

---

# nawra

---

national association of  
welfare rights advisers

---

**Minutes of the meeting held on  
Friday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014  
in Durham**

Hosted by Durham County Council Welfare Rights

**Present:**

Patrick Hill	
Sash Long	Age UK Northumberland
Neruse Oldfield-Thomas	BASE
Campbell McCrae	Berwick Citizens Advice Bureau
Sue Norman	Buckingham Citizens Advice Bureau
Kelly Smith	Child Poverty Action Group
Paul Treloar	Child Poverty Action Group
Fiona Seymour	Citizens Advice
Kate Fincham	Citizens Advice
Sandie Lock	Citizens Advice
Alan Markey	Coventry Independent Advice Services
Andy Malik	Coventry Law Centre
Sarah Andrews	Darlington Council Welfare Rights
Sharon Barlow	Derbyshire County Council
Sarah Roy	Derbyshire Law Centre
Greg Peart	Derwentside Homes
Michelle Dent	Derwentside Homes
Ian Greaves	Disability Rights UK
John Tomlinson	DMC
Alexsend Turner	DUR
Sam Stimpson	Durham County Carers Support
Anna Knight	Durham County Council
Becky Johnson	Durham County Council
Chris Graham	Durham County Council
Claire Foster	Durham County Council
Duncan Wall	Durham County Council
Ian Ferguson	Durham County Council
Jane Ford	Durham County Council
Jennifer Cowen	Durham County Council
John Cook	Durham County Council
Julie Henry	Durham County Council
Kathryn Wright	Durham County Council
Morris Nicholls	Durham County Council
Natalie Rigby	Durham County Council
Scott McNally	Durham County Council
John Bradley	DUWC
Katrina Hudson	DUWC
Gareth Morgan	Ferret

Lorraine Podmore	Frenkel Topping
Louise Clover	Frenkel Topping
Peter Fitzhenry	Golden Gates Housing Trust
Carlo Siccheri	Greenfields Housing Association
Emma Faulkner	Greenfields Housing Association
Corin Hammersley	Greenwich Council
Marie Busfield	Howells LLP
Ineke Gijsbers	ISOS Housing
Vicki Ashby	ISOS Housing
Zoey Corker	Johnnie Johnson Housing Association
Jim McKenny	Kirklees Council
Rachel Ingliby	Kirklees Council
Joe Power	Kirklees Law Centre
Daphne Hall	LASA / Rightsnet
Barbara Knight	Leorn Welfare Rights Training
Jeanette Jones	Liverpool Hope University
Neal Southwick	Macmillan
Anne Foster	Maggie's Centres
Terry Patterson	Manchester City Council
Jane Chapman	Mental Health Matters
Chris Beer	Mind in Monmouthshire
Jane Owen Pam	National Autistic Society
Anjelica Finnegan	NCVO
Debra White	Neath Port Talbot Council Welfare Rights
Jackie Hankins	Neath Port Talbot Council Welfare Rights
Leane Staddon	Neath Port Talbot Council Welfare Rights
Clive Davis	Newcastle Council Welfare Rights
Keith Thompson	Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Rosie Wilson	Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Craig Samuel	Port of Leith Housing Association
Helen Dinning	Redcar and Cleveland Council
Rebecca McCabe	Redcar and Cleveland Council
Caroline Egerton	Richmond Citizens Advice Bureau
Sally Marshall	Rushcliffe Advice Network
Bruce Hastie	Scottish Borders Council
Jon L	South Tyneside Council
Karen S	South Tyneside Council
Richard Machin	Staffordshire University
Laura Carver	Stepchange
Tim Blessed	Stepchange
Zoe Barlow	Stepchange
Lindsay Thwaites	Stockton Citizens Advice Bureau
Dave Lowrie	Stockton Council
Louise Lamont	Stockton Council
Lindsey Wood	Stockton Welfare Rights
Varinder Jagra	Stockton Welfare Rights
Alan Chandler	Sunderland Council
Andy Simblett	Sunderland Council
Heather Redgrave	Sunderland Council
Lesley Cook	Sunderland Council
Sarah McGovan	Sunderland Council
Lesley Brockful	SWRU
Maggie Bailey	Tadea

Roger Thompson	Tameside Council
Trevor Baru	Unite Community
Mo Aldred	Whitby DAG
Maureen Doyle	Whitechapel Centre
Liz Wilson	York Welfare Benefits Unit
Richard Porter	York Welfare Benefits Unit

**Apologies:** Tom Lamb (Dundee North Law Centre); Maureen Arthur (Family Mosaic); Ruth Tindley (Citizens Advice Services Corby & Kettering); Karen Armstrong (Luton Law Centre); Eri Mountbatten (Aberystwyth University Students' Union); Damian Keogh and colleagues at Wrexham Council; Shaun Mach (Rightsnet); Mark Perlic (Wolverhampton Council); Juan Ramirez (Community Advice and Law Service Leicester)

**Civic welcome:** Councillor Morris Nichols, Durham County Council

**The Phil Hanns Memorial Lecture:** The Rt Rev Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham

Phil was held in high regard for his activism and kindness. Welfare rights work is driven by compassion for the person and their community, but also requires a calm and careful analysis of the facts in the pursuit of justice. Phil succeeded in combining the two. He's greatly missed.

The All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty in Britain has recently published its final report [Feeding Britain](#). The inquiry was chaired by Frank Field and Tim Thornton, the Bishop of Truro. It took evidence from all over the country in a series of public meetings. The report notes the kindness of the Foodbank volunteers but also the danger of those volunteers not thinking harder about why users ended up at a Foodbank. We need to ask why Foodbanks exist at all. They should not become part of the welfare state.

The report makes a large number of recommendations, including:

- Processing benefit claims within five days
- No charging for medical evidence
- Email addresses for claimants to use to contact DWP
- Reduction in delays and more use of hardship payments
- STBAs paid automatically
- Review of sanctions regime
- Claimant commitment to be a two-way agreement setting out the DWP's responsibilities
- Improvement in JC+ operations
- More joined up thinking, advice and action

Trussell Trust, who run the largest number of foodbanks, are developing Foodbank Plus where users can get advice as well as food.

**Guest speaker:** Catherine Richardson, Public Mental Health lead with the Public Mental Health team in Durham County Council

[\*Welfare rights: a key driver to improving mental health and wellbeing\*](#)

Catherine described Durham's public mental health strategy.

- By profiling the age, gender and socio-economic characteristics of people who take their own life interventions can be targeted at those groups most likely to be at risk

- Group activities in sheds support people who are identified as belonging to 'at risk' groups.
- Bereavement support, relationship advice and welfare rights work also has an important public mental health role.

### Workshops:

- A. [Partnership working](#)  
Neal Southwick (Macmillan Cancer Support) and Zoe Barlow (StepChange)
- B. [Dealing with overpayment investigations and how to approach preparing an overpayment case for appeal](#)  
Claire Forster and Duncan Wall (Durham Welfare Rights Service)
- C. [Sanctions](#)  
Andy Simblett (Sunderland Council)
- D. [Universal Credit – pilot experience](#)  
Peter Fitzhenry (Golden Gates Housing Trust)

**Guest speaker:** Anjelica Finnegan, National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

[NCVO research on the cumulative impact of welfare reform](#)

NCVO's new project is looking at the cumulative effect of the recent welfare reforms.

Voluntary organisations play a vital role in supporting people and communities and have first-hand knowledge of what impacts the welfare reforms are having. And yet, the sector has not yet spoken with one voice about the combined effects of the reforms.

NCVO want to know:

- How the welfare reforms have affected your beneficiaries?
- What changes have you made to your services as a direct result of the reforms and why?
- What factors have affected your capacity to respond to changing demands?

NCVO want to hear from organisations of all sizes, from across England, whether you provide services or a voice to welfare claimants.

Submit your evidence on the [NCVO website](#).

If you know of any good websites providing information for claimants, please email [anjelica.finnegan@ncvo.org.uk](mailto:anjelica.finnegan@ncvo.org.uk) with the details for inclusion in the report.

The report is due to be published in January 2015.

### Information exchange:

#### 1. Ask CPAG

Paul Treloar - CPAG

*Ask CPAG online* is a new information and advice service for advisers. It consists of three elements:

- An up-to-date bank of written information on frequently asked questions about common problem areas of the benefit and tax credit system. The information is designed to supplement CPAG's welfare benefits and tax credits handbook, by providing more practical step-by-step information.
- An opportunity to provide feedback on the information by email and what other areas of information you'd like to see included.
- An email advice service, which can provide tailored written advice on individual enquiries and cases about issues covered by the written information bank i.e. currently only on JSA/ESA sanctions.

Go to [www.cpag.org.uk/askcpag](http://www.cpag.org.uk/askcpag) for more information.

Please email [askcpag@cpag.org.uk](mailto:askcpag@cpag.org.uk) if you have a suggestion for the topic CPAG should cover next.

## **2. Flexible Partnership Support Fund**

Jackie Hankins – Neath Port Talbot Council Welfare Rights

Advice organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors can apply for funding from the DWP's Flexible Partnership Support Fund. Does anyone have any experience of this? Are the conditions too compromising, and too heavily focussed on getting claimants into work? There is discomfort at the idea of the DWP funding advice services. Please contact [j.hankins@neath-porttalbot.gov.uk](mailto:j.hankins@neath-porttalbot.gov.uk)

## **3. Universal credit past earnings consultation**

NAWRA has [submitted a response](#) to the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) consultation concerning the government's intention that 'surplus earnings' from the previous six months should be taken into account when a person reclaims universal credit.

The proposal suggests that any 'surplus earnings' – defined as earnings more than £100 over the 'nil UC threshold' – will be used to reduce future UC payments if the claimant returns to UC within six months. NAWRA does not believe that these earnings can be considered in any way 'surplus'. They represent essential additional income to enable households to try and lift themselves out of the cycle of poverty.

## **4. Advice Services Transition Fund**

When the scope for legal aid was reduced to exclude welfare benefits, the Big Lottery was funded by the Cabinet Office to set up the Advice Services Transition Fund to fund ways to set up 'sustainable' advice provision.

Does anyone have any experience of the ASTF? Some advice networks have been established, but in other areas there seems little to show for the money.

## **5. Pensions 'freedom'**

Gareth Morgan – Ferret

Everyone aged over 55 is suddenly going to get unfettered access to their whole pension pot from April 2015. However, the UT has decided that if people can access their pension fund then it counts as notional income. This may affect any claims for benefit, leaving them worse off overall.

Citizens Advice has been funded by the government to offer pensions advice but people may have trouble recognising their options.

The Financial Conduct Authority is now suggesting that financial advisers should refer people with benefit queries to advice agencies. However, there are many areas of the country where benefit specialists in advice centres are not available. **Action:** NAWRA to write to the FCA expressing concern.

## 6. Delays in DLA for a terminally ill person

Liz Wilson – Welfare Benefits Unit, York

Recently, a claim for DLA was submitted with a DS1500. The decision was made in two weeks but the client did not get paid for 28 days. Has anyone come across this before?

Action: Julie Henry at Durham Welfare Rights to contact Liz ([manager@welfare-benefits-unit.org.uk](mailto:manager@welfare-benefits-unit.org.uk)) with details of a similar case.

### Minutes from previous meeting:

Minutes of the meeting held in Glasgow on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2014 agreed.

### Future meetings:

NAWRA will meet from 10am-4pm on the following dates. Further information will be circulated to members in due course.

- **Friday 6th March 2015** - Ashley Building, Staffordshire University, Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DF (hosted by Staffordshire University)
- **Friday 5th June 2015** – Wolverhampton
- Can your organisation **offer to host a NAWRA meeting**? We're due to meet on the first Friday of March, June, September and December each year. We're especially keen to hold a meeting in the south of England as we haven't met there for a few years. Please contact [kelly@nawra.org.uk](mailto:kelly@nawra.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. We are especially looking for volunteers for our Stoke meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

### Any other business:

- **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 Julie Henry and the rest of the welfare rights team at  
Durham County Council,  
the guest speakers and the workshop facilitators.**