



**ANNUAL REPORT**  
April 2007 - March 2008





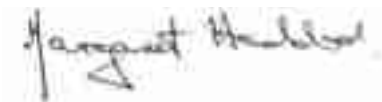
## Chairperson's Statement

I was delighted to take up the position as Chair in January 2008 and I must take this opportunity to thank our outgoing Chair Ken Roulston for his leadership over the past number of years. Ken has ensured that the organisation has a strong strategic direction and governance. I would also like to thank our outgoing Board members Tom Coard and Margaret Castles and I am pleased to welcome back to the Board some old faces including John Carberry and Gerry Maguire.

A key area of our work has been the development of a five year strategic plan. Disability Action's Board recognises the challenges we will face over the life of this strategy. The key challenge in all of these areas is the need to embed disability issues in the mainstream of policy, practice and provision and to provide disabled people with increasing opportunities to contribute their views and experiences to assist in the building of a fair and inclusive Northern Ireland society. As we move into the second decade of the 21st Century we will support disabled people to increasingly demand that their rights are recognised, respected and met.

We look forward to working with disabled people, their families and supporters, our board, our members, central and local Government, the private and NGO Sectors and in particular with our staff, our most valuable resource in delivering this innovative and exciting plan.

I would like to finish by thanking all our staff whose professionalism and commitment continue to ensure that we are able to deliver on our strategic objectives.



Margaret Haddock, Chairperson

## Chief Executive's Message

2007-2008 proved another challenging and stimulating year for Disability Action. We experience the very welcome effects of the return to devolved government through renewing and reinforcing relationships with our elected representatives.

One key challenge in this reporting period has been our response to new and stringent tendering processes. In particular, the provision of Door-to-Door transport services in the Belfast area, and the introduction of the Department for Employment and Learning's new Workable programme. Both tenders required an innovative approach which stressed not only quality but competitiveness.

In relation to the development of policy and practice our work with the Electoral Office and in particular the Chief Electoral Officer has proved very worthwhile as demonstrated by the decision to have disability as a focus of Electoral Registration Week.

Significant staff time was devoted to participation in the Bill of Rights Forum established by government to formulate recommendations to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission as it fulfils its statutory duty in providing advice to the Secretary of State on a future Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Disability Action has also played an increasingly important role in UK disability politics, establishing relationships with the Office for Disability Issues in Whitehall and making key presentations to Equality 2025 on its first visit to Northern Ireland.

We look forward to next year with a firm focus on delivering on our long term strategic plan.



Monica Wilson, Chief Executive





## Senior Management Update

Disability Action's Senior Management team continues to work to ensure that the overall strategic objectives of the organisation are met. Following a review of strategic priorities by the Board last year, 2008 saw the implementations of the 2008/2013 strategic plan. This plan has identified the following strategic priorities:

- Supporting inclusion
- Changing attitudes
- Influencing government policy
- Organisational development

The organisation continues to deliver a range of programmes in support of these priorities and was successful in 2008 in securing the contract for Belfast Door-to-Door transport provision, a service that it had delivered for the last 15 years. The organisation is also considering applying for the NI Quality Award in order to benchmark the quality of its service provision. The Quality Award is scored using the EFQM model and by undertaking this process it will assist us in the organisational development strategic priority.

2007/08 represents the eighth consecutive year of organisational surplus. Financial trends over the year have included the continuation of the transition from government grant to contracted services through tendering processes and more and more government departments adopting the principles of full cost recovery and output based funding in the determination of grant awards.

2007/08 has been a challenging year for the Senior Management Team. With the implementation of a new Strategic Plan in 2008 the Senior Management Team look forward to continue leading the organisation ensuring it works to meet its long term strategic objectives thereby creating a more inclusive society for people with disabilities and their families.

The Senior Management Team is made up of:

Monica Wilson, Chief Executive

Kevin Doherty, Director of Services

Dermot McCluskey, Director of Finance



## Organisational Development

### Diversity Management

Disability Action undertook a Diversity Management Programme to help the organisation embrace and celebrate the differences of its increasingly diverse workforce. As part of the process, a Diversity Audit was conducted which found that the organisation is clearly an equal opportunities employer often going beyond legal compliance in the workplace.

Several recommendations came out of the audit, some of which have already been implemented. These include the appointment of a small team of Diversity Champions, the introduction of a Diversity Policy and a Carers Policy and adopting of a more flexible approach to the setting of the customary holiday systems. Other recommendations are currently being implemented such as the organisation of diversity workshops for all staff and the development of an outreach programme to encourage more applications from the black and minority communities.

### Healthcare Scheme

Disability Action conducted a staff survey in April 2006, following which an action plan was developed. One of the areas within the action plan sought to address the issue of stress levels across the organisation and more specifically to consider introducing a staff 'healthcare package' that would include a stress counselling telephone helpline.

Disability Action has linked up with Birmingham Hospital Saturday Fund (BHSF) to offer employees a healthcare package with benefits including confidential stress and health care helplines which can be accessed 365 days a year, discounted health screening, assistance with dental and optical care.

This package is being offered as part of Disability Action's overall commitment to staff health and wellbeing, to enhance the organisation's terms and conditions and to reward staff for their continued hard work and commitment.

### **Job Shadowing**

Another action arising from the survey was the job shadowing scheme which gives staff the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the knowledge and skills required for other roles within Disability Action. Several members of staff have availed of this opportunity to date and feedback has been very positive.

### **Learning and Development**

Learning logs for all staff were introduced this year. These will give Disability Action vital data on its return on investment in staff learning and development. Records show that there was a breadth of learning across the organisation during the year ranging from professional qualifications in Accountancy and Human Resources through to First Line Management qualifications, Basic Sign Language courses and Diplomas in Supported Employment.

### **Policy Development**

Several new policies and procedures were introduced in the reporting year including a career break policy and an internet and email policy. There were also amendments to existing policies and procedures such as the maternity policy and the authorized absences from work policy, in line with new legislation.



## Access

### Aim

To ensure the highest standard of access to the built environment by increasing awareness and influencing attitudes amongst those who have responsibility for the design and management of the built environment.

### Outcomes

One of the projects the Access Team has been working on this year is with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to establish a quality assessment package for hotel accommodation in Northern Ireland. This package will assist the providers to meet their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and will help people with disabilities when sourcing holiday accommodation. There is currently no information available to disabled people when booking accessible accommodation and there is conflicting advice for hoteliers in designing accessible rooms and services. The Access Team interviewed a range of hoteliers, disability organisations, and disabled people across Northern Ireland and researched tourism information services across the world. It is hoped that we can devise an accessibility scheme which will work for everyone and that can be extended to other accommodation providers.

### Unit Statistics

- Dealt with 1346 enquiries.
- Vetted 520 planning applications.



# Business Support Scheme

## Aims

- To encourage businesses to work towards a model of good practice in relation to disability in their organisations.
- To create a calendar of events to encourage networking and promotion of the business support scheme.
- To increase scheme membership.

## Outcomes

There are currently 10 active members of the scheme, representing a mix of private, voluntary and government businesses. Networking events took place during the year and topics covered included Diversity Management, Reasonable Adjustments and how to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. A review of the scheme is currently under way in order to quality assure its aims and objectives. It is anticipated that the results of this review will be implemented next year.

## Unit Statistics

Providing a wide range of employers in Northern Ireland with expert information on Diversity Management and Reasonable Adjustments.

# Community Development



## **Aim**

To work with people with disabilities and carers from areas of social and economic disadvantage to ensure they have the opportunity to participate in civic society and have their voices heard.

## **Outcomes**

From November 2007 to January 2008 the unit hosted 15 consultation meetings on the barriers faced by people with disabilities in accessing transport. 109 disabled people and 40 disability organisations participated. The consultation covered Blue Badge Scheme, pedestrian zones, parking, Door-to-Door, taxis, Shopmobility, training information and attitudes. The main conclusion of the report was that whether you live in an urban or rural area of Northern Ireland, accessing transport for people with disabilities is key to living an independent life. In achieving the goal of a fully accessible transport system people with disabilities have got to be involved in the planning and delivery of the service. When city, town and village planners are developing pedestrian zones the active participation of disabled people is a crucial element in providing a pedestrian zone that meets the needs of everyone.

## **Unit Statistics**

- 15 consultation events.
- 109 disabled people participated.
- 40 disability organisations involved.



## Centre on Human Rights for People with Disabilities

### Aim

To secure the human rights of people with disabilities in Northern Ireland and to foster a culture of human rights for disabled people through education, capacity building, campaigning, lobbying, influencing and legal challenge.

### Outcomes

The Centre on Human Rights has supported a group of people with disabilities in establishing the REAL (Rights, Empowerment, Action and Lobbying) Network of Human Rights activists. The REAL Network welcomed a visit of support from Archbishop Desmond Tutu in July 2007.

**Paul:** I have been a paraplegic (T5/6) since an accident in 1980. I am attending the training programme and it has stopped me drowning in frustration at not being heard. I will be able to lobby for my rights and those of other disabled people.

**Gerard:** I am 47 years old and live in Belfast. I was born with a disability to both hands but this did not hold me back a great deal. I lost my leg in 2005 and now I am in a wheelchair. Since I have joined the REAL network my outlook has completely changed for the better and I am looking forward to the challenges ahead of us all. I know we will be a voice to be reckoned with in the years ahead.

**Stephen:** Being a member of the REAL Network has meant that I have found out I have the same rights as everyone else. I won't be treated like a second class citizen because of my disability.

**Terry:** Being part of the REAL Network has broadened my views on other people's disabilities. I really feel I have a focus and for the first time in years I don't rely on so much medication.



## Unit Statistics

- The Centre has advocated on behalf of 39 individuals, one quarter of whom are disabled in multiple ways.
- The Launch of the 'My Life, My Right, My Choice' Health Campaign on 4 December 2007 was attended by 110 key stakeholders from the human rights, disability and health & social care sectors. As part of the campaign over 700 printed copies and 1500 CD-Roms of the 'Disability, Human Rights and Healthcare Toolkit' were distributed.
- Both attendance and completion levels of the human rights training programme are at 90%+.

# Count Us In

## Aim

To increase the participation of disabled people in the democratic process.

## Outcomes

Ann Marie is part of the North West Working Group. These are her thoughts:

“I feel very enthusiastic since joining the project and now see the potential to bring about change. Our local MLAs and MP now know us personally. The women in the group and me really feel that our politicians are engaging with us and we will affect change. Definitely I have more confidence in the political process and as a group we feel less isolated. I now know and understand how to access the system more. In the past, our group would never have had face to face meetings with politicians and it just feels more tangible. As a group we now realise that blind and visually impaired are the largest single disability group here – there are more of us than there are civil servants in Northern Ireland. I now realise that if we get active and engage they (politicians) have to take our views on board. Who knows where it will lead?”

## Unit Statistics

- Minister for Transport Mr Conor Murphy visited the Derry Count Us In group to discuss issues around transport.
- Articles have been printed in Agenda NI and Ability NI.
- The Count Us In project made a presentation to the Equality 2025 group.
- Through direct and indirect means, the project has reached out to an estimated 13,000 people.





## Diversity Works

### Aim

To develop a diversity management process for use in different employment sectors in Northern Ireland.

### Outcomes

Diversity Works piloted a diversity management process with three employers over an 18 month period in 2005/07. One of the organisations involved was Abington Manor Care Centre, a private care home for older people with mental health difficulties and people with physical and learning disabilities, run by the Wilson Group. At that time just over 50% of the staff of Abington were from outside Northern Ireland and cultural differences were causing difficulties.

An evaluation of the pilot revealed that staff were more willing to ask for meetings and to approach managers / directors about problems and with suggestions. Since the new communications policy, developed during the pilot, relationships were better and no complaints had been received about the use of different languages in the workplace. In conclusion it was firmly believed that diversity management was increasingly something that businesses need to think about and that government should invest in diversity management support for Northern Ireland.

### Unit Statistics

- 266 people were involved in the Moving on Diversity Pilot Study. 12 articles were published on websites / publications and 15 presentations made on the findings of the study.
- For the 39 participants involved in the 'Hard to Deal With?' Research Study, on average, there was a 52% improvement in personal skills.
- 17 employers from 3 EU countries participated in a visit to Portugal.
- 5 papers were produced and distributed to a mailing list of over 500.

# Fundraising

## Aim

To significantly increase overall levels of income for the organisation.

## Outcomes

The Gala Ball was principally sponsored by BT Vision and is the central, public element in a 3 year partnership that will enable both organisations to support our mutual customer base and which will enable Disability Action, through financial and in-kind support from BT, to bring the benefits and availability of IT and telecommunications to disabled people across Northern Ireland. As part of the 3 year partnership, the 2010 Gala Ball will also be sponsored by BT.

Highlights for the Fundraising Unit in the period under review included the Corporate Golf Challenge and our 2008 Gala Ball.

## Unit Statistics

- The Corporate Golf Challenge, supported by Belfast International Airport raised £9,000.
- The Gala Ball which took place in February 2008, raised £35,000.



# Information and Policy

## Aim

To provide specialist information and advice on disability issues.

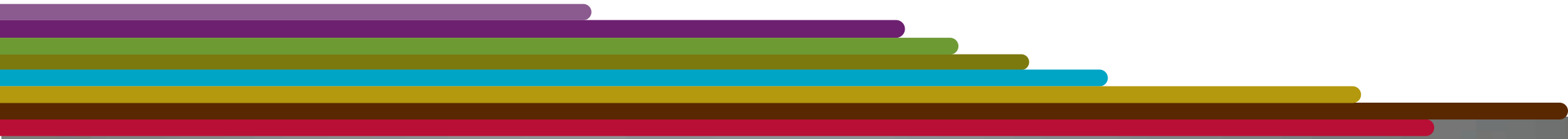
## Outcomes

Miss Crothers was referred to the Information Unit by a statutory agency following difficulties with her son's benefit payments. Her son has learning disabilities and Miss Crothers manages his affairs for him. Miss Crothers had been able to claim Child Benefit and Income Support for her son until his 20th birthday as he was in full-time, non-advanced education. However this entitlement ends when the young person with disabilities turns 20 and they then have to claim in their own right. Miss Crothers was unsure what Departments to contact and how to establish a new claim for her son. An Information Officer advised her and also assisted in filling in the necessary forms.

Miss Crothers was delighted with our help and said, "I have so much stress in my life looking after my son and always want to make sure I am doing the best thing for him. Disability Action Information Officers have been a major source of support and information for me and I couldn't manage without them."

## Unit Statistics

- 95% of people rated the services as very good.
- In excess of £1.2million was generated in benefit entitlement for people with disabilities.
- Responded to 20,300 enquiries.





# Marketing

## Aim

To lead on all corporate marketing activity, provide support to Disability Action's services and projects and to deliver their objectives in terms of publications and other marketing material, public relations and events.

## Outcomes

The Marketing Unit produced a variety of publications and organised a number of events including assisting Diversity Works with their final publications and the Centre on Human Rights for People with Disabilities with the development of the Health Campaign. On a corporate level the unit ensured that profile packs and folders were kept updated as well as the website. The preparation for the Disability Exhibition in May 2008 was a key area of work due to the high level of organisation that this event requires.

The Unit continues to take the lead in all press enquiries. On average we respond to three media enquiries a week. These are wide ranging but often include ensuring that journalists are using the correct information in their news items.

## Statistics

- £9,981 worth of print press coverage generated.
- 17,370 people visited [www.disabilityaction.org](http://www.disabilityaction.org)

# Switched on Communities

## Aim

To support voluntary and community organisations by technology training and providing equipment.

## Outcomes

Louise has a visual impairment which has caused her some problems with using the computer in work. She experienced difficulty in seeing the font on the screen and viewing keys on her keyboard.

We explained how to adjust the settings on Louise's computer to increase font size and change the contrast to make the font more visible. Having looked at a variety of different keyboards Louise felt that the most suitable was the 'Kid Glove' as it had the benefit of larger font on the keys and also had a protective glove to prevent damage by possible spills. Having made simple changes Louise was able to work more efficiently. She has now a higher level of accuracy and works more independently.

## Unit Statistics

- Recruited 12 voluntary and community organisations this year across Northern Ireland, in addition to the 10 recruited last year.
- Over 500 individuals have been reached through the project in the last year.
- Over 25 individuals from community organisations have attended assistive technology training at Disability Action.



# Mobility Centre

## Aim

To provide a quality mobility and driving assessment service.

## Outcomes

Joe Boyd has Cerebral Palsy and in early 1994 he began a course of driving lessons but unfortunately at that stage it was not possible for Joe to pass his test. He went to study at university where he had to devise methods to cope with the high pressures of exams.

On completion of his education, Joe began to investigate whether similar coping methods would enable him to drive. Subsequently, Joe started taking driving lessons again. Joe says, “Without exaggeration, passing my driving test will make a positive, life-changing difference to my personal circumstances.”

“There is a definite glass-ceiling for those who cannot achieve independent mobility. I have worked in journalism for a number of years and it is fair to suggest that it would be impossible to progress beyond a certain level in this and many other careers without a driving licence. More importantly, it becomes increasingly difficult to socialise independently without a car as you get older. Friends become involved in raising their own families, parents become less able and regular use of suitable public transport can lead to a drain on financial resources. All of this leads to a grown man or woman with a disability feeling like a ‘31 year-old 10 year-old’ who is dependent of the goodwill of others to have a life. Having a private life and forming deep personal relationships outside the family becomes difficult or impossible. Having the ability to drive independently is the difference between living life as one’s own person or simply living to suit others.”

Thanks to the support of his Disability Action instructors, coupled with his determination and perserverance, Joe is nearly at the stage of applying for his driving test.



## Unit Statistics

- 721 driving assessments completed.
- 1728 driving lessons conducted.
- 13 people have completed their training and passed their driving tests.
- 8 drive - from - wheelchair assessments completed.



# Pathfinding

## Aim

To encourage women with disabilities to take the first step and think positively about establishing a business venture.

## Outcomes

Dympna McVeigh took part in the 8 week Pathfinding programme delivered in Dungannon at the end of 2007. Dympna came to the course with an interest in buying the franchise for Accessible Travel & Leisure, the UK's specialist travel agency formed in 1997 to create barrier free holidays for people with disabilities.

Dympna embarked on the Pathfinding programme prior to taking the final step and buying the franchise. During her time on the programme her key areas of learning included; introduction to enterprise, the entrepreneur, ideas generation, marketing, finance, presenting a business idea and sources of support. Working in a small group with other women with disabilities, who too have experienced barriers, enhanced the support and encouragement and created a positive experience for Dympna. The training programme was delivered in a way that was totally inclusive and in an environment that allowed women, like Dympna, to explore the possibility of enterprise before making that final commitment.

## Unit Statistics

- The programme was delivered in 4 areas across Northern Ireland, with 43 participants starting the programme, exceeding the original target of 32.
- 37 women with disabilities successfully completed the programme.
- All participants reported satisfaction with the reasonable adjustments made to ensure the course met their needs.



GO  
for  
Women

New Pathways  
to Female  
Entrepreneurship

Department for  
Business, Innovation  
and Skills



# Support Works

## **Aim**

To provide small group or one-to-one learning support to trainees with the highest support needs on mainstream government training programmes across Northern Ireland.

## **Outcomes**

Trainees with significant disabilities have been working towards an ASDAN qualification relating to the environment. They are gaining knowledge on aspects of renewable energy and recycling. One aspect of the course is to visit a recycling centre and they have been collecting bottles, cans and paper to bring to the centre. The course gives trainees with significant disabilities an insight into the importance of a healthy environment and how they can contribute to this.

## **Unit Statistics**

- Learning support delivered to 30 trainees with the highest support needs on Jobskills and Training for Success.
- Support Works staff provided support to trainees in 14 Training Organisations across Northern Ireland.
- Trainees achieved qualifications in ASDAN, NVQ Levels 1 & 2, Essential Skills and CIBT Health and Safety Examination.





## Training Support

### Aim

To support the inclusion of young people with disabilities in mainstream government training programmes.

### Outcomes

Lorraine McNulty was following an NVQ level 1 qualification in Retail and Distribution at Clanrye Training Services through the Jobskills programme. The Training Support Worker supported her across her 3 years of training on work-placement, benefit issues and liaising with her Training Organisation. She grew both in confidence and in skills for work in her chosen area, and after a number of work placements she was placed with Eurospar in Newry.

Lorraine developed her skills and abilities in placement and demonstrated that she could be a dependable and committed worker. The Training Support Worker negotiated employment for her through the Workable programme to allow for ongoing support in the transition to paid employment. Lorraine has made excellent progress and is happy in her new job.

### Unit Statistics

- 232 young people with disabilities were being supported to participate in the Jobskills programme and 100 young people in the Training for Success Programme.
- Over 60% of leavers progressed to employment, further education or training.
- 100% of respondents to our service user evaluation found the Training Support Worker's visits useful or very useful.





[www.IKEA.co.uk](http://www.IKEA.co.uk)



# Workable



## Aim

To support the inclusion of people with disabilities in employment under the Workable (NI) and Employment Support Programmes.

## Outcomes

During the year, Disability Action was successful in placing two people with disabilities with the new IKEA store at the Hollywood Exchange, Belfast under the Workable (NI) programme. Disability Action staff were impressed from the outset at the company's approach to recruitment and selection. IKEA co-workers were very inclusive and aware, and welcomed the Placement Officer's involvement, both in giving disability specific advice and as a support to individual employees. Alan Martin and James Johnson started employment with the company in October 2007 in preparation for the store's long awaited opening on 13 December 2007. Despite being such a large organisation, the Human Resources team and individual supervisors were positive and enthusiastic, showing real interest and commitment to including their new workers in a busy and dynamic work environment. Both Alan and James have risen to meet the challenge of their new roles which they thoroughly enjoy. Alan says, "IKEA has a family type atmosphere which is very friendly and the management give both support and encouragement. I like the job because it is a multi-cultural environment and everyone helps each other out as a team member. There are more opportunities for me to develop as an individual and also to develop my skills with IKEA."

## Unit Statistics

- By March 2008 177 people with disabilities were being supported under Employment Support.
- By March 2008 75 people with disabilities were being supported under the new programme, Workable (NI), building momentum with local employers and disabled people.
- The staff team has doubled with the introduction of the Workable (NI) programme to ensure that Disability Action can meet its support commitment to people with disabilities using its services.



# Transport

## Aim

To provide transport services for people with disabilities who are unable or find it difficult to use public transport.

## Outcomes

Disability Action operates a Door-to-Door transport service for people with disabilities in the Belfast area and a group service. There are 4 fully accessible minibuses which member groups, clubs and organisations can hire for trips either on a one-off or regular basis. Trips can be organised to destinations throughout the UK.

- “Door-to-Door is my lifeline with the outside world; I meet and make friends while travelling on the bus.”
- “A great service, my wife and I are very thankful and are always treated with help and kindness by all the drivers.”
- “I use a rolator, thank God for the bus; I can go to town or Yorkgate. The service is wonderful.”
- “An excellent service which I appreciate very much. Everyone is helpful and friendly.”
- “The service is very good and without it I would be housebound, I hope it continues.”
- “Thank you for your kindness and support.”
- “Excellent service, there are many people who would not get out of their homes without the service.”
- “I look forward to going out on the bus, the drivers are very efficient and helpful.”

## Unit statistics

- Over 30,000 Door-to-Door passengers carried, and tender won for new Door-to-Door service in Belfast.
- Over 8,300 passengers carried on 849 group bookings.
- 86% of respondents to Customer Survey rated the helpfulness of the driver as good or very good.

# Board of Directors

01 April 2007 to 31 March 2008

## Honorary Officers

Mr Ken Roulston	(Chair until 05 December 2007)
Mrs Margaret Haddock	(Chair from 21 January 2008)
Mrs Margaret Haddock	(Vice Chair until 21 January 2008)
Mr Ronnie Hanna	(Vice-Chair from 21 January 2008)
Mr David Mackey	(Honorary Treasurer)

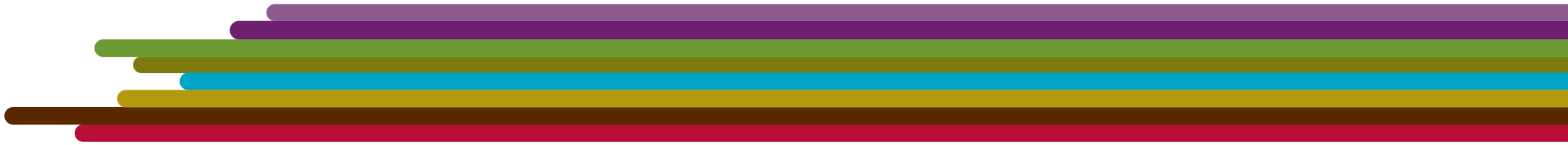
## Chief Executive

Ms Monica Wilson O.B.E.	(Secretary)
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## Directors

Mr Tom Alexander	(from 11 January 2008)
Mr Carlton Baxter	(from 25 February 2008)
Miss Elizabeth Black M.B.E.	
Mr John Carberry	
Mr Tom Coard	(until 05 December 2007)
Mrs Margaret Castles	(until 05 December 2007)
Mr Liam Deane	
Mr Ronnie Hanna	(until 21 January 2008)
Mr Gerry Maguire M.B.E.	(from 05 December 2007)
Mr Hugh McPoland	
Mr Kevin Traynor	







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