



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

Paper 44/13

11 March 2013

NIAR 192-13

Eleanor Murphy

The Independent Living Fund

The Independent Living Fund (ILF) will permanently close at the end of March 2015 with responsibility for the support of ILF users transferred to local authorities in England and the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The purpose of this paper is to provide background information on the Independent Living Fund; the Coalition Government's rationale for the closure of the fund; and an overview of some of the concerns/issues raised by local stakeholders.

1 Introduction

The [Independent Living Fund \(ILF\)](#)¹ is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body of the Department for Work and Pensions (in GB), it was established in 1988 and is overseen by a Board of Trustees. The Fund provides financial support in the form of discretionary cash payments to help people with disabilities, throughout the UK, live an independent life in the community rather than in residential care. However, the Fund has been permanently closed to new applications since December 2010.

In December 2012, after a consultation exercise, the Minister for Disabled People (UK Government Minister) announced that the Independent Living Fund will close on the 31 March 2015. However, the Government gave a commitment that current awards will continue to be payable until this date. The Coalition Government claims that that the Fund in its current form is unsustainable. Currently, the fund is managed centrally

¹ Independent Living Fund website - www.dwp.gov.uk/ilf/about-ilf/

under the auspices of the Department for Work and Pensions, however, under the new proposals funding will be devolved to local councils in England and the devolved institutions in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Minister for Social Development has stated that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will be responsible for the support of current ILF users from April 2015².

2 An overview of the Independent Living Fund

This section looks at:

- The number of people in receipt of payments from the ILF in Northern Ireland and the amount of funding received; and
- The Fund's eligibility criteria.

How many people in Northern Ireland are in receipt of payments from the Independent Living Fund?

There are currently **741 people in Northern Ireland** in receipt of payments from the Independent Living Fund (there are 18,865 recipients throughout the whole of the UK). The average monthly payment in Northern Ireland is **£989.41**. The table below provides latest quarterly information (i.e. Oct-Dec 2012) on the number of ILF recipients and the average monthly payment by Health Care Trust and the total *actual* funding over that quarter.

Table 1: Independent Living Fund: Quarterly Results October to December 2012

Health Trust	Number of Recipients	Average 4 week payment over the Quarterly period	Total Actual Payment over the Quarterly period
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	142	£1,049.78	£459,321.77
Eastern Health and Social Care Trust	92	£1,082.76	£309,213.11
Northern Health and Social Care Trust	121	£825.97	£306,378.14
Southern Health and Social Care Trust	181	£896.85	£518,046.21
Western Health and Social Care Trust	205	£964.15	£606,502.55
Total	741	£989.41	£2,199,461.78

Source: Independent Living Fund Statistics, 2012.

The total amount of Independent Living Fund expenditure in Northern Ireland for the *last quarter* of 2012 was around **£2.2 million**³ (out of a total UK quarterly expenditure of around £78.2 million).

What does the Independent Living Fund pay for?

Payments can be used to⁴:

² Assembly Question – AQW 19553/11-15. Mr Chris Lyttle to the Minister for Social Development. Tabled 7 February 2013.

³ Independent Living Fund Quarterly Statistics for 2012. www.dwp.gov.uk/ilf/publications/corporate-publications/statistics/

- Employ a carer or personal assistant to provide personal and domestic care.
- Pay a care agency to provide personal care and help with domestic duties.

The ILF payments can be used for assistance with tasks such as toileting, bathing, washing, dressing, eating/drinking, shopping, cleaning etc. It cannot be used to pay for any care provided by social services or a relative who lives with the recipient, home maintenance or adaptation, gardening, bills, travel expenses, childcare.

Payments from the Independent Living Fund are reviewed on a continuous basis, at least once every two years. This is to evaluate if the persons circumstances have remained the same. When an award is reviewed, the ILF will check the record that the recipients have been asked to keep to show how the money has been spent. For this reason, many people find it helpful to keep their ILF money in a separate bank account.

If a person employs their own carer or assistant then funding can be provided to pay for National Insurance contributions, holiday pay and employers' liability insurance.

Who is eligible for payments under the Independent Living Fund?

To receive financial assistance, in most cases a person must:

- Be living in the UK for at least 26 weeks per year.
- Receive social services support worth at least £340 per week – this can include direct services or payments from their local health trusts e.g. attendance at a day centre.
- Receive or be entitled to the highest rate care component of Disability Living Allowance.
- Have less than £23,250 in savings or capital (including savings and capital of their partner).
- Be independently living in the community rather than in residential care.

How much will a person get?

The amount that a person is entitled to is based on how much care they need and how much it will cost. How much a person is expected to pay towards their care is taken into account.

If a person applied before April 1993, the maximum payment is £815 per week.

If a person applied after April 1993, the maximum payment is £475 per week.

Payments to current recipients of the ILF are made 4 weekly in arrears and are normally paid into the recipient's bank account.

⁴ Information taken from the NI Direct website - www.nidirect.gov.uk/the-independent-living-fund

3 What are the issues?

The prospect of closing the Independent Living Fund appears to have caused considerable anxiety amongst those currently receiving payments under the Fund. In July 2012, the UK Government published a consultation on the future of the Independent Living Fund⁵, a number of disability organisations in Northern Ireland responded to the consultation. Below is a summary of the issues they raised:

Disability Action (NI) state⁶:

- There was a lack of effective consultation on the closure of the Fund in Northern Ireland and Disability Action wrote to the Department for Work and Pensions on this matter. The Minister for Social Development and the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety must undertake effective local consultation.
- That plans close the Independent Living Fund (ILF) and instead promote the system of ‘personalised budgets’ (these budgets are current available in Great Britain) – Disability Action states that there is no system or legislation for personalised budgets in Northern Ireland to support this model of independent care and support for disabled people. The Northern Ireland Executive must set out clearly the policy intentions for the future of the Independent Living Fund in Northern Ireland
- The recently paper “*Who Cares? The Future of Adult Care and Support in Northern Ireland – A discussion*” does not make any reference to the future of the Independent Living Fund and this omission is a concern of Disability Action.
- The draft OFMDFM Disability Strategy has a specific priority for independent living for disabled people, Disability Action believe that the future of the Independent Living Fund in Northern Ireland must be considered in the Disability Strategy.
- The funding which was available via the Independent Living Fund is to be devolved to the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Administration. Disability Action is seeking clarification as to which Department will be responsible for the funding – DSD or DHSSPS? Is there a commitment from the Northern Ireland Executive that former ILF funding will be ring-fenced in Northern Ireland? Will ILF users have their existing levels of funding protected?
- Currently ILF funding goes directly to the individual and is managed by them. Will this system be replaced by Direct Payments⁷? Disability Action states that

⁵ Department for Work and Pensions (2012) Consultation on the Future of the Independent Living Fund. www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2012/future-of-ilf.shtml

⁶ Disability Action Response to the consultation on the Future of the Independent Living Fund, October 2012.

⁷ Direct Payments are cash payments, made in lieu of social service provision, to individuals who have been assessed as needing services

currently Direct Payments do not fund many of the activities currently funded by the ILF. Disability Action believes that ILF users therefore have less choice and control that they currently exercise.

- There is a need to set up an ILF Working Group in Northern Ireland which should include ILF Users, disability organisations and DSD and DHSSPS officials. This group should be formed before further policy developments are made in relation to ILF funding in Northern Ireland.

The Centre for Independent Living in Northern Ireland highlighted many of the issues raised by Disability Action but further state:

- Since the ILF closed to new users in 2010 disabled people in Northern Ireland who would have previously been eligible for ILF have been limited by the restricted budgets on offer from the Health and Social Care Trusts and have missed out on opportunities for improving quality of life.
- They also believed that there has been insufficient consultation in Northern Ireland with regards to the future of the Fund and the different way that social care is funded in Northern Ireland.
- There has been very little engagement by DSD with service users, disability organisations and Health and Social Care Trusts regarding the future of ILF.

In response to the new arrangements the **Minister for Social Development**, in an Assembly Question (answered 18 February 2013) stated:

“My Department is now doing all it can to help ensure that those disabled people in Northern Ireland who are most in need of care and support are not disadvantaged by the decision of the Department for Work and Pensions to close the Independent Living Fund with effect from April 2015.

The ILF monies will not be lost to NI and my officials will develop transitional arrangements for current recipients of the ILF. They will also work closely with the other devolved administrations to help develop alternative longer-term arrangements for the future provision of the care and support previously funded by the ILF. Draft proposals will be submitted to the Northern Ireland Executive for consideration but in due course.