

Written Ministerial Statement

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Health, Social Services and Public Safety

NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FUTURE SUPPORT OF INDEPENDENT LIVING FUND USERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Independent Living Fund (ILF) provides financial support through direct cash payments to disabled people throughout the United Kingdom to pay for care agency staff, or for the recipient to employ their own personal assistant.

In December 2010, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) concluded that, given the very different policy context to when the ILF was established in 1988, administering an increasing amount of social care funding outside the mainstream care and support system was no longer appropriate or sustainable.

DWP announced that the ILF would be permanently closed to new users, and that funding for existing users would be maintained until the end of June 2015.

In Northern Ireland, responsibility and funding for the administration and payment of ILF users will transfer from the Department of Social Development to my Department from 1 July 2015.

I am therefore pleased to advise the House of my decision to put in place new arrangements for the future support of users in Northern Ireland once the current ILF system comes to an end on 30 June 2015.

I have liaised closely with my counterpart in the Scottish Government, Health Secretary Shona Robison, and have reached agreement in principle with the Scottish Government, that payments to ILF recipients in Northern Ireland will be administered through the newly-created Scottish ILF infrastructure.

My decision to implement these new arrangements is underpinned by the outcome of my Department's public consultation on how ILF users in Northern Ireland would be best supported after the closure of the ILF. It was clear that the majority of respondents preferred Option 2: Form a successor body.

I consider that these new arrangements are the most cost-effective solution to ensure that ILF recipients in Northern Ireland continue to be supported and I am very pleased that I have been able to work with the administration in Scotland to achieve this agreement. Services will continue to be provided on the same basis and in line with the comprehensive series of policy documents which set out policy and procedure under which the UK ILF has operated previously.

Finally, I am confident that recipients of the ILF in Northern Ireland, their families and carers will welcome this important development; which underscores both commitments made by predecessors and my own determination that my Department should do all that it can to ensure that ILF recipients in Northern Ireland are not disadvantaged by DWP's decision.