

Minutes

Northern Ireland Advisory Group

Tuesday 16 September 2025, 11:30 to 15:00

The Mount Conference Centre and via Zoom

Permanent Members Present

David McDonald - Chairperson

Niqi Rainey

Collette Jones

Affiliate Members Present

Amanda Paul (via Zoom)

ILF Scotland Representatives in Attendance

Peter Scott

Harvey Tilley

Linda Scott (via zoom)

Emma O'Neill (via zoom)

Lee House

Sandra Sweeney (via zoom)

Permanent Members Apologies

Caroline Wheeler

Michaela Hollywood

Frances McHugh

Robert Dallas

1. Housekeeping, Welcome, Apologies and Introductions

Lee informed the Members of the emergency exits and confirmed there were no emergency drills planned for today.

David welcomed everyone warmly, expressing appreciation for their continued commitment to the Advisory Group. Introductions were made, with attendees sharing their names and roles. This was particularly helpful for newer members and those joining remotely.

There was a sense of urgency about the future of ILF in Northern Ireland, with several members expressing hope for progress on re-opening the Fund. David referred to the challenges faced in securing meetings with political representatives and emphasised the importance of persistence and strategic advocacy.

Apologies were noted for members unable to attend, including those affected by technical issues. The Group expressed understanding and agreed to follow up with absent members to ensure they remained informed about key decisions and updates.

This item also prompted a brief discussion about improving accessibility for future meetings, including better support for remote participants and more timely communication in advance of sessions.

2. Minutes from Previous Meeting

Group members reviewed and discussed the minutes from the previous meeting and confirmed their accuracy. The previous Meeting's minutes

were approved and ILF Scotland's Communications Team will upload to the website.

Actions from previous Meeting

- Sandra, Emma, and Caroline to review the Direct Payment User Group NI Facebook page content and assess issues raised to determine Group input. (Ongoing)
- Follow-up regarding collaboration with local organisations (CILNI, ICMS) to offer Recipients the choice of additional support. (Ongoing)
- David to follow up the Group's request with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities Independent Monitoring Mechanism for Northern Ireland (IMNI) to become a member. (Ongoing)

3. Matters Arising

A meeting had been scheduled between Robbie Butler MLA, Mark McGuikin, and Colin Dunlop to discuss the re-opening of ILF in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the meeting did not happen, and no follow-up communication has been received.

The Group debated next steps, including whether to pursue the matter with the Vice Chair of the Committee for Health and to formally request an opportunity to present our case to it. There was consensus that the situation needed to be addressed diplomatically but firmly, to ensure the Group's concerns were taken seriously by political stakeholders. The Group agreed to make the request.

4. 10-Year Celebration Feedback

The Group reflected on the recent 10-year celebration event, which marked a significant milestone for ILF Scotland, highlighting the event's success in showcasing the impact of the Fund and the importance of independent living. The celebration was not only a moment of pride but also a strategic opportunity to raise awareness among stakeholders and the wider public.

Feedback from attendees was generally positive, with many appreciating the stories shared by Recipients and the emphasis on co-production. However, there were also logistical challenges and suggestions for improvement. For example, some felt that future events should ensure better accessibility for remote participants. The Group agreed that lessons learned from this event should inform planning for future engagements, particularly those aimed at influencing policy and public perception.

5. Policy Update

Linda spoke about ongoing work around the Charter for Involvement and the Feedback Strategy, both of which are central to ILF Scotland's commitment to co-production and continuous improvement. The Group discussed the need for more proactive engagement with politicians and officials.

There was also discussion around the uplift in payments, which had been processed more efficiently than in previous years. The uplift for Northern Ireland was notably generous at 9.78%, compared to 5% in Scotland, and included considerations for employer national insurance contributions. Members welcomed this progress, but Peter cautioned

that future funding to ILF Scotland from the Department of Health NI would need to increase to maintain service levels, especially given the likelihood of another national minimum wage hourly rate uplift next year.

Charter for Involvement

Linda presented an overview of progress in key areas of the Charter for Involvement, which includes twelve standards aimed at ensuring disabled people are meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lives. She highlighted progress made through joint Advisory Group meetings and co-production events, including the parliamentary event in Scotland, the engagement events to develop ILF Scotland's new Strategic Plan and the recent 10-year anniversary celebrations in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

She highlighted that the Charter's principles are embedded in ILF Scotland's strategic planning and in ongoing marketing and communications. Examples include case studies and the PA recruitment campaign that aim to emphasise independence and empowerment. Linda encouraged members to continue to identify priority areas for the Charter and to provide feedback on how it could be better implemented across services.

Feedback Strategy

Emma introduced the draft Feedback Strategy, which aims to formalise how ILF Scotland gathers and responds to feedback from Recipients, Award Managers, and other stakeholders. A draft Service Charter is included in the Feedback Strategy that sets out a number of service standards that people can expect from ILF Scotland. The aim is to achieve sign off from ILF Scotland's Board at its next meeting in November.

The Group discussed the importance of creating accessible and routine mechanisms for feedback. Emma invited members to suggest ideas about how people might share their experiences and needs, emphasising that feedback should inform service improvements and policy development. There was also discussion about aligning ILF Scotland's feedback approach with best practice from other organisations, and ensuring that responses are timely, transparent, and meaningful.

6. Re-Opening of ILF in NI

Members expressed frustration at the lack of accountability and questioned the sincerity of political support. David suggested raising the issue to the Vice Chair of the Committee for Health and copying relevant stakeholders into future correspondence. The Group agreed that advocacy efforts must continue, and that presenting directly to the Committee for Health could be a powerful next step. There was also discussion about involving disabled speakers in upcoming parliamentary events to strengthen the case for re-opening the Fund.

7. Sleepover Rates

The discussion around sleepover rates highlighted a disparity between practices in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, social care workers are paid the full hourly rate for sleepover shifts, regardless of whether they are actively working or simply present. In contrast, Northern Ireland still operates mainly on a fixed nightly rate, which may fall below the national minimum wage rate depending on the hours worked and the nature of the support provided. The emphasis is placed on the employer determining the nature of the shift.

David emphasised this might leave employers open to accusations of paying employees below the legally required minimum wage as detailed by HMRC and that he was awaiting clarification from Colin about whether the directions from HMRC applied in Northern Ireland.

8. Direct Payment User Group NI and ILF Information

ILF Scotland has recently joined the Direct Payment User Group NI Facebook group. At the request of the Advisory Group, ILF Scotland's communications team are asked to prepare a post to explain ILF Scotland's role and clarify that applications are not currently open in Northern Ireland. The aim is to raise awareness without causing confusion or false expectations. Niqi proposed featuring this post prominently on the group page and encouraging users to comment with questions, which would allow ILF Scotland staff to respond directly.

The Group discussed how best to manage ILF-related queries on the page and agreed that ILF Scotland's communications team should reply to any messages via the ILF Scotland Facebook account. If questions are raised via messages that ILF Scotland is not included in, Niqi / Caroline will alert ILF Scotland's Communications team. The Group emphasised the importance of clear, accessible communication, especially given the frequent confusion between ILF and Trust-managed direct payments.

9. Terms of Reference

Linda confirmed that the Terms of Reference for the Advisory Group are due for review in December. David raised concerns about the timing of

agenda and minute distribution, noting that receiving documents too close to the meeting date makes it difficult to prepare adequately. He proposed that draft minutes be sent to both the Chair and Vice Chair within a month of the meeting and that the draft agenda be sent to both two weeks in advance of the next meeting, allowing for collaborative review and input. Linda will revise the TOR and Lee will circulate to members for any comment prior to review at the December meeting.

Linda agreed and suggested scheduling a short pre-meeting with the Chair and Vice Chair to discuss the agenda and any emerging issues. This approach had worked well in Scotland previously and could help streamline planning and ensure all voices are heard. The Group supported this idea, recognising the need for more timely communication.

10. Any Other Business

It was noted that the transition from Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) to Universal Credit could significantly impact disabled Recipients. Sandra explained that transitional protections exist for current ESA claimants, but new applicants may face reduced support. The Group agreed that ILF Scotland should publish clear guidance on this issue via newsletters, social media, and the website to help Recipients navigate the changes.

Another concern was the growing complexity of award management, especially when family members acting as Award Managers become ill or unable to continue. Sandra shared a brief insight from a recent paper produced by ILF Assessors exploring alternative models, including third-party organisations. However, this option often lacks the depth of

involvement provided by family members. David suggested that Microboards should also be considered. The Group acknowledged the need for flexible, sustainable solutions and agreed to keep this issue on the agenda for future meetings.

Actions Points from today's meeting.

- Improve accessibility for future meetings, including for those participating remotely – Lee
- Ensure minutes and agendas are issued more timeously – Lee
- Communications Team to upload minutes of the June meeting to website – ILF Scotland Communications Team
- Ensure follow up regarding the meeting that was scheduled to take place between Robbie Butler MLA, Mark McGuikin, and Colin Dunlop to discuss the re-opening of ILF in Northern Ireland – David
- Ensure improved accessibility particularly for remote participants at future engagement events – Linda
- Share ideas about methods of sharing feedback – Advisory Group members
- Ensure ILF Scotland's feedback approach is aligned with best practice from other organisations and that responses are timely, transparent, and meaningful – Emma
- Raise re-opening of ILF in NI with the Vice Chair of the Committee for Health, copying relevant stakeholders into future correspondence – David
- Involve disabled speakers in upcoming parliamentary events to strengthen the case for re-opening the Fund – David

- Provide clarification from the DOH NI regarding the application of directions from HMRC regarding sleepover rates applies in Northern Ireland – Colin
- Prepare a post for the Direct Payment User Group NI Facebook group explaining ILF Scotland's role and clarify that applications are not currently open in Northern Ireland – ILF Scotland Communications Team
- Ensure that the post features prominently on the group page and encourage users to comment with questions, and share individual enquiries about ILF where required with the Communications Team – Niqi and Caroline
- Incorporate suggested changes to the timing and procedure for issuing minutes and preparing agendas to the Terms of Reference, due for review at the December meeting, and circulate to the Group - Linda
- Publish guidance on ESA via newsletter, social media, and the website to help Recipients navigate changes – ILF Scotland Communication Team
- Include Award Management on future meeting agenda when feedback is available from the ILF Scotland internal working group – Linda / Sandra

11. Day, Date and Times of Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 9 December 2025, with a proposed earlier start time of 11:30 a.m. The Group discussed the planning for the Christmas lunch, to be held at the Mount, and agreed to confirm dietary requirements in advance. The Group agreed to invite the Minister to the meeting and / or the lunch.