

# LARG Meeting

## 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2016

### **In attendance**

Seamus, Michael, Brian, Ian, Graham, Marina, Edel, Sharon, Ann and Catherine

### **Minutes of Last Meeting**

We discussed the feedback from the SWC Students re the presentation on 25<sup>th</sup> November which was very well received.

Phase 2 of the town centre work is continuing and they are now working on Thomas Street. Seamus raised an issue about lack of dropped kerbs at bottom of Quarry lane and this was then brought to attention of Barry Monteith who put us in touch with Dermot Bleeks, Transport NI and has since been rectified.

Seamus also identified lack of dropped kerbs for crossing road at Holmes Funeral parlour and this has been forwarded to Dermot for their attention.

### **Welfare Reform**

Catherine took the group through some information on Welfare Reform to help people understand the changes proposed by the legislation and referred to Eileen Evason's report which outlines her proposals to maximise the use of additional spending power for agreed changes to the welfare regime.

These proposals have been presented to OFMDFM in Feb 2016 and they have agreed to share this report with the Social Development Minister to ensure speedy implementation.

### **Main Changes proposed in Welfare reform**

**Universal Credit** bringing together Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit – basically anyone receiving one or more of these benefits will see them all rolled into one payment under the name of Universal Credit.

**Personal Independence Payments** will be the new name replacing Disability Living Allowance and available to people aged between 16-64yrs of age. Everyone on DLA will be informed about the change over which will take place in the next 3 years and each person will have to make a fresh claim. PIP has two components (daily living and mobility) and there will only be 2 rates (standard or enhanced) rather than the High, Medium and Low rates of DLA.

### **Cuts to Housing Benefit if your social housing is too large – called bedroom tax**

A lot of news coverage about people living in Housing Association or Executive properties which have more bedrooms than they need and under the new changes if you want to keep the additional bedroom property your housing benefit would be reduced (eg) couple in England were losing £40/month as they were deemed to have 1 additional bedroom. This bedroom tax will not apply in NI with report in Newsletter on 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016 stating "***Stormont has already agreed not to introduce the bedroom tax which was brought in for other parts of the UK***".

### **Contribution based Employment & Support Allowance**

People who are deemed to be in the Work Related Group of ESA will only get this benefit for a maximum of one year. You will not be affected if you are in the Support Group.

### **Benefit Cap**

For people getting Housing Benefit there will be a limit of £350 for single claimants and £500 for families that can be claimed – however Eileen Evason’s report has noted that this could change in the near future.

### **Benefit Appeal rights**

You will now be required to ask that a decision is looked at again before an appeal can be made.

### **Parts of Social Fund to be abolished**

If you require Funeral or Maternity expenses and or a budgeting loan this will now be paid under Universal Credit and a new **Discretionary Support** service will offer grant and loan payments if you are in extreme hardship.

### **New Conditions about looking for work**

For anyone looking for work, on Jobseekers allowance, Income support or Employment Support Allowance before your claim is transferred to Universal Credit.

If you are looking for work you will be required to sign a new claimant commitment which will set out a number of work related requirements you’ll have to meet before you can get your benefit. If you are working on low income you will have to show you are looking for a job with more pay or hours to increase your income. If you have a partner this claimant commitment will have to be signed by and will also apply to them.

### **Will your income from benefits be lower after the changes?**

People getting certain benefits will be protected if their income drops once they move to Universal Credit – this is called **transitional protection**.

There is no transitional protection for people currently getting Housing Benefit which means your income **may** go down as soon as the new Housing Benefit rules become law. If you are getting Disability Living Allowance and apply for Personal Independence Payment your DLA will continue to be paid for 28days after PIP decision whether or not you are entitled to PIP.

We agreed that we should facilitate an information event on Welfare Reform and Catherine to get in touch with Advice and MIDAS (advice service in Magherafelt for the Mid Ulster Council area).

### **AOB**

#### **Reading Rooms Project – Tuesday mornings in Willowbank**

Catherine spoke to the group about Reading Rooms Project. This is a day opportunity and anyone who is interested should let Patricia know. A number of members have already signed up for this which should be starting in March. Marina has identified that she would also be interested in this.

### **New Build**

Ann spoke to the group about the new build and confirmed that we are looking at a moving date of week after Easter. The new building will primarily be offering day care for people who have been identified at being in the high need category by the Trust.

### **Day Opportunities**

The Reading Rooms project is a Day opportunity

### **Next meeting to be confirmed for September**

