

Note of Meeting

Northern Ireland Stakeholder Group Meeting

**Tuesday 6 December, 11.30 a.m. – 3.00 p.m.
The Mount Conference Centre/Zoom.**

Permanent Members Present

David McDonald, Chair
Niqi Rainey
Caroline Wheeler
Frances McHugh (via Zoom)
Michaela Hollywood
Robert Dallas
Collette Jones

Affiliate Members Present

Amanda Paul
Bryan Myles

ILF Scotland Representatives in Attendance

Linda Scott
Lee House
Emma O'Neill
Peter Scott (Via Zoom)
Liz McGarrity
Jackie Aitken
Harvey Tilley (via Zoom)
Robert White

Department of Health Representatives in Attendance

Colin Dunlop
Peter Toogood (Joined meeting 12:30)

Permanent Members Apologies

Kieran McCarthy

List of Actions:

1. Colin and Linda to discuss uplifting the PA rate by 12% in advance of April 2023 and backdating to 1 April 2022. (Complete)
2. Lee to share links from Michaela to the communication team on PA support and future landing programme.

1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies and Housekeeping

David welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked if everyone was happy for the audio of the meeting to be recorded for minuting purposes. All agreed.

David advised that Michaela Hollywood and Robert Dallas had been invited and had agreed to join as Permanent Members and, on behalf of the Group, welcomed them especially.

David advised also that, in due course, Peter Toogood, Deputy Secretary, Social Services Policy, would be joining us, on behalf of Peter May, Permanent Secretary, Department of Health, so that we might thank them in person for their continuing and robust support of the Independent Living Fund.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The previous meeting's minutes were approved and will be uploaded to the website. ILF Communications Team to action.

Actions points from previous meeting:

1. Future agenda point for next meeting to be added about Policy 26 and being an Award Manager. (Complete)
2. Lee to set up a further two meetings on Zoom for the Group to discuss Advanced Care Planning and the Consultation on the Reform of Adult Social Care. (Complete)

3. Matters arising

David advised that he had written, on behalf of Members, to Robin Swann MLA, Minister of Health, thanking him for his support for us and his support for re-opening the Fund and asking him to consider in the meantime reducing the Available Income required and increasing the Maximum Award; and, subsequently, with the leaving of the Minister, to Peter May, Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health, thanking him for his support and inviting him to join us in person at this meeting.

David asked Linda to comment on Employers' National Insurance contributions for Recipients and whether this had been included in the most recent ILF Scotland Newsletter. Linda confirmed this had been included.

David reminded Members of the intention to have a joint Advisory / Stakeholder Group Gathering in Scotland later this year. As before, Members expressed their enthusiasm. Peter, Harvey and Linda advised they will be working on this as soon as possible.

4. Re-opening of the 2015 Fund in Northern Ireland

David informed the Group that, at a meeting of the Disabled People's Parliament, in December, representatives from each of the 5 main Parties confirmed their commitment to the re-opening of the Fund. David then invited Colin to give us any update he might have on the re-opening of the Fund. Colin advised the Group that matters regarding the re-opening of the Fund are in a similar position from his last update at the previous meeting: that until the budget is agreed for the next 3 years nothing can be confirmed.

5. ILF Available Income Reduction

David thanked everyone involved for their hard work in supporting the reduction in Available Income contributions. Colin advised the Group that, before his departure, the Minister had agreed to reduce the contribution that Recipients make to their ILF Award to £43.00 per week from £103.00 per

week, effective from 1 October 2022. Colin added that he hopes that further down the line there will be an opportunity to abolish this completely.

6. PA Remuneration, Recruitment and Retention

David expressed his thanks and that of Members to Colin, Linda, Harvey and Peter and everyone else involved in the Department and Independent Living Fund Scotland for working with such dedication and determination to support us, to reduce the Available Income requirement and to increase the Fund's current rates and asked them to elaborate on the matter. Colin advised the Group that to help support the recruitment and retention of PA's, in October 2022, the Minister announced an additional £7.1 million for Direct Payments. This will allow Trusts to increase the DP funded PA hourly rate to £14.75 gross i.e. inclusive of any holiday pay, pension/insurance costs, etc. and represents an increase of 12%. Colin confirmed that to try to achieve parity, ILF Scotland will also be able to apply an increase to PA hourly rates and backdate any increase to 1 April 2022. Linda confirmed that this involves a considerable amount of work, looking at each award and component and considering what increase can be achieved within the overall available budget. ILF Scotland will begin the preparatory work as soon as possible and Linda will liaise with Colin around a suitable increase for ILF funded PA hourly rates with a view to implementing this as early as possible in 2023. There was a request from several members of the Group to consider uplifting these rates earlier in the financial year in the future. Members referenced the fact that the Minimum Wage increases at least in April each year and, as employers, Recipients and Award Managers are required by law to ensure they pay this rate, which can be difficult if not impossible if the monies received do not match the Minimum Wage. The issue of backdating was also raised, noting that a lump sum paid to a PA could affect means tested benefits such as Universal Credit. Colin, Peter, Harvey and Linda confirmed that the Department and ILF Scotland would give further consideration to this and the timing of the payments.

Linda advised also about the Minister's agreement to increase the maximum award to £1,000 for Group 1 and £600 for Group 2 Recipients and noted the benefit that this would bring to those Recipients whose awards are at or close to the previous maximum award levels of £815 and £475 respectively. The increase will allow ILF Scotland to incorporate increases to Provider / PA rates that they would not previously have been able to do.

David welcomed Peter Toogood, who was attending in Peter May's place, in response to our invitation to Peter May to join us, and reiterated our discussion above and expressed our heartfelt thanks to Peter May, Peter himself, Mark McGuicken, Colin Dunlop and everyone else in the Department who worked so hard to support the Independent Living Fund, its Recipients, Award Managers and PAs. Peter expressed his sincere thanks for the invitation and his real pleasure at being with us.

7. Review Visits Update

David invited Robert, Jackie and Liz to speak to this matter. Robert advised the Group that the review visits have been complicated to complete due to the Trusts dealing with the recovery from the pandemic and a social care staffing shortage, which makes it difficult for the Trust to provide a Social Worker from the Trust to attend reviews. Liz and Jackie stated they will work closely with Recipients and Award Managers to support changes to PA rates, Available Income reduction and the increase to the Maximum Award.

8. Advance Care Planning

David reported that he had met with Emma to discuss Advance Care Planning and asked Emma to elaborate on the matter. Emma advised that the Department of Health has published guidance on the policy for Advanced Care Planning on its website. ILF Scotland will post this on its website and on social media channels and will email to all Group Members.

9. Charter for Involvement

David asked Linda to provide us with an update on the progress of the Charter. Linda advised that staff have made good progress in implementing the Charter actions. Linda will provide an update to the Group and the Board and will publish a revised plan on the website in April 2023. Emma will set meetings to discuss this further with the Group in quarter one of 2023.

10. Public consultation on future of Muckamore Abbey Hospital NI

Emma advised that the consultation closes on 24 January 2023. The consultation consists of three questions. Members voiced their feelings on the matter and desire to contribute to the consultation. Emma confirmed Lee will send out an invite to a meeting in early January to discuss a submission.

11. Any Other Business

Michaela asked if ILF Scotland could share the links to a training programme for PAs, which she was involved with. Michaela advised there is a landing programme to be launched in February 2023 that ILF Scotland could also share. Lee to discuss with the communication team on how to proceed.

Caroline asked if we could add an agenda point for the next meeting about supporting Award Managers in line with third parties doing the job. David agreed to consider the matter.

12. Next Meeting Arrangements

Tuesday 7 March 2023, 11.00 a.m. – 3.00 p.m., The Mount and on Zoom