

P-05-771 Reconsider the closure of the Welsh Independent Living Grant and support disabled people to live independently – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 3.12.18

Eich cyf/Your ref Petition P-05-771

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Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales

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Dear Mr Rowlands,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond to the letter you received from the Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care regarding the planned closure of the Welsh Independent Living Grant (WILG).

For this letter I have decided to list my responses to the Minister's letter in an easy-to-read, bullet point format. This will allow the Committee time to access the key points against the weak arguments put forward by the Minister and the Welsh Government.

Without further ado, I will begin listing the reasons for which we strongly disagree with the Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care.

- The Minister begins his letter by stating that the purpose of the changes to Social Care are to end the "two-tier arrangement" that currently exists in order to provide a level playing field to all disabled people. The Minister is referring to a two-tier system that the Welsh Government chose to perpetuate. Meanwhile, during the consultation process ahead of the introduction of WILG, there were a number of other options on the table. Option 4 proposed opening up the WILG for new applicants. This option was never fully investigated by the Welsh Government who seem averse to investing in people.

- The #SaveWILG campaign fully supports equality across the board and it is a bizarre argument that says essential support should be jeopardised to give equal treatment to all. What is actually happening is an EQUALISATION DOWNWARD, however subtle and however long it takes to materialise. We cannot just sit back and let this happen.
- It is not AND never has been an excuse not to do something because it is "difficult to unpick". It would ONLY create "turmoil" if the Welsh Government handled it badly. It does not inspire confidence to witness such a lack of self-belief by our elected representatives. Of course, the obvious point is that there is mass turmoil NOW precisely BECAUSE of what the Welsh Government are doing. I'm afraid that those in power will have to put in the hours to make up for their initial mistakes against the warnings from disabled people and their families.
- In his letter, the Minister tries to blind the Committee with statistics. I prefer to concentrate on the human aspect and the number of emails that the #SaveWILG campaign receives regularly. These confidential messages are often found with tales of struggle, depression and desperation. On paper it is easy to ignore the negative effects of policies, but in the real world those that are directly affected deserve to be listened to. A large majority of struggling recipients do not have the ability to speak out against the Government in the way that I have done. Furthermore, many recipients are too afraid of the consequences of criticising Councils that have so much control over their lives. This was why arrangements under the ILF provided a safety net for disabled people: because assessments were carried out by independent Social Workers, who could not be manipulated by local authorities.
- We are told that the Minister has instructed local authorities to perform a "deep dive" into the WILG transition. How can we begin to trust the findings of local authorities when they are under such immense pressure to cut costs due to a lack of funding from Central Government? Disabled people must be protected in the face of these cuts and not be seen as an easy group to exploit.
- I fully believe that the Welsh Government have a responsibility to support disabled people and should work with them instead of pointing them towards cash-strapped local authorities, many of whom do not have an adequate complaints procedure in place.
- The Minister and his team have repeatedly told us this is not about money. However, when we say that the Government should open WILG to all

disabled people, they repeatedly say they can't afford it. So, it is about money, then?

- This situation has arisen because of the heartless closure of the ILF by the UK Government but the current mistakes, confusion, mess and inconsistencies proves that the Welsh Government are heading in the wrong direction. Disabled people with high support needs are the ones paying the price for these errors.
- At no point do we see the Minister or the Welsh Government acknowledging that MOST WILG recipients are not able to contribute on a level playing field to any consultation. There seems to be a complete – I am sure unconscious – lack of understanding about this. People are not machines that fit neatly into box-ticking exercises.
- Informing us of the huge delays already, shows that the turmoil, and lack of a competent working system, already exists. Hence the need to make sure long-term that those who need this support most, do not have to worry about this kind of upheaval on a yearly basis.
- THE most important thing is the healthcare & support for recipients. Many do not have the luxury of time to be fighting this full-throttle. Let me be clear though, there are plenty of us fortunate enough not to be in their position who will never give up or shut up about this.
- QUESTION FOR COMMITTEE MEMBERS: When do we expect to get the full, published, unedited or unamended report from the review?

Thank you very much indeed for facilitating this process. I am grateful to you and everyone at the Petitions Committee for taking the time to listen and consider our strong arguments.

Yours in hope,

Nathan Lee Davies
#SaveWILG campaign

Please find below links to three different reports into the effects of the ILF closure in England:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-living-fund-post-closure-review>

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/facts-and-information/independent-living-social-care-and-health/ilf-one-year-on/>

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/independent-living-fund-shocking-drop-in-support-after-ilf-closure/>

In addition, I have added some links below concerning my own fight for the continuation of WILG:

<http://www.leaderlive.co.uk/news/2015/07/07/gallery/our-fight-to-fund-independent-lives-in-flintshire-and-wrexham-74959/#.VZu96zMTWf4.twitter>

<http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/welsh-government-has-sold-disabled-people-down-the-river-on-post-ilf-plans/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-38385381?SThisFB>

<https://nathanleedavies.wordpress.com/save-wilg-campaign/>

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disabled-activist-is-fighting-for-his-life-as-he-hands-petition-to-welsh-government/>