

London Pride plays host to new Labour Deputy Leader

2nd July 2007 15:18

Tony Grew

Harriet Harman rounded off the most exceptional month of her political career with a powerful address to London's gay community on Saturday.

Speaking in Trafalgar Square to a crowd of tens of thousands of LGBT people and their supporters, the newly-elected Deputy Leader of the Labour Party welcomed the appointment of an openly lesbian MP to a ministerial role and pledged herself to continuing the fight for equality.

As well as being appointed Leader of the House of Commons, Ms Harman was named Minister for Women by Gordon Brown last week.

It is thought she will take responsibility for equality issues, including gay rights, as part of that brief, though that has yet to be confirmed by Downing St.

However, that would mean moving the Women and Equality Unit, headed by former Stonewall head Angela Mason, from the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Ms Harman appeared on stage with Angela Eagle MP and told the assembled crowd:

"This is my first public appearance as Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and this is the first public appearance of our new treasury minister Angela Eagle.

"I think we should celebrate her appointment here today. I think today is a day of celebration but also a day of determination.

"We are celebrating the progress that has been made. It was in the 1970s, those first gay pride marches, in the 1980s section 28, then in the 1990s when Stonewall and other organisations built a truly mass movement.

"I think that we should celebrate the progress that we have made in government with the new civil partnerships, we are putting gay couples on the same footing as everyone else when it comes to adoption, and we introduced new laws to outlaw homophobia and discrimination in the work place.

"But this is not just celebration, because we all know that there is further to go, and that this is a day of determination too.

"We are going to have a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights that will mainstream the battle against homophobia. We are going to have new work in schools to tackle homophobia, more work within the police and the criminal justice system to prevent and deter homophobic crime.

"We have come long way but further got to go and I am just going to hand you over to my sister in government, Angela Eagle."

Last week Prime Minister Gordon Brown appointed Ms Eagle to a junior Treasury minister, the first and so far only lesbian in the government.

"Hello Pride. I can tell you as someone who nominated Harriet to be our deputy leader in the Labour Party, when she is on your side, and she is as you have just heard, she gets things done, so we are going to have a great few years consolidating and extending LGBT rights in this country," Ms Eagle told the crowd.

"And I am going to be doing what I can do to help, but I can't help and Harriet can't help if you don't help us. So have a great Pride but remember this still work to be done."

Earlier, the Mayor of London appeared on stage with his two young children, who promptly attempted to sabotage his speech by lying on one of the speakers and trying to grab the microphone.

Gay revellers were highly amused as Mr Livingstone exclaimed:

"No you can't make a speech yet son, no you can't take the microphone away, Thomas I will get cross, you don't want grumpy Daddy, do you? No. Thank you."

After the children were ushered off stage, the Mayor spoke about the attacks on London on July 7th 2005 and of his determination that the terrorists would not win:

"One thing I remember so vividly from that horrible weekend two years ago was the speech that was made by a religious leader, a Baptist minister in the United States of America.

"His response to the 52 Londoners that died was that he thought it should have been more because this is a city that tolerates homosexuality.

"So let's send a message. This has become a good city for people of a different sexual orientation to live in.

"We follow places like San Francisco and Copenhagen and Amsterdam.

"But let's never forget these are few secure, isolated areas, in a world still awash with bigotry and hatred.

"We used to see a situation a hundred years ago where gays and lesbians would be beaten to death and the police would turn a blind eye. That is still the situation for tens and millions of our comrades and sisters and brothers around the face of the planet.

"So let's celebrate Pride in London today. Let's do all the things we can for those people in other cities who still live in fear and oppression. Peter Tatchell, who was on the march today, viciously beaten by fascist thugs in Moscow, that's still the situation.

"So as well as enjoying this city, do something to help those who are still facing the position we were in half a century ago."

The Mayor also told the crowd of his pride that London will be hosting the Gay and Lesbian Football Association World Championships next year.

In the run up to the 2012 Olympics, Mr Livingstone said we will celebrate our diversity.

"This is a gay and lesbian city, it's a Muslim and Hindu city, it's a straight city, it's a city for every nationality and religion in the world."

The organiser of Riga Pride took to the stage to make the very point the mayor had.

People are having to fight for their rights across the world.

ITV Local have extensive coverage of this year's Pride, including the preparations for the event.