



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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PIP Policy Team
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
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Dear Sir/Madam,

DLA reform and Personal Independence Payment consultation response

At its meeting of 24 May 2012, the Committee for Social Development received a briefing from Disability Action on the DLA reform and Personal Independence Payment.

While Members recognise this as a worthwhile and vital document particularly given the incoming Welfare Reform Bill, they did express some concerns which are outlined below.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Pelan

**Dr Kevin Pelan
Clerk, Committee for Social Development**

Issues for Consideration

1. Reassessments

At its evidence session on this issue the Committee heard from Disability Action that it is proposed to reassess up to 1,000 people per week in Northern Ireland. The Committee believes that is unachievable and the Department therefore needs to reconsider this and establish a more realistic target.

The Committee is also of the opinion that meeting such targets should not be the Department's *overriding* aim and that getting the reassessment correct in the first place should be the priority. To this end there should be an effective quality assurance procedure in place in order to keep the number of appeals to a minimum.

However, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that there will be a significant number of appeals. The Department must ensure that the appropriate level of resources to deal with these reassessments is provided.

In order to deal with a potentially high number of reassessments it is the Committee's view that sufficient staffing resources must be provided and staff must receive adequate and timely training for dealing with these proposed changes. There must also be a workable and robust IT system in place to deal with demand.

2. 4 week period

The Committee believes that the 4 week time period within which a PIP claim must be made, once a person is notified of a requirement to claim, is wholly insufficient.

It is the Committee's view that many claimants will seek independent advice on how to complete the necessary forms and it is aware that there is currently a 4-6 week waiting list to access advice services in Northern Ireland. The Committee therefore believes that if the Department wishes the new system to be fully effective then claimants must be given sufficient time to complete the relevant forms. It is the Committee's view that this should be *at least* 6 weeks. Consideration should also be given to the availability of additional support to claimants in order to ease the transition from DLA to PIP.

3. Disability in Northern Ireland

The consultation relates to England, Scotland and Wales but DWP has stated that comments are welcome from organisations here. Given the higher rates of disability here compared to GB the Committee would wish to seek assurances that the Department will make sufficient representation to highlight the specific issues in respect of disability that relate to Northern Ireland before changes are introduced here.