

National Disability Strategy

Overview

1. The Government today launches a National Disability Strategy to underpin the participation of people with disabilities in society. The strategy comprises four elements—

- Disability Bill 2004
- Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004
- Six Outline Sectoral Plans, and
- A commitment to a multi-annual Investment Programme for disability support services.

The Strategy builds on existing policy and legislation including the Employment Equality Act 1998, the Equal Status Act 2000, the Equality Act 2004 and the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 and the policy of mainstreaming service provision for people with disabilities within the State agencies that provide the service to citizens generally.

2. The elements of the Strategy

Disability Bill 2004 is a positive action measure designed to support the provision of disability specific services to people with disabilities and to improve access to mainstream public services for people with disabilities. The Bill provides an individual right to an independent assessment of need, to a related Service Statement and to independent redress and enforcement. It provides a statutory basis for accessible public buildings and services, six Sectoral Plans, positive action for the employment in the public service, restrictions on the use of genetic information and the establishment of a Centre for Excellence in Universal Design to support the design of buildings, products, systems etc. which are usable by all.

Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004 introduces personal advocacy services specifically for people with disabilities. The new service will be administered by Comhairle and envisages the provision of a personal advocate to persons with a disability who have difficulty in obtaining, without assistance or support, a social service.

Six Sectoral Plans Under the legislation six Ministers are required to draw up Sectoral Plans as follows — Minister for Health and Children, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Minister for Transport, Minister for Environment, Heritage and

Local Government, Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The six plans are published in outline form today.

A Multi-annual Investment Programme will apply to a number of priority disability specific services and will be developed and announced as part of this years estimates and budgetary process. The multi-annual Programme will have both a Capital and revenue (current) element starting in 2005.

3. **Health Sector Reform**

The National Disability Strategy will complement the modernisation process which is underway in the health services. An important part of that process will be to ensure delivery of high quality services for people with disabilities, in accordance with the strategy announced today.

4. **Consultation**

There have already been ongoing consultations with the Disability Legislation Consultation Group (DLCG), a Group representative of people with disabilities. Dialogue with the DLCG will continue following publication.

5. **Monitoring**

Preparation of the Strategy has been guided by the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. The Cabinet Committee will continue its role as the elements of the Strategy are being put in place.

21 September, 2004.