

EQUALITY GROUPS PUT PRESSURE ON FIRMS IGNORING JOB LEGISLATION

Pressure is being put on the government to withhold contracts for the 77% of top companies that ignore their legal duty to operate equality practices for people from ethnic minorities or with disabilities.

Duncan Campbell, Friday February 17, 2006, The Guardian

Pressure is being put on the government to withhold contracts for the 77% of top companies that ignore their legal duty to operate equality practices for people from ethnic minorities or with disabilities.

While the national employment rate is 75%, it drops to 59% for ethnic minorities, a meeting in London will be told today.

Committed2Equality (C2E) which was set up to examine discrimination laws said most companies paid lip service to the law and the situation for many minorities seeking work is as bad as ever.

"Many businesses skirt around equality issues or have no processes," said Janet Lakhani, its chief executive. The only way to make employers take their responsibilities seriously was to withhold government and local authority contracts.

"With a government committed to increase employment for

disadvantaged groups it is glaringly obvious; they should expect their suppliers to meet legal and statutory obligations," she said. "Supplying the public sector is big business. Over 330,000 businesses rely on income from either central or local government."

According to C2E, 3,000 (77%) of the largest companies - those employing more than 250 people - who invoice an estimated £5bn to £6bn each year, fail to meet equality and diversity obligations. Ms Lakhani said that the government could play a more proactive part. "There should be a cabinet minister for equality."

The government acknowledges that there is a problem. Margaret Hodge, minister for work, said: "Too many graduates from ethnic minority communities are being left behind." Equality organisations argue that there are sound financial reasons for abiding by the laws. By next year, companies in the UK are expected to be paying £360m in

costs for actions brought under the laws. Costs have grown by 70% from £150m to £210m since 2002 and around 10% of UK organisations have been subject to a claim for discrimination in the last seven years.

With age discrimination outlawed from October this year, claims are likely to rise. Sex and disability discrimination are the two major areas which lead to actions which cost firms an average of £10,000.

Valentine's Day card changes snub disabled shoppers, says NCC

OUT-LAW News

Card issuers have let down elderly and disabled customers by failing to tell them that they can use alternative cards in order to pay for goods after the Chip and PIN implementation deadline of 14th February, the National Consumer Council (NCC) warned yesterday.

According to the consumer watchdog, up to three million elderly and disabled consumers find it difficult to use Chip and PIN cards, because of problems in remembering PIN numbers or because physical disabilities make it hard to use keypads.

Like everyone else who holds a Chip and PIN card, these consumers will no longer be able to

sign for goods in Chip and PIN enabled stores after 14th February, and will be obliged to use their PIN number. This, says the NCC, will result in "misery and frustration" – which can be avoided, because there is a simple solution.

As APACS, the UK's Payments Association advised last week, disabled and elderly cardholders are entitled to apply to their card company for an alternative card, most likely a chip and signature card, that will enable them to continue signing no matter where they shop after Valentine's Day.

About 100,000 chip and signature cards have already been issued, says APACS, but if any customer still needs one there is still time to get one issued before 14th February. They should contact their card company now.

"Our research has shown that the overwhelming majority of disabled cardholders have welcomed chip and PIN and are happily using it ahead of 14th February," said Sandra Quinn from chip and PIN. "We accept however that some disabled cardholders may find using a PIN more difficult and we are pleased to see that they are contacting their banks ahead of the change and requesting a chip and signature card so they can continue to sign."

The NCC says the announcement is too late. It wants a high-profile publicity campaign as a matter of urgency.

"A year ago we urged the banks to launch an information campaign and improve bank staff awareness of the chip and PIN alternatives," said Claire Whyley, Deputy Director of Policy at the NCC. "We are really disappointed that banks haven't taken their responsibilities to vulnerable customers more seriously. Three million people could find themselves high and dry at the checkout."

The NCC has also called for changes to the Banking Code to give consumers clear information on the cards available to them.

According to Help the Aged spokesman Paul Bates, the charity has "heard of appalling cases where older customers have been forced to leave their shopping behind at the tills because they could not remember their PIN."

"There is an alternative to chip and PIN cards but banks are failing to promote this," he said.

Natalie Salmon, Head of Goods & Services at the DRC says:

"We are concerned about the confusion - inconsistent information from bank and retail staff. The DDA means that retailers and banks have to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people who are unable to use PIN cards or find it physically difficult to key in their numbers. Adjustments could be accepting a chip and signature card instead of a chip and PIN card or adapting the service area so that customers with visual or mobility

impairment can easily use the PIN machines. In refusing to make changes, retailers and banks could be breaking the law and may face court action if they don't accept alternative methods of payment. We are currently investigating a number of cases of potential discrimination and will not hesitate to pursue legal proceedings if we believe companies are in breach of the law. This could result in legal penalties of up to £50,000."

Council splits up couple for the first time in 65 years

Steven Morris
The Guardian

A couple told of their heartbreak at being separated for the first time in 65 years because social services refuse to put them in the same care home.

Burma veteran Richard Driscoll cannot walk unaided and relied on his wife to help him get around, while Beryll Driscoll is blind and was accustomed to using her husband as her eyes. But they have been forced to spend the last seven months apart. A place in a care home was found for Mr. Driscoll after he fell ill but social services will not pay for his wife to stay with him. She is having to be looked after by other relatives and the couple, both 89, meet only twice a week.

Mrs. Driscoll said: "We have never been separated in all our years together and for it to happen now, when we need each other so much, is so upsetting. I am lost without him, we were a partnership.

"It has been such a struggle without him. He was my eyes. Since I went blind 16 years ago he has done everything for me. I am so depressed. I just want to be with Richard but I am told I don't fit the criteria. I think it is very cruel."

Mr. Driscoll said he lived for the days when his wife visited him at Bredon View care home in Cheltenham. "It hurts a lot, I am missing her so much," he said. "It is wonderful when she does visit, but so painful when she has to leave. We should be together. I just don't understand why people want to keep us apart."

One of their sons, John, 58, said: "What they've done is take away my father's legs and my mother's eyes by splitting them up."

Another son, Terry, 62, added: "They had a great passion for each other, which makes me so angry that they have been torn apart. A lot more compassion should have been shown towards them both."

The couple met in 1939 in Burma, where Mr. Driscoll was serving with the Dorset Regiment and his wife to be was a shorthand typist. They married in the UK a year later and had six children. Mr. Driscoll worked for the UK Atomic Energy Authority

constabulary and later became a school caretaker.

Last June he was moved into Bredon View after being discharged from hospital following a chest infection. Since then the family have campaigned for Mrs. Driscoll to be allowed to join him.

A spokeswoman for Gloucestershire social services said it was unable to keep the couple together because of their differing needs. She said: "This is a difficult situation and we sympathise. Where a person may require care services, a full assessment of each individual's needs is carried out." She added: "It can be difficult to accommodate couples together when they have different needs."

Disability rights: The dangers of risk aversion

By Virginia Matthews
The Independent

A blind woman is refused access to a disco on the grounds that her white stick would be a fire hazard. A deaf woman is refused entry to a dentistry course because she would be unable to hear if a patient screamed out in pain. Residents of a nursing home are refused napkins on the grounds that they could choke on them. A householder is refused permission for a grab rail for her steep front steps in case she fell while using it.

These are among dozens of cases being collected by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), which believes that a "risk averse culture" in Britain is severely curtailing the rights of disabled people to work, travel, socialise and ultimately lead independent lives. It believes that there must be a "grown-up" debate on how much risk is actually acceptable to adults.

The DRC's claims are supported by Sheelagh Richards, chief executive of the College of Occupational Therapists, who believes that some employers and local authorities have "lost the plot" when it comes to managing risk.

"Looking back over 36 years of practice, we used to be able to find solutions to the problems of disabled people without inventing a whole list of different and often contradictory processes as is the case today.

"We are at severe risk of treating all disabled people as innately vulnerable when this may be very far from the case," she says. "The risk averse culture is quite literally preventing people from leading independent lives, when what we should be doing is explaining any risks and then letting people make up their own minds about whether they want to take them."

The attitude of some employers that disabled people are an innate risk to themselves and to others was satirised to great effect in the TV series *The Office*, in which a

character in a wheelchair was told she was a fire hazard. The DRC's head of policy Neil Crowther says this attitude is rife in real life, "creating unnecessary barriers between disabled and non-disabled people." He says: "Risk aversion is literally preventing disabled people from participating fully in society and now amounts to a new form of discrimination against them."

Behind the risk-averse culture, says Crowther, is the fear of being sued. He claims that local authorities and some employers live in fear of "an outbreak of US-style litigation in Britain" and are making "increasingly misguided assessments" of risk in an effort to head this off.

"While we all want sensible health and safety laws," says Crowther, "fear of litigation is replacing sensible action. The end result is disabled people being denied the chance to take decisions and weigh up every day risks for themselves."

"If disabled people are to become equal citizens, then the damage done in all areas of life by the misapplication of risk, as well as the belief that all disabled people are inherently vulnerable, must be challenged."

Breast cancer gene insurance risk

BBC News Online

People applying for insurance should have to disclose if they have been tested for inherited

illnesses, the Daily Telegraph has reported.

The newspaper said insurers want official permission to ask customers if they have been tested for two genes linked to breast cancer.

But the Association of British Insurers (ABI) described the story as "alarmist, irresponsible and factually incorrect."

The ABI added that it had no plans to make customers disclose cancer tests.

The Telegraph report coincided with unions, human rights lawyers and patient groups joining together to call on the government to forbid genetic testing at work.

Testing workers for inherited illnesses could lead to discrimination in the workplace and, if insurers were to get hold of the results, the potential for future health and life insurance cover to be denied, the groups warned.

"It is unacceptable for any woman and their family in this position to have to take on the additional stress of worrying about the impact a genetic test could have on their employment and insurance prospects," Anna Wood, Campaigns Manager of Breast Cancer Care, said.

At present, insurers have to ask the Genetics and Insurance Committee (GAIC), which advises the government on the issue, for permission to request details from customers of genetic tests.

"Breast cancer tests have not been approved by GAIC and the insurance industry has not asked for them to be so," Jonathan French, ABI spokesman told BBC News.

"No application has been made to the GAIC and none would be made unless there was clear and widely accepted scientific evidence to support the value of such tests," Mr French added.

The ABI added that it had a moratorium on genetic testing in place until 2011 and the only inherited illness insurers ask their customers to disclose is Huntington's disease.

Guide launched to help employers meet DDA obligations

Personneltoday.com

A free guide has been launched to advise companies on disability access and best practice under the revised Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

Disability access consultancy Configure has designed the handbook to give companies a better insight into the access auditing process under the revised DDA, which states that every company must make "reasonable adjustments" to accommodate staff with a disability.

The guide offers practical information on how to carry out an

access audit, modify premises and provide disability equality training to staff.

From December 2006, the DDA placed a new duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.

Disabled people in work earn 10% less on average than their non-disabled colleagues, according to the Disability Rights Commission.

For a free guide go to:

www.configure.co.uk

Scot's Tourette's struggle to become film

Laura Roberts
Scotsman.com

A YOUNG Scot's struggle to come to terms with the distressing condition of Tourette's syndrome is set to feature in a Hollywood film.

Some of Los Angeles' most successful film directors are keen to produce a script charting the story of the janitor from Galashiels as he battles to cope with his undiagnosed condition and the uncontrollable swearing it causes while growing up in the Borders.

John Davidson's severe swearing outbursts made him a target at school and caused him to be beaten up in the street.

He first came to public attention as a 16-year-old in 1989 when he featured in the BBC documentary

John's Not Mad and he has now become the voice for Tourette's syndrome through his work with Tourette Scotland.

Now his story has been taken up by Gwendolyn Whiteside, the American screenwriter who has been involved in hit shows such as Six Feet Under and Dawson's Creek. The writer spent a month last year in Mr Davidson's home town of Galashiels, Selkirkshire, researching his background.

She also spent several weekends observing youngsters on activity holidays organised by Tourette Scotland in July 2005 as well as talking to Mr Davidson's friends and family.

The first few chapters of her screenplay have already attracted the interest of the major film studios and directors such as Sam Mendes and the Coen brothers. The film will be in the style of My Left Foot, which starred Daniel Day Lewis as a painter with cerebral palsy.

Ms Whiteside has said that she would like Ewan McGregor to play the lead role; and that if possible the film would be shot in the Borders using Scottish actors.

Mr Davidson, 34, a community centre caretaker, will maintain an advisory role throughout writing and production. He said: "I am being sent a draft of the script to look over and put in Scots dialect. I am being consulted all the time.

"It would be set in Galashiels - they won't be making me out to come from a town in America or anything like that."

He said the film will not be just a serious look at the disease, explaining: "You have to have a sense of humour and I am sure there will be quirky episodes."

Tourette's charities expressed their hope yesterday that the film would educate people about the condition and lead to more diagnoses.

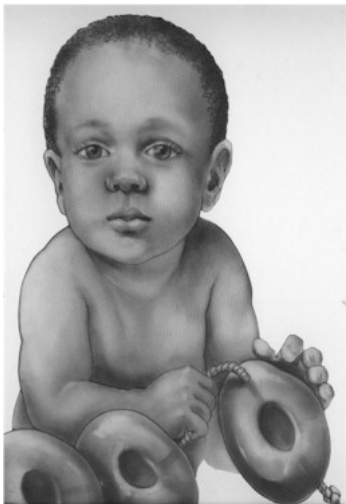
Roy Hillard, the president of the Tourette's Syndrome UK Association, said: "This film could be fantastic for raising the profile of Tourette's."

"There is no more anti-social illness and the worst thing is that sufferers are totally aware of what people think and are saying about them."

Experts estimate that one in a hundred school children suffer from Tourette's syndrome or a related disorder, but only a small fraction are diagnosed.

Sickle Cell & Thalassaemia Support Group

In Coventry, a team of Haemoglobinopathy officers, a general Information officer and a clinical nurse specialist for Haemoglobin Disorders are trying to start a Sickle Cell support group.



This group will provide a supporting environment where people with the condition can meet up, socialise and also learn more about Sickle Cell Disorders.

For more information contact:

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Coventry NHS
Teaching Primary Care Trust
25 Warwick Road
Coventry, CV1 2EZ

Tel: - 024 76961300
Fax :- 024 76961339
E-Mail contacts:-
Lindsay.randall@coventrypct.nhs.uk
mark.Williams@coventrypct.nhs.uk

Leamington Shopmobility Opens Up the Town

The Leamington Times
22 February 2006

After years of difficult access Leamington Town Centre has now become a real option for shoppers with a mobility difficulty.

Thanks to Leamington Shopmobility scheme, disabled and older people as well as those with temporary mobility difficulties can borrow wheelchairs and scooters free of charge to get to the shops and public amenities.

The scheme which opened its doors in 2003 has gone from strength to strength with a membership now approaching 600. Both residents and visitors have found the scheme plays a vital role in enabling them to retain their independence. One scheme user said, 'I not only enjoyed myself, but was also able to shop and move about without days of pain afterwards. Thanks for your patience and training, Leamington Shopmobility scheme has gone

some way of improving an old lady's quality of life."

The scheme is run by disabled and older people who can draw directly on their own personal knowledge to assist customers. It employs a small team of staff who come from a variety of disability based backgrounds to ensure that its users are fully trained and confident before leaving their premises within the Royal Priors shopping centre.

The Shopmobility service is free of charge in Leamington and is supported by Warwick District Council and the National Lottery. Anyone with a mobility difficulty (whether temporary or permanent) who wants to use the service can do so Monday to Saturday between 10.00am and 5.00pm.

First time users are advised to bring 2 household bills on their first trip. Shopmobility staff can be contacted on 01926 470450 or call into their unit on 4th Floor Royal Priors Car Park for details.

Stage Character 'all shook up' by diabetes

A FREE theatre performance, aimed at raising awareness of diabetes and encouraging testing is to be given in Coventry. The one-act play, All Shook Up, will be held at Methodist Central Hall in Warwick

Lane. City centre, at 7pm on Thursday, March 2.

The Pyramid Theatre Company was commissioned to stage a play by the West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority, the National Primary Care Development Team and Diabetes UK.

It centres on lorry driver and Elvis impersonator Frank and his efforts to come to terms with diabetes. To book a seat, phone Tracy Aish on 024 76 323850.

Unspoken signals could lead to fear

Coventry Citizen

Most of us take for granted that we can judge how people are feeling from their tone of voice, expression, or general body language. But for people with Asperger Syndrome (AS) understanding these unspoken messages can be extremely hard, leading to frustration, anger, fear and even violence,

AS is a form of Autism, a common condition that affects the way a person communicates and relates to others. Traits of Autism common to AS include difficulties in communicating and making relationships, and lack of imagination.

A support group for those with the condition exists in Coventry to raise awareness and support those who

have it and their carers, families and friends.

James Fletcher, 18, of Cheylesmore, is a member of the group; He suffers intense anxiety in social situations and was singled out and bullied when he was younger.

He said: "It affects the way you communicate with other people socially, you can struggle meeting new people and I have a phobia of groups. I see Coventry as threatening. I find it quite scary being alone and I would rather be with someone else. I avoid eye contact with people because I'm afraid of what they might think of me."

Mike Smith, aged 46, of Holdsworth Crescent in Holbrooks, also has AS and says people with the condition have to 'work out' other people's emotions, the same way someone else has to work out a puzzle or a maths equation.

He explained: "We have to work it out as we go along, we lack animal instinct for reading emotion that other people have. We are extremely literal; people might ask if you can shut the window and you say "Yes I can" and that's taken as sarcasm."

Ray Richmond, 54, of Cheylesmore, wasn't diagnosed with AS until after 50. He raised a family and worked as a Researcher Manager for the NHS, but for years didn't know what the problem was. He said: "When I

was younger I had the impression that I wanted the world to stop so I could catch up. It's frustrating when you miss the body language and social clues given by other people so your angry reaction is very unexpected and over the top, according to them. I used to walk miles just to calm down, but it's a neurological difference and it's not our fault."

For more information on the support group, ring Social Services' user development officer - Sinder Mahil, on: 024 76 833513.

Move to put services under one umbrella

Coventry Evening Telegraph

People in Coventry are being asked for their opinions on plans to merge mental health, learning difficulties and substance misuse health organisations in the city.

The West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority want to combine the three different primary care trusts into a single body, claiming it would have a bigger budget and provide a better service for its client groups.

The move is being backed by the PCT's of Coventry, Rugby and north and south Warwickshire, as well as Coventry City Council and Warwickshire County Council.

Now people who use these services or are affected by them are being asked for their comments on the proposed merger.

To get a copy of the full consultation document outlining the proposals, phone: 0800 0887055 or e-mail: mental.health.reconfigurations@swarkpct.nhs.uk

It is available in a number of languages, including Urdu, Punjabi and Gujarati, and in Braille and large print.

A number of public meetings about the planned merger are taking place soon – details at www.wmsha.nhs.uk

Comments on the proposed merger can be sent to: Mental Health and Learning Disability Reconfiguration Project Office, PO Box 4319, Warwick, CV34 9BU; or made over the phone on: 0800 0887055. The deadline is Friday, April 28.

Special Educational Needs Information Mornings

If you would like to get information about voluntary organisations and support groups or you have a child who is having problems at school and you need information – The Parent Partnership Service for Special Educational Needs will be holding Information Mornings within the Children's Information Service,

Central Library in Coventry on the following dates:-

Wednesday 29th March 2006

Wednesday 17th May 2006

Wednesday 14th June 2006

Wednesday 27th September 2006

Contact them on: - 024 76 678365 to make an appointment or to get more information.

Spring Conference

The National Association of Special Educational Needs will be holding a Spring Conference on Wednesday 22nd March 2006, at 7pm – pm at Elm Bank Corporate Training Centre, Mile Lane, Coventry, CV1 2LQ.

The conference will explore the views of children with disabilities or special educational needs. The conference will be led by Professor Ann Lewis, of Special Education and Educational Psychology in the School of Education at Birmingham University. Professor Lewis has written extensively in this field. Her research interests include the methodology of child interviews and national/international policy concerning SEN and Inclusion.

This conference is open to parents/carers and professionals.

Individual/School Members and Concessions - £10

Non-members - £15 (Refreshments included)

For more information e-mail
Sue Devenport at: -
sue.devenport@ntlworld.com

Residents get a say in ambulance service

Coventry Citizen

Residents are to get their say over controversial proposals which could see their ambulance service become part of the largest in the world.

The government is looking at merging the service with West Midlands, Hereford and Worcester, and Staffordshire Ambulance Services to create a regional organisation for the 'west central area.'

This would make it responsible for around five and a half million people, across nearly 6,000 square miles.

A survey has now been launched by the city council to gauge public opinion.

Health Scrutiny chair, Labour Cllr. Joe Clifford, said: "We are fortunate in Coventry to have an excellent ambulance service. I am concerned by the government's proposals, and I want clear reassurances that if the new regional trust is created, the quality of our local service will not fall.

"Reorganisations like these can take months or even years to sort out, and I have yet to be convinced that the hoped for 'positives' outweigh the potential 'negatives'. I hope that by obtaining evidence from experts and the public, the scrutiny committee can agree a robust and clear response to these proposals."

The survey can be accessed via the "Consulting Coventry" section via the Council's website, at: www.coventry.gov.uk

Research Reveals Problems

Coventry Citizen

Older people living in the city sometimes go for months without speaking to another person, according to research.

More than 90 elderly Coventry residents were interviewed in an attempt to discover the problems they face, and isolation and loneliness came out as the most common.

The study was carried out for the Coventry Partnership, which is made up of public, private, community and voluntary organisations, and aims to improve local services, particularly in less well-off areas of the city.

Kay Millar, project manager for act-uk, which carried out the research for the partnership, said it was time

the 'forgotten' generation was highlighted.

"I think many people will be surprised to realise just how many people in Coventry don't leave their house, or go for months without talking to a single person," she added.

Of those questioned for the research, 20 volunteered to meet agencies such as the city council, Whitefriars Housing Group, Age Concern, and Coventry's Older People's Partnership, to discuss ways of improving the situation.

Kay continued: "Because we don't see or hear (older) people, this does not mean they do not exist. Family breakdowns, language barriers, mobility problems, bereavement and mental health issues mean there are hundreds of older people across Coventry who may not have left their homes in years, or very rarely do so. By looking at how to reach these people now, we can ensure the right changes are made for future generations."

Ideas discussed in the project include a new befriending scheme to encourage volunteers to visit older people in their homes and take them out.

Plans are also being looked at to expand the emergency button schemes in the city so residents can use them to talk to a named contact for general help or simply for a chat.

Disabled neighbours faced with fear of losing community

Louise Price and Andrea Jones two young disabled women are faced with losing their homes when Coventry City Council demolish their purpose-built flats in Cygnet Court in order to make way for a massive building development for the City College. Louise and Andrea are among several tenants living in both Cygnet Court and Orwell Court who are objecting to the compulsory purchase of these two blocks of flats, as they want to remain living in their purpose-built flats.

These, flats which are owned by Orbit Housing Association, are ten years old, are to have a compulsory order placed on them so that the City College will be able to build new college premises on the site. These new college buildings will be part of the Swanswell Initiative.

As a result of Coventry City councillors from all parties kicking up a huge fuss over the plight of these young disabled people, the Council will be committed to finding alternative accommodation for these young people. The council's latest idea is to offer Orbit Housing Association a piece of land on the corner of both Canterbury Street and Raglan Street in Hillfields. However, either the Council or Orbit

Housing Association shortly are going to put in a planning application to build a replica as close as possible to both Cygnet Court and Orwell Court on the site.

Louise Price, who is a wheelchair user, says that she would not feel safe living in that part of Hillfields. She also says that although there are lots of students living in the area, there is no community spirit.

Andrea Jones, who has a mental illness, says that not knowing what the future holds for her is adding to her stress. She goes on to say that she would miss the sense of community that she gets from the families who live close to both Cygnet Court and Orwell Court. Mrs. Jones also says that both the doctors' surgery and the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital are nearby, and that they get on well with the people and the families who live in the red brick houses across the road from their flats. They are also known by the local shopkeepers.

Mr. John Mutton, the Labour Opposition leader of the council has written to all twelve tenants living in the flats trying to arrange to meet with them. Ms Price says that she is willing to meet with him. Mr. Mutton says that more purpose-built accommodation is needed for disabled people.

CDP Membership

If you know of anybody who would like to become a member of CDP, receive our newsletter and have voting rights at our Annual General Meetings, please pass this membership form to them. Membership is free for all disabled people and can be registered by phone or email on:

Tel: - 024 76 675802

E-mail: - info@cdp.org.uk

Otherwise please fill in the membership form on the next page and send it to: -

**Council of Disabled People
Room 6 Koco Building
The Arches, Spon End
Coventry, CV1 3JQ**

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name:

Organisation: (if appropriate)

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Address:

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E-mail:

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I prefer to receive my newsletter
(please tick)

Print

E-mail

Audio Tape

Large Print

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