

## Note of Meeting

# Northern Ireland Advisory Group

Tuesday 3 June 2025, 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm

The Mount Conference Centre and via Zoom

## Permanent Members Present

David McDonald (Chairperson)

Frances McHugh via Zoom

Michaela Hollywood via Zoom

Caroline Wheeler via Zoom

## Affiliate Members Present

Amanda Paul

## ILF Scotland Representatives in Attendance

Peter Scott via Zoom

Claire Henry

Harvey Tilley

Emma O'Neill

Karen Burnett via Zoom

Lee House

Sandra Sweeney

Jackie Aitken via Zoom

Brendan Burns

## **Other**

Colin Dunlop via Zoom at P2P

Mark Bates Insurance - Leona

## **Permanent Members Apologies**

Robert Dallas

Niqi Rainey

## **1. Housekeeping, Welcome, Apologies and Introductions**

Lee Informed the Members of the fire exits and confirmed there were no fire drills planned for today.

David welcomed everyone to the Meeting and accepted apologies.

## **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:**

1. Peter to write to the Minister of Health, inviting him to the Event (Done).
2. David contacts Danny Donnelly to check dates for the 10-year Celebration Event (Done).

3. Lee to schedule meeting to discuss 10-year Celebration Event (Done).
4. Niqi to discuss with Caroline the possibility of Incorporating ILF matters on the Direct Payments Users NI Facebook Group.
5. Communications Team to prepare Question and Answer insert for post to Direct Payments Users NI Facebook Group.
6. Peter to discuss with companies like CILNI about the possibility of cover arrangements for Award Managers if sick.

### **3. Matters Arising**

Brendan joined as a new assessor. Discussion focused on enhancing the Direct Payments Facebook user group to provide comprehensive information about Independent Living Fund (ILF) to over 7,000 members, addressing questions on funding, employment policies, and support. Linda would like to understand the content to be used and shared on the group page. The group agreed that sharing as much about what ILF Scotland does and FAQ to help support any questions. David mentioned explaining what ILF Scotland does, who receives the funding and links to the website policy page. Linda keen to avoid confusion on the page with what the Trust offers with direct payments.

#### **Direct Payments User Group and ILF Information**

Caroline and Niqi have admin rights on the Direct Payments Facebook page and plan to add ILF-related content and Q&A to support users.

Users inquire about insurance, hourly rates, holidays, maternity pay, Universal Credit, and conflicting advice from social workers.

Admins manage posts closely to maintain respectful communication and provide peer support, referring complex issues to solicitors and other organisations.

There is a need to clarify distinctions between ILF and Direct Payments to avoid confusion.

Groups like this exist but are less active in Scotland.

### **Action Items**

- Sandra, Emma, and Caroline to review the Facebook page content and assess issues raised to determine group input.
- Follow-up regarding collaboration with local organizations (sell, ICMS) to offer users support choices.
- David to manage correspondence about joining the Independent Mechanism Northern Ireland (IMNI) group for reporting on United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

## **4. Annual Uplift**

ILF uplift of 9.78% is approved, pending final Scottish Government sign-off expected imminently.

Implementation anticipated by end of month, backdated to 1 April.

Delays in trust payments cause budgeting difficulties for recipients.

Uplift applies only to directly employed personal assistants, with a wage cap at £18.53 per hour; self-employed rates differ.

Memorandum of Understanding among ILF Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Scottish Governments signed, enabling progress.

## **5. Mark Bates Insurance**

**Employers' Liability Insurance:** Covers serious illnesses or injuries occurring because of employment, with policies typically retained for 30-40 years for such latent claims. It also includes protection for incidents caused by employer fault, for example, injuries due to unrepaired hazards.

**Public Liability Insurance:** Applies outside the home and employment relationship, covering damage or injury caused to third parties, for example a wheelchair accidentally damaging a public member's property.

**Property and Workplace Safety:** Employer's duty to maintain a safe environment. Issues with housing association properties were raised, highlighting the use of health and safety policies and documentation of efforts to secure timely repairs.

**Healthcare Training and Certification:** Challenges securing formal recognition or certificates from trusts for PA training were discussed. The insurance perspective requires training to be delivered by a medical or healthcare professional with documentary evidence (email or certificate) including trainer and trainee names, task details, and training date.

**Insurance Coverage for Healthcare Tasks:** Specific policies exist for healthcare tasks carried out by PAs, with premiums based on the number of trained healthcare PAs. Temporary or bank staff are

excluded. Coverage also protects against potential harm PAs could cause to care recipients.

Delegation Panel in Trust (Northern Ireland): Established following advocacy, this panel issues certificates and monitors training, but similar consistent structures are lacking elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

Use of Private Sector Training Providers: Private providers can be accepted if trainers are appropriately qualified healthcare professionals.

Virtual training is permissible if the trainer is suitably qualified, though face-to-face is preferred.

Redundancy Cover for PAs: Included in some policies but requires strict adherence to legal processes to avoid employment tribunal risks.

Temporary PA Replacement: Enquiry made about insurance coverage when substituting a PA temporarily, pending further investigation.

### **Action Items**

- Follow-up on insurance coverage options regarding temporary PA replacements; responder (David) to report findings.
- Sharing detailed information about the Trust delegation panel with interested parties to promote consistent training standards across Northern Ireland.
- Encouragement for employers to document all communications regarding workplace safety and repairs to demonstrate reasonable efforts.
- Consider contacting insurance provider for clarification on acceptable training providers and evidence required.

## **6. Policy Update including Employer NI, Feedback from ILF Board, Feedback Strategy**

### **Feedback Strategy**

Emma sent out a draft to gather feedback.

The first stage was to draft a copy then develop Charter. Working group within casework and assessors to feedback further. The last action is to format statements and gather further feedback to enable them to sign off.

- ILF uplift of 9.78% is approved, pending final Scottish Government sign-off expected imminently.
- Implementation anticipated by end of month, backdated to 1 April.
- Delays in trust payments cause budgeting difficulties for recipients.
- Uplift applies only to directly employed personal assistants, with a wage cap at £18.53 per hour; self-employed rates differ.
- Memorandum of Understanding among ILF Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Scottish Governments signed, enabling progress.

### **Employment and Payment Challenges**

- Significant confusion exists over employment rules, insurance policies, funding entitlements, and budgeting for direct payments.
- Issues arise with redundancy payments, insurance coverage, and trust financial assessments.
- Some recipients face conflicting advice and problems due to inconsistencies across different trusts.
- Calls to establish a dedicated direct payments group for recipients to discuss problems and influence policy.

## **Other Notes**

- Discussion on sleepover rates and employment appeal tribunal outcomes highlighted differences between Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Admins are vigilant about unregistered agencies advertising in the group to protect service users.
- Feedback strategy underway including the creation of a service charter outlining expected service standards to users.
- Universal Credit informational notes circulated and well received.

## **Next Steps**

- Continue refining ILF content for the Direct Payments user page to support diverse inquiries.
- Complete coordination with relevant organizations to enhance service options.
- Monitor and facilitate implementation of the ILF uplift payment.
- Consider establishing a direct payments recipient group to address widespread challenges.

**Michaela Hollywood left the meeting 2.30 pm**

**Leona (Mark Bates) left the meeting at 2.30 pm.**

## **Board Feedback**

Peter advised that the board need to recruitment as are two people short. They would like to recruit from Northern Ireland. This is managed by Scottish Government and not by ILF Scotland. The minister will make the final decision on this post.

The board have invited David and Jim to attend the meeting. The board have been invited the upcoming celebration events.

## **7. Terms of Reference**

Agreed to carry forward to the next meeting.

## **8. Re-Opening of ILF in NI**

Harvey advised the group that a submission has been provided with updated figures and details looking at how the Scotland re-opening has worked. A final proposal is now being worked on to submit to the minister.

## **9. 10th Year Celebration Event Planning**

Discussion focused on organizing the Life Worth Living conference celebrating 10 years of the Independent Living Fund (ILF) Scotland. The event aims to raise awareness about the social and human rights models of disability, showcase successful delivery of ILF grants, highlight their impact on disabled people and their families, and advocate reopening ILF in Northern Ireland. It is scheduled for 3 July in the Great Hall of Parliament Buildings, with attendees including ILF recipients from Northern Ireland, their representatives and personal assistants (PAs), other disabled people, family carers, ministers, politicians, government colleagues, public bodies, and the Third Sector.

### **Key Decisions**

- Date: 3 July (not 12 July).
- Venue: Great Hall, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.
- Sponsors: Three MLAs - Danny Donnelly, Robbie Butler, and McHugh.
- Event order: Arrival from 6:00 pm, registration and refreshments from 6:30 pm in the rotundas, event begins at 7:00 pm.

- Accessibility: British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreters to be provided.
- Invitations: Postal invitations sent in Scotland last Friday; email invitations to be sent this week, including to Northern Ireland attendees.
- Media: Holly is liaising with the Assembly and Department of Health regarding media invitations.
- Event recording: The event will be live streamed or recorded and posted afterwards.

### **Discussion Topics**

- Program includes speeches by David, ILF recipients, non-recipients, presentation on social return on investment by Finbar (if available), remarks by Minister Mike Nisbet, and closing by MLAs.
- Format envisions a panel with Frances, Michaela, Caroline, Nicky telling their stories collectively, followed by four non-recipients sharing theirs.
- David explained scheduling of a preparatory online session on 19 June to rehearse stories with recipients and non-recipients separately.
- Preparations are ongoing including a site visit to Stormont to discuss audio / visual needs, accessibility, and health and safety requirements.
- Consideration of seating arrangements based on expected turnout (hall can accommodate up to 200) once attendee numbers are finalized.
- Potential for representatives from this group to attend the related Scottish ILF celebration event on 25th June as observers.

## **Action Items**

- David and Linda to finalize invitation list and continue coordination with stakeholders including Danny Donnelly and Alice at Stormont.
- Emma to arrange BSL and ISL interpretation; Holly to manage media invites.
- Group members to prepare for online story rehearsal on 19 June (half 1 to 2 pm recipients, 2 to 3 pm recipients, 3 to 4 pm non-recipients).
- Plan site visit to Stormont post-19th June to finalize event setup.
- Verify venue availability aligning with dates and Scottish event on 25 June.
- Distribute event details and Scottish event invites to group members.

## **10. Future Meeting Arrangements**

Tuesday 16 September 2025