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# nawra

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national association of  
welfare rights advisers

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**Minutes of the meeting held on  
Friday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2014  
in Stockton-on-Tees**

Hosted by Stockton Borough Council's Welfare Rights Team

**Present:**

Sarah Long	Age UK Northumberland
Jane Nelson	Birmingham City Council
Yvonne Hyland	Birmingham City Council
A Davies	Carers Centre, York
Kelly Smith	Child Poverty Action Group
Alan Markey	Citizens Advice
Pam Austin	City of Edinburgh Council
Bob Stephenson	Cleveland Trade Unionists & Unemployed Workers Resource Centre
A Turner	D W R
Martin O'Kane	Derbyshire County Council
Sharon McCarthy	Derbyshire County Council
Gregg Peart	Derwentside Homes
Chris Graham	Durham Council Welfare Rights
Claire Forster	Durham Council Welfare Rights
Jennifer Cowen	Durham Council Welfare Rights
John Cook	Durham Council Welfare Rights
Julie Henry	Durham Council Welfare Rights
Kathryn Wright	Durham Council Welfare Rights
Natalie Rigny	DWRS
Duncan Wall	DWRS
Gareth Morgan	Ferret
Carlo Sicheri	Greenfields Housing Association
Emma Faulkner	Greenfields Housing Association
Amy Fiddler	Howells
Elaine Henderson	ISOS Housing
Lee Forrest	ISOS Housing
Vicki Ashby	ISOS Housing
Zoey Corker	Jonnie Johnson Housing
Jim McKenny	Kirklees Council
Daphne Hall	LASA/ Bristol City Council
Anthony Lewis	LCC Welfare Rights
Andy Malik	Luton/Coventry Law Centre
Tom Messere	Maggie's/Big Book
Terry Patterson	Manchester Council
Glenda Dodd	Manchester Metropolitan University Student Union Advice
Tony Todisco	Middlesbrough Council Welfare Rights Service
L Bram	Middlesbrough Council Welfare Rights Service
Malcolm Bateman	Middlesbrough Council Welfare Rights Service

Sarah Hannah	Middlesbrough Council Welfare Rights Service
Suzi Meaney	Middlesbrough Council Welfare Rights Service
Jackie Hankins	Neath Port Talbot Council
Clive Davis	Newcastle Council
Emma Noble	Newcastle University
Suzanne Moffatt	Newcastle University
Paul Walton	Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust
Simone Caudell	Orbit Housing
Sue Hutchinson	Parkinsons UK
Aleks Clayton	Perennial
Helen	Perennial
S Myers	Redcar and Cleveland Council Welfare Rights
Belinda Ealand	Redcar and Cleveland Council Welfare Rights
Noreen Deen	RNIB
Jane Emerson	Rotherham Council
Andrea Peacock	SBC Welfare Rights
Dave Lowie	SBC Welfare Rights
Anita Miller	Sears Group Trust
Jeff Barker	Stockton Borough Council
Lesley Brockbank	Stockton Borough Council
Varinder Jagra	Stockton Borough Council
Amanda Jackson	Stockton Borough Council
Billy Park	Stockton Borough Council
Diane Price	Stockton Borough Council
Lindsay Thwaites	Stockton Borough Council
Mike Robinson	Stockton CAB
Susan Griffiths	Stockton Borough Council
Lyndsey Wood	Stockton Borough Council
Andy Simblett	Sunderland Welfare Rights
Louise Lamont	SWRU
Vawinder Jaghe	SWRU
Deborah Berridge	Thirteen
Richard Porter	Welfare Benefits Unit York
Dan Manville	Wolverhampton Council
Mark Perlic	Wolverhampton Council

**Apologies:** Maureen Arthur (Family Mosaic); Barbara Knight (Leorn Welfare Rights); Campbell McCrae (Northumbrian CAB); Ruth Tindley (Citizens Advice Services Corby and Kettering) Damian Keogh and team (Wrexham Council); Craig Samuel (Port of Leith Housing Association); Eri Mountbatten (Aberystwyth University Student Union); Juan Ramirez (Advice Leicester Partnership); Patrick Hill; Shawn Mach (Lasa); Tamara Moreau (Colchester Borough Council); Tom Lamb (Dundee North Law Centre);

**Welcome:** Neil Schneider, Chief Executive of Stockton Borough Council

Neil welcomed everyone to Stockton and praised the work of the welfare rights team.

**Guest speaker:** Phillip Edwards, Institute for Local Governance

*The Continuing Impact of Welfare Reform in the North East*

[slides at [www.nawra.org.uk](http://www.nawra.org.uk)]

[full report at [www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=598](http://www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=598)]

Phillip is one of the authors of a report which examines the financial, social and housing market impact in the north east of England of the recent series of 'welfare reform' policies and the implications for claimants, local authorities, social housing providers and the voluntary sector.

- Benefit cuts will mean a cumulative loss to the north east economy of £940m. The most significant proportion of the loss is due to cuts to benefits for disabled people.
- The impact will have a spatial dimension. Areas already experiencing multiple deprivation have the greatest losses.
- Food bank use and legal/illegal money lending is increasing.
- There is an increased demand for advice
- 'Work incentives' are severely constrained by the nature and relative weakness of labour and housing markets
- The region has the highest rate of people affected by the bedroom tax. However, there are no major over-crowding problems and the number of under-occupying households requiring a one-bedroomed flat is four times greater than the number of tenancies available.
- Financial stress may increase likelihood of crime, anti-social behaviour, relationship breakdown, emotional distress, substance misuse, self-harm and increased pressure on mental health services.
- Local welfare assistance schemes are underspending but not loosening criteria. Levels of support are lower than under the Social Fund and cash is not available.
- The DWP is referring claimants to local welfare assistance or DHPs rather than administering short term benefit advances.
- Sanctions are becoming more severe at a time when jobs are more scarce. There are variable practices across different Job Centres.
- The report highlights the issues that arise from applying a national policy across diverse areas of the country. The underlying economic conditions and the structure of the housing stock in the north east leaves residents vulnerable to a range of pressures with little flexibility in local governance to mitigate them.

**Guest speaker:** Dr Suzanne Moffat PhD, Newcastle University

*The Do-Well Study: Randomised controlled trial, economic and qualitative process evaluation of domiciliary welfare rights advice for socio-economically disadvantaged older people recruited via primary health care*

- The research project is designed to test whether welfare rights advice is good for older people's health and wellbeing.
- The study started in Dec 2011. A total of 755 participants aged over 60 were recruited from GP practices. Chosen at random, half received immediate welfare rights advice and the other half will receive advice in 2014-15
- 22% of intervention participants received extra benefit as a result of the intervention. Of these, 77% received a financial benefit, 17% received a non-financial benefit and 6% received

both. The most common benefits received were attendance allowance and council tax discount.

- The study will follow up all participants after 12 and 24 months and the final report is due to be published in Dec 2015.

[slides and links to more information at [www.nawra.org.uk](http://www.nawra.org.uk)]

### Discussion:

- It would be good to devise ways to advise people based on what is due to happen to their benefits in the near future so that they can make changes to mitigate their losses. However, the impact of this early intervention work is hard to evidence.
- Sometimes, the impact is not well reflected in monetary terms. For example, a successful AA claim of a fairly modest sum gives an older person greater independence that may delay the need for them to move into far more expensive residential care.
- In 2006, NAWRA commissioned a [literature review from researchers at Manchester University on the benefits of welfare rights advice](#) . It has been used successfully by members to argue against cuts to their service.

### Workshops:

- A. *Welfare Advice Networks*  
Marie Kerr (Stockton Advice & Information Service)  
[slides at [www.nawra.org.uk](http://www.nawra.org.uk)]
- B. *PIP One Year On*  
Julie Henry and Kathryn Wright (Durham Welfare Rights)  
[slides at [www.nawra.org.uk](http://www.nawra.org.uk)]
- C. *ESA Substantial Risk - Regulation 29(2)(b) and Regulation 35(2)(b) - The Case Law View*  
Mark Perlic (Wolverhampton Council)  
[slides and notes at [www.nawra.org.uk](http://www.nawra.org.uk)]
- D. *Discretionary Welfare UK*  
Terry Patterson (Manchester Council)

### Information exchange:

#### 1. Reduction in appeal numbers

Pam Austin (City of Edinburgh Council) has noticed a sharp drop in the number of clients seeking to appeal decisions. This could be due to the delays in decision-making (especially PIP claims) and the introduction of mandatory re-consideration. It's important that people know that they can still challenge decisions.

#### 2. SSAC consultation on benefit waiting days

NAWRA has submitted our response to the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) enquiry into government proposals to extend the number of benefit waiting days from three to seven.

NAWRA has strongly condemned the proposal, stating that the change would impact disproportionately on disabled people and those who have not been in regular employment. It will be another cut to those who have already been adversely affected by a string of welfare reforms including restrictions to local housing allowance, the bedroom tax, benefit cap, the introduction of PIP

and cuts to tax credits. Further, it will make it harder for people to find work as they are left without basic resources.

The government's supposed aim is to encourage and support people into work. NAWRA fails to see how taking away the resources necessary for a basic living can in any way support people into work. The proposal as stated will lead to:

- Increased stress and ill-health for claimants
- Claimants and their families having to go without food or heating
- Increased rent arrears
- Increased reliance on foodbanks which are already stretched
- Increased use of loan sharks and pay day loans
- Reduced ability to find work or move back towards work

The [full text of our response](#) can be downloaded from the resources area of the website.

Thanks very much to Daphne Hall (Bristol City Council/Lasa) for drafting the submission and to all the NAWRA members who contributed evidence.

### 3. WCA Review Year 5 - contribute your views

[Section 10 of the Welfare Reform Act 2007](#) commits the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to publish an independent report each year for the first 5 years of operation of the WCA - and this year 5! Dr Paul Litchfield has been appointed to undertake this task. Dr Litchfield is interested in how the WCA is operating and further changes that might improve the process. He is particularly interested in data that supports points raised below. The call for evidence focuses on the following 4 categories:

- the experience of the WCA process
- the work-related activity group and support group
- mental health and learning difficulties, and
- the impact of previous independent reviews.

.. more details available by clicking [here](#).

NAWRA is very committed to ensuring that the WCA is revised to become a fairer assessment in line with overwhelming feedback from members from across the UK and so we are asking for member to give us details of your experiences and case studies to inform NAWRA's response. All input is greatly appreciated even if it is a couple of sentences!.. but would be great to have a bit more in the format suggested below:

- background
- central issues
- impact on client
- suggested improvements

**Action:** The call for evidence runs until 15<sup>th</sup> August 2014 so please email Eri Mountbatten (Aberystwyth University Students Union and NAWRA rep for Wales) on [eri@nawra.org.uk](mailto:eri@nawra.org.uk) as soon as possible or in any case by Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2014 very latest.

### 4. Welfare reform changes chart

Tom Messere (Big Book/Maggie's), Daphne Hall (LASA/Bristol City Council) and Tamara Moreau (Colchester Borough Council) are working on updating NAWRA's [Welfare Reform Changes Chart](#). The chart gives a summary of recent and forthcoming benefit changes in an easy-to-print format. We will email all members when it is ready.

## 5. Pensions

Changes announced in the Budget mean that people will be able to take large chunks of capital from their pensions. However, claimants need to be aware of capital limits for certain benefits.

The SPC transitional amount for people getting single-tier pensions from 2016 was now not likely to happen as the delays in the implementation of UC mean that HB is likely to continue for some time.

## 6. Incorrect advice about free school meals

NAWRA has identified an issue with clients being incorrectly turned down for, or being discouraged from claiming, free school meals. We believe this issue to be widespread following a random check of 11 council websites of whom 7 were showing incorrect criteria.

Children are eligible for free school meals if a parent receives any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit

Many local authorities seem to be applying their own interpretation to the above criteria, for example by assuming that if a client claims another out-of-work/in-work benefit apart from those listed above then they would be ineligible for free school meals or by adding their own criteria to the list above.

Here are two examples that we have come across on council websites that add additional criteria:

- “You are not eligible if you receive any amount of Working Tax Credit”
- “Please note that anyone claiming Working Tax Credit, Contribution-Based Job Seeker’s Allowance and/or Contribution-Based Employment and Support Allowance is NOT eligible for free school meals, regardless of what other credit/benefits are being claimed”

Clearly, both of these examples are a misinterpretation of the law.

A few councils, as a result of contact from a local welfare rights service, have changed the information on their website. We need all welfare rights services to check their local websites for accuracy and encourage changes where necessary. As well as the correct criteria being on the website, call centre staff also need to be trained in applying the correct criteria.

**Action:** We would welcome contact from members regarding this issue so that NAWRA is able to keep a record of the progress we make. If you have comments, or examples, please email our committee member [Tamara.Moreau@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:Tamara.Moreau@colchester.gov.uk)

### Minutes from previous meeting:

Minutes of the meeting held in Sheffield on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2014 agreed.

### Future meetings:

NAWRA will meet on the following dates. Further information will be circulated to members in due course.

- **Friday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2014** – Renfield St Stevens, 260 Bath Street, **Glasgow** G2 4JP (hosted by Glasgow City Council)
- **Friday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014** – Town Hall, Market Place, **Durham** DH1 3NE (hosted by Durham County Council)
- Can your organisation offer to host a **NAWRA meeting in 2015**? We're due to meet on the first Friday of March, June, September and December. We're especially keen to hold a meeting in the south of England as we haven't had one there for a few years. Please contact Alan Markey, the chair of the Committee ([Alan.Markey@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:Alan.Markey@citizensadvice.org.uk)) to find out more about hosting.
- NAWRA relies on its members to offer to facilitate **workshops** at meetings. If you have a good idea for a workshop that you would like to run at a future meeting, please contact [kelly@nawra.org.uk](mailto:kelly@nawra.org.uk) who will put you in touch with the host.

### Any other business:

- **Regional networks**  
**Action:** There's a list of [regional welfare rights adviser networks](#) on the NAWRA website. Please email [kelly@nawra.org.uk](mailto:kelly@nawra.org.uk) with any updates.
- **NAWRA is all over the internet**  
Follow NAWRA on Twitter @NAWRA\_UK, find us on Facebook, join us on LinkedIn and have a look at our website [www.nawra.org.uk](http://www.nawra.org.uk)
- **Contact details**  
Do you receive regular emails from NAWRA? If not, it is likely that we do not have the correct contact details for you or your membership has lapsed. Please contact Kelly Smith, NAWRA Secretary at [kelly@nawra.org.uk](mailto:kelly@nawra.org.uk)

**Thank you to Billy Park and the rest of the welfare rights team at  
Stockton Borough Council,  
the guest speakers and the workshop facilitators.**