on that group, but also to the civil servants as well.

So, exposure and discussion helps for a much richer policy and a better understanding. We are making progress. As someone who has been appointed relatively recently into the job, it's clear that the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 is having an effect.

We've done some good work and progress on rights throughout the UN Convention, and we are, in the Welfare Reform Bill, which Liz mentioned in terms of the right to control, giving people the power to determine how resources that provide care and support and employment that affect their lives, more control over those things.

One can envisage that in the future, when we've sufficiently done the right piloting and got these models to work, that people will be able to swap between different funding streams, so they can make decisions as to how that money is used in order to live their lives as independently as possible. And again, as Liz referred to, we have got the Equality Bill, which will be going through Parliament very soon.

So, a comprehensive disability rights framework will only be effective if people understand how it can be applied. I think that the guide is going to assist us with this, but importantly, and what's been referred to in the speeches, in terms of empowerment.

Now, yesterday I was in Essex talking to the Essex Coalition of Disabled People. The work they're doing at the independent living centre - and at a high level, they are looking at Government policy - but also it's very much user led with representatives throughout Essex. They are drilling down and having dialogue with their local representatives as well as across the piece. Because we can have strategies and we can have policies. But it's actually their practical application that's important. And the more we can do to empower disabled people to say, 'Hey, what's happening about swimming pool access?' 'What's happening about the buses?' 'There aren't steps so I can get up into the bus, and taxis', all those things - that's about independent living.

So we've got some way to go, but the way we will get there is by working with disabled people. I agree absolutely with the remarks

made about representation. So I'm pleased that many colleagues - Members of the House of Commons - have come along today.

This guide will help us to have a better dialogue, and understand the issues of disabled people, and inform us when we're making decisions. So I'm grateful for the work of RADAR. At the beginning of my notes it said to me, 'Thank people for coming along and say that today's reception marks the end of RADAR's MP dialogue scheme and the launch of the RADAR's guide on disability for MPs'.

I can tell you, since coming into post there's never been an end of the dialogue I've had with RADAR. And, of course, that will continue and there won't be an end to the guidance they give me as a Member of Parliament and as a Minister. I appreciate that and I appreciate the working relationship we have with them, so thank you very much again, John. And they're applauding already so I'll get off.