



Navigating changes to the ILF Case Study 2015-16

The Independent Living Fund (ILF) had been set up in the 1980s to top up the funding available from local authorities for care, in recognition that those with the highest levels of support needs require assistance which local authorities did not provide. Resources were provided in a way which enabled people to have choice and control over the support they needed. The ILF made a major difference to people whose needs had previously meant their only options were residential care or a very limited life for them and their families.

The ILF closed on 30th June 2015, leaving many former ILF users worried about the future. Merton CIL supported a consultation with ILF users just before the start of the year, and following intense discussions with local MPs and Councillors, Merton Council agreed to ring-fence the transition funding received from Government for former ILF users for a year. This gave the 19 ILF users in Merton a small breathing space to plan ahead.

During the year, Merton CIL wrote to all ILF users via the Council, inviting them to a peer support session to share experiences. We also hosted a workshop on issues facing ILF users which was developed by Scott-Moncrieff & Associates Ltd, a national firm of solicitors specialising in community care and other civil liberties work.

We also supported individual ILF users to prepare for community care re-assessments by Merton Council, and supported them at the re-assessments themselves.

"The group meetings were good for sharing information. I wouldn't have known some of that stuff otherwise. The preparation session was most useful so I knew what to expect. Having support during my review was key because the session was really long and I would have forgotten important stuff without you there to remind me."

A number of issues were highlighted through our work supporting former ILF users. Cuts to the social care team meant that assessments were often done with social workers who didn't know the individuals or understand their impairments. The approach to assessments was inconsistent with some people getting a full care act assessment and others getting a print out of a previous (non-care act) assessment and being asked to comment on it. There was an inconsistent approach by the Council to sharing draft reports, with some assessors sharing them and getting feedback from the individuals, and others send it straight to panel with no input, or even making recommendations

against the wishes of the individual. There were long delays getting the final decision on what care and support the Council would provide - in some cases there was a 2 month wait for news.

"That assessment! Did they want me to get naked? It was so invasive. This long and drawn-out process I am now going through for basic support, when all I want to do is get in with my life... not knowing what will or might happen is a terrible way to live your life"

Nearly half of former ILF users had their support cut following assessments by the Council, however, only two of the people supported by Merton CIL were cut. This means that the majority of people seeing a cut in their care package had not been supported by an advocate.

For people whose care was frozen, we've been made aware of a number of cases where they have been asked to pay more towards their care following financial assessments, even though they have not had an increase in their income; this is also effectively a cut, and something we are looking at.

Our work with former ILF users meant that we were able to contribute to an evaluation of the closure of the ILF with Inclusion London, which was published in 2016.