Independent Living Fund Scotland

We also support independent living in Northern Ireland

Note of Meeting

Northern Ireland Stakeholder Group Meeting

Tuesday 3rd September, 11.00 am to 3.00 pm 2024

The Mount Conference Centre and via Zoom

Permanent Members Present

Caroline Wheeler

David McDonald, Chairperson joined via Zoom.

Niqi Rainey

Robert Dallas joined Meeting at 12.46.

Affiliate Members Present

None (asked to absent)

ILF Scotland Representatives in Attendance

Peter Scott

Harvey Tilley

Linda Scott

Robert White joined at PM via Zoom

Lee House

Karen Burnett via Zoom

Permanent Members Apologies

Frances McHugh

Collette Jones

Affiliate Members Apologies

None (asked to absent)

List of Actions:

1. Lee/Linda to write to all Permanent Members who have not attended sufficient Group Meetings since before Covid-19, in accordance with our Terms of Reference, to ask them to confirm that they no longer wish to remain with the Group.
2. David to confirm with Kieran that he has formerly stepped down as Vice Chairperson.
3. Linda/Colin to ask an adviser/expert on Universal Credit to attend an upcoming Stakeholder Meeting.
4. David to follow up IMMNI membership.
5. Linda to email out changes to the Terms of Reference for Permanent Members to review and agree, alongside the Group name change & Election of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson, with their respective roles and responsibilities.
6. Lee to email out Christmas Lunch arrangements.

1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies & Housekeeping

David welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

Lee Informed the Members of the fire exits.

2. Minutes from Previous Meeting

The Group approved the previous Meeting's minutes. ILF Scotland's Communications Team will upload to the website.

Actions from previous Meeting

List of Actions:

- David to ask an MLA to sponsor an event, to celebrate or promote the reopening of the Fund, at the NI Assembly (done).
- Harvey to explore how ILF Scotland can help (pending).
- Linda to request a NMW Increase for Independent Living Funding (done).
- Linda and Lee to arrange a joint meeting. (done)
- Harvey to investigate constituting the Group as a DPO (done).
- Linda to investigate membership for IMNI Disability Forum (done).
- Lee to email Helen McLaughlin and check membership status. (done no response)

3. Matters Arising

Caroline raised concerns about the continuing delay in increasing the ILF hourly rate for this current financial year and its financially detrimental impact on PAs who are on Universal Credit. Caroline raised concerns also about the misalignment in periods of payment, some being four weekly and others being monthly. Caroline asked for more information on how to manage Universal Credit and these issues. Linda and Colin agreed that they would invite an adviser/expert on Universal Credit to attend an upcoming Meeting.

Niqi referred to the item discussed at the last Meeting about the Stakeholder Group qualifying as a Disabled People's Organisation (DPO). Niqi said she believed that this might not be possible. Harvey informed the Members that they received no legal advice as yet on this matter, but it had been discussed internally. Linda stated that the Terms of Reference would need to be changed if this was to be actioned. Peter said that he liked the suggestion but the Group would have to be

constituted differently to be a DPO and ILF Scotland would have to make changes firstly before this could happen. Members agreed not to proceed with the matter and remain constituted as they are now.

Linda informed the Members that sending a Representative to the Disability Forum of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for Northern Ireland (IMMNI) is allowed for in our Terms of Reference. Members agreed to propose that we send a Representative. David agreed to follow this up.

4. Hourly Rate Increase

Linda informed the Members that a submission has been made to the Government in Northern Ireland regarding hourly rate increases, to ensure it is in line with the National Minimum Wage increases, and backdated payments. Colin informed the Members that the submission was currently being considered and a decision was expected to be made later this month.

David remarked that this needs to be actioned in April to allow Recipients and their Award Managers, together with any third parties involved, to comply with their legal obligations to increase PAs wages in line with the National Minimum Wage at the decreed time, usually the beginning of each financial year, namely April. Making the monies available to Recipients and their Award Managers later in the financial year and expecting backdating to be satisfactory causes considerable problems including for PAs in receipt of Universal Credit. Caroline concurred that the payment being made in April is important, for all concerned, not least to keep within the line of the law.

Peter agreed to highlight the Universal Credit issue to Colin when considering the paper for wage increases and payments.

5. Policy Update

Linda informed the Members that there was not much to update on currently, except that, in Scotland, following the re-opening of the Fund there, a policy change to the maximum award has been made. The maximum award for the re-opened fund is £330 per week.

Linda added that the main focus has been on the re-opening of the Fund in Scotland and ensuring that applications are being completed as promptly and properly as possible.

6. Re-Opening of 2015 Fund Review

Colin Informed the Members that he is currently working with his team to submit the case for re-opening the Fund to the new Minister, Mike Nesbitt, MLA, adding that that submission is due in for consideration this month. David asked had Deena received any reply from the Minister to her second letter to him, which included reference to reopening the Fund. Colin agreed to check if there had been any reply.

7. Terms of Reference

The Members discussed their concerns about the increasingly small number of Members and its impact on having enough of a quorum to make decisions. Linda confirmed that the Group's Terms of Reference require 5 Permanent Members to be present for a quorum and any decisions to be agreed. Peter informed the Members that the ILF Board Quorum is currently 3. The Members discussed and agreed changing the number for a quorum to 3 also, in order to move ahead effectively.

Linda suggested she send out revised Terms of Reference, with the suggested changes, to enable all Permanent Members, including those not present today, to agree this change by email. The Members present agreed this.

8. Name of Group

Linda Informed the Members that the Advisory Group in Scotland had originally been called the Recipient Advisory Group but had changed this to the ILF Scotland Advisory Group to make it clear that they were not providing advice to recipients. David had suggested NI Advisory Group. Niqi raised a couple of concerns, one being that if someone joining the Group would be committed to giving advice, the other being that the name of the Group could have an impact on attracting members. David expressed concerns that stakeholders implies more than Recipients and Award Managers and was too broad a term for who we are. David added

that the only people we are advising as an Advisory Group are ILF Scotland and relevant local Government Representatives. David concluded by pointing out that the Advisory Group in Scotland were not experiencing difficulties by using the name and that, indeed, their Membership had increased.

Robert joined the Meeting.

The Members agreed to change the name to ILF Northern Ireland (NI) Advisory Group.

Linda agreed to send out this change along with the Terms of Reference suggested changes.

9. Membership Matters

The Members agreed this had been covered in a previous agenda point.

10. Centre for Independent Living NI Proposal

Peter Informed the Members that Deena Nimick had been appointed as Campaigns and Policy Manager for the Centre for Independent Living Northern Ireland (CILNI). David added that it's Chief Executive Officer, Bryan Myles, who had been an Affiliate Member until recently, had written to the Group asking that consideration be give to Deena taking his place. The Members thanked Bryan and Deena both and wished their thanks recorded but agreed that our Terms of Reference did not allow Deena's Membership any more than it did Bryan's, as a representative of an organisation rather than an individual in their own right. David suggested that we consider alternative opportunities to avail of Deena's and Bryan's experience, expertise and enthusiasm, which would form part of the Members' later discussions.

11. Election of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson.

Peter suggested that within other communications to the Group, the description of the roles and responsibilities, as detailed in the Terms of Reference, be included so that Members can review them if considering putting themselves forward for the posts. The Members agreed.

Peter, Harvey and Colin left the Meeting.

12. Christmas Lunch Arrangements

Lee agreed to email out Christmas Lunch details in coming weeks.

13. Disabled People's Parliament

David Informed the Members about the re-establishment of the Disabled People's Parliament and asked might they be interested in attending? The Members agreed their interest in doing so and to attend as either individuals or Members of the Group. David agreed to keep them informed of developments and the next meetings of the Parliament.

13. Re-Opening Of 2015 Fund Again

David raised concerns about the length of time it has taken to try to persuade will Department of Health here to reopen the Fund in NI, the more so since Scotland has reopened Its Fund nearly 9 months ago. David reckoned it will soon be time to escalate matters and wished to suggest the following staged approach:

invite the new Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt, MLA, to meet us, to encourage him to reopen the Fund in NI;

identify potential Recipients to join us in the meeting;

re-establish the Working Group;

organise an event at the Assembly to spotlight the life-giving properties of the Independent Living Fund and our quest to reopen it for others like us, inviting the new Minister of Health and other MLAs to join us at it;

present our quest to the Health Committee and ask for their support;

invite MLAs to ask questions of the Minister of Health about reopening.

David Informed the Members that he has invited an MLA to sponsor the event and reserve the Senate Chamber, at Parliament Buildings, Stormont for a 2-hour duration on a Monday or Tuesday in December.

David added that we should invite Jim Elder-Woodward and the Scotland Advisory Group to the event.

Niqi suggested a new Recipient of the re-opened Fund in Scotland make a video or come to the event in person to exhort the impact of now having the funding.

Linda recommended that re-establishing the Working Group be discussed with Colin.

The Members agreed to proceed with all the above in turn as warranted.

14. Promoting PAs

The Members discussed the role that is required of PAs. Caroline stated we need to recognise them as Personal Care Assistants and the difference between a Carer and PA. David recommended that initially the value of the work of PAs paid with Independent Living Funding be the focus. Emma agreed to explore this.

Linda informed the Members that in terms of promoting PAs, ILF Scotland have completed a case study on Joan Turner who is a member of the Scotland Advisory Group. Chloe McKee who is also a member of the Scotland Advisory Group is writing a blog with her PA. Caroline stated she would be happy to take some of this work forward in NI via online discussions. The Members agreed this should be discussed in more detail at the next Joint Stakeholder Meeting which is taking place in Mid-October.

David left the Meeting.

15. Any Other Business

The Members agreed to keep the re-opening of the Fund in NI high on the agenda with an updated submission with the latest figures. Linda agreed to ask Peter and Harvey to follow up.

16. Next Meeting Arrangements

Next Meeting is Tuesday 10 December with Xmas Lunch