

Briefing for the Petitions Committee

e-Petition number: [P-05-771](#)

Petition title: **Reconsider the closure of the Welsh Independent Living Grant and support disabled people to live independently**

Text of petition:

Why we oppose this decision:

The Welsh Government said the decision was taken on stakeholder advice. The majority of representatives on the stakeholder group were third sector or citizens. But they didn't want WILG scrapped and the key point is that our advice was not accepted.

It should also be remembered that closure of WILG is not inevitable as is proved through the formation and success of the Scottish Independent Living Fund; which also works to support the Northern Ireland ILF.

Furthermore, the hugely popular Labour Party Manifesto outlined plans to set up a national care system to exist independently of local authorities.

This is exactly the time that the Labour Party should be united on such issues against the Tories. We must question why Welsh Labour are not playing their part in the changing political landscape?

Indeed, eventually it should be our aim to set up an Independent Living Fund for Wales so that no disabled person should have to suffer the same uncertainty and isolation as WILG recipients are now experiencing. We can only begin to believe that true social justice and equality for all is possible if Welsh Labour revisit their WILG decision.

Welsh Labour will no doubt argue that we should give the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act a chance to succeed. However, this idealistic act needs hefty investment and resources to ensure it is a success – with no sign of any of the necessary improvements to our infrastructure that the success of the Act depends on. This may indeed be the time for a revolutionary change in the way social care is delivered, but such a transformation could take a decade or more and WILG recipients do not deserve to be treated like guinea pigs when their high care and support needs require long-term stability and structure.

Funding for the Welsh Independent Living Grant, which replaced the Independent living Fund, is due to be transferred to local authorities from April 2018 when it will be used to provide social care services as part of mainstream local authority provision. Current recipients of the Welsh Independent Living Grant will then receive their support from services provided or arranged by local authorities or via direct payments administered by local authorities.

Background

The Independent Living Fund (ILF) was a UK Government funded discretionary scheme which helped people who had both day and night care needs and who were getting the higher rate care component of Disability Living Allowance. The ILF was aimed at disabled people with relatively high support needs as an alternative to residential care and it was provided in addition to local authority social care services.

The ILF was set up in 1988 as a UK-wide scheme with offices in Nottingham. It operated as an independent discretionary trust funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and was managed by a board of trustees. Recipients used the money to purchase support services, particularly personal assistants, in a similar way to Direct Payments.

In December 2010, the Minister for Disabled People of the UK Government announced that the ILF was to be closed to new applications. In December 2012, following a consultation on the future of the Fund, it was announced that the Fund would be closed permanently from April 2015.

However, in November 2013 the Court of Appeal upheld a [legal challenge](#) against the Government which it found had failed to meet its Equality Duty in the consultation on the future of the ILF and in its decision to close it. The Department for Work and Pensions subsequently undertook a new equality impact assessment and in March 2014 the Minister for Disabled People announced that the ILF would close on 30 June 2015. From 1 July 2015, the funding and responsibility of ILF care and support needs transferred to local authorities in England and the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Since 1 July 2015 local authorities in **Wales** have administered a Welsh Independent Living Grant (WILG) and payments have continued to be made to former ILF recipients. From April 2018 the Welsh Government is proposing to transfer the WILG funding to local authorities to be used to provide social care services to former recipients as part of mainstream local authority provision.

In **England** former ILF recipients now have needs assessments and care arrangements made through their local authority.

In **Scotland** a new [Scottish Independent Living Fund](#) has been established for people who formerly received ILF. **Northern Ireland** also has a new [replacement Independent Living Fund](#) administered through ILF Scotland.

Welsh Government response

The Minister for Social Services and Public Health has provided a response to the petition.

She states that the stakeholder advisory group, which the Minister is consulting on decisions around the former ILF, did not oppose the decision to transfer funding from the Welsh Independent Living Grant to local authority social services.

She also states that providing all social care services through local authorities will be fairer, particularly given that the ILF had been closed to new entrants since 2010, and help to ensure that all disabled people receive social care services in the same way.

The Minister sets out the alternative options which were considered, including having ILF payments to Welsh recipients administered by the Scottish ILF. She states that this option would not have been available for some time and would have been too costly.