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PRESS RELEASE

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Record £5,000 for disability discrimination

26th March 2008 – District Judge Weston, sitting at Kingston-upon-Hull county court, awarded a record £5,000 damages for disability discrimination against a golf club proprietor and former councillor.

Mr Langdon, who uses a wheelchair, attended a family celebration at Sutton Park Golf Club in Hull. Unfortunately for him and his family, their evening was spoilt by the limited access to the club and in particular to the toilets. This resulted in extreme humiliation and embarrassment for them.

With the help of Hull's Choices & Rights Disability Coalition, Mr Langdon approached the proprietor, Mr Webster. He refused to respond to any phone calls or letters.

Sheffield Law Centre then assisted Mr Langdon to enforce his complaint in Hull county court. At the hearing on 26th March 2008, District Judge Weston found that Mr Webster had failed to acknowledge not just the humiliation and inconvenience caused to Mr Langdon but also his complaints of discrimination. He ordered Mr Webster to pay £5000 compensation, plus court costs, within 21 days.

Speaking after the hearing, Mr Langdon said,

“We’d have been happy with an apology at first but he just would not respond to us. It makes you feel as if you’re of no consequence. In the end, we felt we had to take the complaint to court.”

Douglas Johnson, Disability Rights Worker at Sheffield Law Centre said,

The Disability Discrimination Act was passed into law in 1995 but there have been very few cases where disabled people have enforced their complaints against service providers in the county court.

The compensation awarded recognises the humiliation Mr Langdon went through on that evening and sends a clear message to service providers that disabled people can and will bring complaints to court where they suffer unlawful discrimination.”

Christopher Cole, Chair of Sheffield Law Centre, said,

This is a very good example of Law Centres developing equalities work and bringing cases of real benefit to people. It should now encourage businesses to improve their access to the public.

Mark Baggley, of the Choices & Rights Disability Coalition, said:

"It is particularly surprising that the proprietor, Mr Phil Webster, ignored our requests as he was formerly a Cabinet member on Hull City Council and we thought he would be more aware of his responsibilities."

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 prohibits discrimination on grounds of disability. It applies to the fields of employment, education, goods and services. Part 3 of the Act requires service providers to make "reasonable adjustments" to their services so as to provide as close a service as possible to that provided to other members of the public. Service providers may make adjustments to their policies or practices, as well as to any physical barriers on their premises.
2. Disabled people who have been discriminated against unlawfully can bring a complaint in their local county court. Where discrimination has occurred, county courts have the power to award compensation for "injury to feelings" – this is to cover humiliation, embarrassment, inconvenience and stress, even where there has been no financial loss.
3. At the hearing on 26th March 2008, District Judge Weston referred to the following cases in setting the award of damages:

[Vento v Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police \(No.2\) \[2002\] EWCA Civ 1871](#)

[Purves v Joydisc Ltd 2003 IRLR 420](#)

[Potter v Canterbury Christ Church University \(Canterbury county court\)](#)

[Shaban v Wharfe's Restaurant and Tea Rooms \(Yeovil county court\)](#)

4. This case represents the highest level of compensation to date for a case brought under Part 3 (non-employment cases) of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
5. Sutton Park Golf Club is run privately and is separate from Sutton Park Golf Course, which is run by Hull City Council.
6. Sheffield Law Centre is a registered charity and provides specialist legal advice in social welfare law. The disability rights post is funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. There are 60 law centres altogether in the UK, supported by the Law Centres Federation.
7. For further information, please contact Douglas Johnson, Disability Rights Worker at Sheffield Law Centre, Waverley House, 10 Joiner Street, Sheffield S3 8GW. Tel 0114 273 1501, fax 0114 279 7778 or e-mail Douglas@slc.org.uk