



Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board

**MINUTES OF THE FULL BOARD MEETING
TUESDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2008**

Present

BOARD.

Mrs Anne Spaight
Dr. Amit Arora
Mrs Simone Baker
Mrs Jean Cooper
Mrs Judith Holt
Mr Zubair Khan
Dr. Ben Ko
Dr. Ian McGill
Dr Mohammad Obaidullah
Mrs Clair Poole
Prof. David Scott
Prof Tom Sensky
Mrs Sarah Vines
Mrs Christine Whitehead

VISITORS

Mr Norman Cockett – Disability and Carers Benefits
Mr Chris Booth – Disability and Carers Benefits
Dr. Roger Thomas – Health Work and Welfare
Ms Margaret Birchall – Disability Carers Service
Dr. Martin Donnelly – Secretary to DLAAB (Northern Ireland)
Ms Janis Creane – Northern Ireland Department for Social Development
Ms Sarah Newman – Equality 2025
Mrs Gail Knowles – DLAAB / DCS Secretariat

SECRETARIAT

Sharon Foster-King
Mr John Hicks

APOLOGIES

Dr. Ronald Pearce
Mrs Sarah Playforth
Mr Douglas Ross
Mr Stanley Millar
Vivian Hopkins
Mr Bruce Calderwood
Dr. Bill Gunnyeon
Mr John Bergman

Agenda Item 1 – Opening remarks and Apologies.

1.1 The Chairman welcomed those present and in particular Ms Newman of Equality 2025 (EQ2025). The Chair also welcomed Mrs Knowles who was about to join the Secretariat in place of Sharon Foster-King who was moving to another role. The Chair also noted that Dr McGill was about to retire from the Board having completed 10 years service. Dr. McGill said it had been a great privilege to have worked for the Board where he had wonderful colleagues and had met some interesting people.

1.2 Apologies were noted from Mrs Playforth, Dr. Pearce, Mr Ross, Mr Millar, Vivien Hopkins, Mr Calderwood, Dr Gunnyeon and Mr Bergman.

Agenda Item 2 – Minutes of the Full Board Meeting – Tuesday 9 October 2007.

2.1 The minutes were agreed with one amendment:

- 5.2 “been” changed to “being”.

Agenda Item 3 – Matters arising.

3.1 The Chair started by apologising for the annual report not being circulated before publication and thanked Sharon Foster-King for all her help in producing the report.

- 7.1 advert approved, and running.
- 9.1 Mr Khan, Mrs Playforth and Mrs Poole were members of the DLA and Work research Steering Group.
- 9.3 The Chair had met with Sir Richard Tilt and the Secretariat was asked to invite him to the next Full Board Meeting.

Action Point – Secretariat to invite Sir Richard to the next DLAAB full Board meeting to discuss the work of SSAC.

Agenda Item 4 – Update from Equality 2025 (EQ2025).

4.1 The Chair reminded the Board that it had received a briefing from Mrs Jackson in October 2006 about the establishment of EQ2025, she then invited Ms Newman to update the Board.

4.2. Ms Newman reminded the meeting that EQ2025 had been established after the publication of “Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People.” by the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit. It had been established to enable the views of Disabled People to inform and influence policy making and to contribute to the development of policies and services.

4.3 Ms Newman made the following points in her report:

- EQ2025 is an advisory body not a campaigning body.

- The Board has four major interests: independent living; early years & family support; the transition to adulthood; and getting & keeping jobs.
- Independent living, stems from recommendation 4.3 of the life chances report. Getting & Keeping jobs, is high on the governments agenda as Social Services concentrate on care for Disabled People rather than finding employment. EQ2025 were looking at how individual budgets could be extended into employment.
- EQ2025 was working with the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Health.
- EQ2025 is urging the Government to ratify the recent United Nations convention on Human Rights for Disabled People.
- EQ2025 is looking to develop its profile within Government by having a series of bi-lateral meetings with a number of Government Departments to look at ways of co-operating and working together.

4.4 In response to questions from Board members Ms Newman noted that EQ2025 had met with the Commission for Equality and Human Rights and both bodies are taking care not to duplicate work, in addition EQ2025 may feed into a study on “hate crime”. EQ2025 intends to meet with the Disability Employment Advisory Committee to examine the question of moving into the world of work.

4.5 The Chair thanked Ms Newman and asked her to convey to EQ2025 that DLAAB would like the two bodies to work closely together.

Action Point – Secretariat to invite the Chair of EQ2025 to future Board meetings.

Agenda Item 5 – Review of the Memorandum of Understanding – DLAAB paper number 184.

5.1 The Secretariat reported that the existing Memorandum of Understanding had not been reviewed since the original had been signed off. The Secretariat is seeking primary legislation to change the role of the Board in the meantime it had produced an updated version of the Memorandum and was seeking comments from Board members.

5.2 In discussion the following points were made:

- Paragraph 19a would need to be amended to reflect any changes in the remuneration package.
- Paragraph 11 about fraudulent and negligent statements is a standard paragraph.
- Paragraph 14, attendance at full Board meetings, would be amended following discussion.
- The ten year rule, the maximum period in office must not exceed 10 years, would be included in a revised version.

5.3 Further comments and notification of typing errors should be sent to the Secretariat.

Action Point – All Board members invited to send comments to the Secretariat.

Agenda Item 6 – Is the Board a Scientific Advisory Committee? – DLAAB paper number 185.

6.1 In 2001 the Office of Science and Technology arranged a code of practice workshop to discuss guidance for Scientific Advisory Committees, DLAAB was included as it had been identified as a scientific Committee by a departmental representative at an initial stage. The Board had previously discussed whether it was a Scientific Advisory Committee but no firm conclusion had been reached, a decision was now needed. The Chair invited views from the meeting.

6.2 After a brief discussion the Board decided unanimously that it was **NOT** a Scientific Advisory Committee. The Board did not consider itself a wholly scientific body as the role of the Board included consideration of non scientific disability benefit issues. Also the Board felt it would be inappropriate to follow the presumption of openness given the discussions which take place concerning medical conditions and possible implications for benefit eligibility. The Board accepted that these discussions should remain confidential. Finally the Board felt it would be difficult to follow the guidance on peer review.

Agenda Item 7 – Update from DLAAB Northern Ireland.

7.1 Dr Donnelly reported on Mr Millar's behalf.

7.2 The implications of the Review of Public Administration on the life expectancy of DLAAB(NI) are still unclear but likely to be known towards the end of 2008. It is assumed that it will dovetail with the extension of DLAAB remit to include NI if necessary.

7.3 The NI Board has had one meeting since the last GB Board. Monica Wilson (Chief Executive) of Disability Action gave a presentation on the role of her organisation with a membership of 180 groups in NI. She spoke on Equality, Diversity, Human Rights, Community Development and the emerging issues for people with disabilities in NI and its role in a devolved administration. The Disability and Carers Service of Northern Ireland Social Security Agency provided a presentation on the use of the Online Medical Guidance.

7.4 The Board is currently advising Disability & Carers Service on how it might take forward education for its staff as a consequence of the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Difficulty (NI).

Agenda Item 8 – DLA and Work Study.

8.1 The Chair invited Mr Khan to update the Board. Mr Khan explained that he, Mrs Playforth and Mrs Poole had joined a DWP Steering Group to oversee a research project looking at how DLA acts as an incentive or disincentive, to work. Insight Research had been commissioned to contact 5,000 randomly selected disabled people to examine what difference receiving DLA made to their finances. The steering group had looked at, and approved, the prepared script that telephone callers would be using. Final approval was needed from a research ethics group. The Steering Group was particularly keen to ensure that high standards of security were maintained.

Agenda Item 9 – Special Rules Pilot.

9.1 The Chair invited Dr. Thomas to update the Board. In its report on special rules the Board recommended that awards made under special rules should be limited to three years and that special rule awards which have been in payment for more than three years should be reviewed. Dr Thomas explained that there were currently around 27,000 such awards. A pilot review had started earlier this year looking at the under 55 age group. Within that group some sub groups, such as those in residential care, had been excluded from the exercise. If it was considered that the recipient of DLA was no longer terminally ill the case was considered under normal rules and an assessment made of the care and mobility needs. To date around 400 cases had been reviewed but it was too early to draw any conclusions.

9.2 Mrs Whitehead had provided training for Decision Makers relating to AIDS which highlighted that the best evidence relating to AIDS came from Hospitals.

Agenda Item 10 – Recruitment update.

10.1 The Chair invited the Secretariat to provide an update on the current recruitment exercise. The Secretariat reported that an advert seeking applicants to fill four positions on the Board; i.e. a Disabled Person; a Medical Practitioner; a Psychiatrist and either a Community Psychiatric Nurse or a Community Worker, had been approved and was currently running in a number of publications.

10.2 Some 400 application packs had been sent out, completed application forms were due back on 15 February 2008. A sift panel, made up of the Chair, Mr Booth and Mr Thompson an Independent Assessor appointed by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, would be sitting on 20 and 22 February and interviews had been scheduled for 17, 18, 19 and 20 March.

Agenda Item 11 – Review

11.1 At this point the Chair invited Mr Cockett to update the Board on what was happening in relation to the recent review of the Board.

11.2 Mr Cockett informed the Board that the Chair and he had met with the Minister for Disabled People who had made some very positive comments about the Board and its future role. He reported that the Minister had been very pleased with

the quality of recent reports particularly the report on Higher Rate Mobility Component for the under 3s who required bulky equipment.

Agenda Item 12 – Dates of future Board meetings.

12.1 As the work of the Board is expected to increase following the recent review the Chair had agreed to increase the frequency of Full Board meetings to six a year. Future meeting dates for the Board are:

10 June 2008;

12 August 2008;

14 October 2008;

9 December 2008;

10 February 2009, and

14 April 2009. Board members were asked to take note.

Action Point – Secretariat to inform all Board members of future full Board meeting dates.

Agenda Item 13 – Any other business.

13.1 Mr Khan had visited the Birmingham Disability Benefits Centre which had been very useful and he wanted to thank all those involved in arranging the visit.

Meeting closed.