

Scottish Parliament Social Justice & Social Security Committee

Inquiry into Addressing Child Poverty through Parental Employment

Written submission by the Independent Living Fund (ILF) Scotland, 22 June 2023

1. The Independent Living Fund Scotland (ILF Scotland) is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and is governed by a **Board of seven non-executive directors** (ilf.scot/about-us/our-board/) (appointed by Scottish Ministers).

the 2015 Fund (ilf.scot/2015-fund/) - providing discretionary payments to disabled people, allowing them to purchase care and support to live independently.

the Transition Fund (ilf.scot/transition-fund/) – providing up to £4000 to help young disabled people transition into adulthood and become more engaged and active in their communities.

the Person-Centred Planning Grant (ilf.scot/transition-fund/person-centred-planning-grant/) – helping young disabled people plan for the future (ahead of an application to the Transition Fund) and

The Technology Grant (ilf.scot/transition-fund/technology-grant/) – helping young disabled people to get online.

Working in partnership

2. We employ a team of around 65 people to deliver our services, led by a dedicated **senior management team** (ilf.scot/about-us/our-staff/) and have our **main offices in Livingston** (ilf.scot/contact-us/) in central Scotland.
3. We work in partnership with 37 Health and Social Care Partnerships/Trusts (HSCP/Ts) across Scotland and Northern Ireland.
4. As a Fair Work organisation, working with disabled people we are regularly viewing our working practices to ensure Diversity and Inclusion is front and centre of decision making. Our Board and staff group are diverse and well informed, and we continue with our working strategy as we move forward.
5. Organisational Demography – By the end of Q1 the organisational make up is 72: staff (65) and Directors (7). Female: 73.6% and Male: 26.4%, with 23.6% of staff self-identified as disabled, 2.77% BAME and 2.77% LGBT.
6. ILF Scotland's workforce work flexibly to suit a work/life balance for all colleagues which supports the disabled people we support.

7. ILF Scotland has been awarded the following accolades for our work practice over the last 8 years demonstrating excellence in our HR practice:
- Finalist in the Best Public Sector Employer at the 2017 Family Friendly Working Scotland Awards.
 - Winner in the inaugural Best for Fathers from Fathers Network Scotland at the 2017 Family Friendly Working Scotland Awards.
 - Top 30 UK Employer at Working Families Benchmark in 2017.
 - Best Public Sector Employer at 2018 Family Friendly Working Scotland Awards.
 - Top 10 UK Employer Working Families Benchmark in 2018.
 - Winner 2018 Best Small Employer Working Families Special Awards.
 - Winner Working Mums Best SME 2019.
 - Top 30 UK Employer Working Families Benchmark in 2019.
 - Top 3 Public Sector Services at the Guardian Awards 2019.
 - Finalist in the 2020 Family Friendly Working Scotland Awards.
 - Best Small UK Employer in the 2020 Working Families Special Awards.
 - Top 10 UK Employer Working Families Benchmark in 2020.
 - Top 10 UK Employer Working Families Benchmark in 2021.
 - Finalist in the Best for Mental Health, the Best for Employee Engagement and the Best for Family Support category in the 2021 Working Mums Awards.
 - Highly Commended in the Flexibility Works 2021 Top Employer Awards.
 - Top 10 UK Employer Working Families Benchmark in 2022.
 - Best Small Employer 2023 Working Families Best Practice Awards.
 - Finalist Best Flexible Working 2023 Working Families Best Practice Awards.
 - Carers Positive Award gained.
 - Disability Confident Employer.
 - Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief Accreditation.
 - Endometriosis Friendly Employer Status.
 - Bronze Health Living Award gained.
8. We are a flexible by-default organisation and recruiting managers must make a business-case not to offer posts as flexible. During the recruitment pipeline we discuss diversity and inclusion, job design and job outputs and what the viable options are for achieving them. This carries on through the initial contact with applicants and during the recruitment/selection process so that we can be confident of balancing the needs of the business and the individual. If we can make a job work for the individual, our thinking is that the individual will deliver their best outputs during their employment.
9. The overarching approach is that we want to recruit the best people, and this means understanding what the conditions are for them to deliver their best. That said, we pro-actively recruit disabled people and those with long-term health conditions. For us this is not so much about hours/attendance but making sure we have matched our output requirements with the right people who can deliver them. As a small organisation, we need to recruit and retain the best talent and in return we are rewarded by highly competent, highly motivated and high-performing individuals who give their all when they are on our time. We get their

best and they get the best balance for them, so it is a win win situation for everyone.

10. Before, during and since the COVID-19 pandemic we continually strive to improve our offering and we have the following :

- An inclusive and respectful culture, where all voices are heard and valued
- A team culture, where we look out for each other
- Leaders, leading by example by all colleagues (we are all leaders)
- A genuine sense of caring, kindness and compassion for each other
- Person centred role, recruitment, and deployment planning
- Family friendly working policies
- Flexible and agile working policies (100% of staff work flexibly)
- Person led learning and development plans
- Monthly on-line all staff 1-2-1s including sessions with our Board Directors
- Individual 1-2-1's
- Peer support groups
- Annual mental health and resilience training
- Internal mental health first aiders
- Confidential HR hotline
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Staff benefits programme
- Annual all staff development and reconnecting away days
- Well-being hour each week to use for personal wellness
- Menopause guidance
- Promoting health awareness sessions for staff e.g., menopause / men's health with external speakers
- Strong internal communications throughout the organisation
- All staff paid above the Scottish Living Wage

11. Our Board, Governmental Sponsor Teams, Stakeholders, SMT and staff drive our 2023-26 strategy.

12. We use online media tools: YAMMER , our organisational social media space to promote more personal and fun elements of work and over the last few years implemented TRICKLE, an app which we use as a Wellbeing Hub, pulse surveys, motivation and encouragement – this is anonymous and gives all staff a live voice which we react to as appropriate.

13. Regular 1-2-1's and department meetings are in place and continue to be a major source to ensure we are a cohesive and connected unit. We are not complacent, and this is an ongoing process We do not always get this right all of the time, but we listen, and we learn, and we react as appropriate.

14. Development Days are held bi-annually, during COVID they were online, now they are face-to-face with regular external facilitation – which encourages open, honest, and innovative ideas to surface and be harnessed.

15. During COVID-19 lockdown and since we have had considerable challenges which impacted many of our staff e.g.

- Childcare
 - Family care and of grandchildren and parents
16. The guilt of balancing caring for children or family members and completing a day's work and run a home are understood quickly. Immediate clear messages are given to prioritise all caring needs and to work flexibly within the confines of your role and business needs. Given the "can-do" attitude of our staff, we realise staff may work late to balance hours worked flexibly during the day. Mindful of the risk of stress, fatigue, anxiety and possible "burn-out," managers reinforce this managed by working flexibly and work with individuals to ensure a safe balance of work, rest, and social support.
17. Alongside our SMT, HR team and our well-being groups, further support actions are available and promoted across our communication platforms:
- Line manager 1-2-1's
 - Manager team check-ins, e.g., Business Services hold a 15 min 'by exception' meeting checking in with work commitments that week and how we can support each other ad ease pressures.
 - Monthly all staff meetings (virtual and in-person)
 - Full support for home workstations (away from the kitchen table)
 - Meeting free Fridays
 - Promotion of the well-being hour – making time for yourself
 - Tailored well-being and support resource pack
 - Coffee and cuppa (both virtual and face to face)
 - Mental Health First Aider 's
 - TRICKLE as an employee engagement and wellness tool
18. This is even more remarkable as when taken in the context of the busiest operational period in our 8-year organisational history. Indeed, due to the critical nature of the support provided by ILF Scotland to around 5,000 disabled people in Scotland and Northern Ireland, colleagues have had to deal with difficult and challenging circumstances on a daily basis alongside increased workloads. Colleagues have been able to deal with an increase in work tasks and corresponding without any adverse impact on service quality or organisational resilience.
19. Today, we are as healthy and well as a staff team and are preparing for the future. We are mindful that we have had to change our 'business as usual' model. We are never complacent and work hard constantly to ensure our staff offering is fit for purpose to attract and retain staff. We have made sure all team are safe, supported, resilient and ready for it, and being life friendly means knowing what is important to our team, and doing what we need to do to keep them at their best.
20. We all work flexibly to suit our own personal situation. Following COVID, the technical move to full and remote working was straightforward due to our embedded policies and life friendly working practices. We are cognisant of the pressures all staff have which can be, but not limited to:

- Childcare
- Family care and of grandchildren and elderly parents
- Changes to the nature of work
- An ability for face-to-face meetings and direct personal support

21. Our embedded life friendly and flexible policies which all staff are encouraged to use with regular promotion are as follows:

- Maternity Policy: As a day one right - CMP 26 weeks full pay and CMP 26 weeks half pay. A phased return option is an available option over 6 weeks; and also, an entitlement to request income smoothing during your OML and AML is available. Re-training on returning from Maternity Leave is available and encouraged as appropriate
- Paternity Policy: As a day one right: 8 weeks Paternity leave which can be taken in up to 4 instalments of 2 weeks up to 180 days after the date of child's birth/adoption. An employee may take paid time off to accompany their pregnant partner to antenatal appointments
- Adoption Policy: Mirrors our Maternity Policy
- Shared Parental Leave Policy – as a day one right
- Time off for Dependents: As a day one right: a generous paid time and also unpaid time available over a 12-month rolling period and an extra 5 days paid leave if matched by a days annual leave up to 5 extra days.
- Well Being Policy: this includes the health & wellbeing hour where employees can do something that helps their wellbeing.
- Sickness & Absence Policy: this includes generous SSP
- Parental Leave Policy which offers unpaid leave for up to 18 weeks until a child is 18 years old
- Term Time Working is available as an option with income smoothed pro-rated salary
- Menopause Support and Managers Guidance with health awareness sessions offered in 2022
- Learning & Development Policy: PDP's are individually led with input from line managers with support to follow interest and activities. Many employees have completed accredited degrees and course which has allowed them to apply for promoted posts both internally and externally
- Flexible Working Policy
- Flexitime Policy
- Hybrid Principles to allow enhanced flexibility to when and where all employees work
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Bereavement Policy: offering generous paid leave and support

22. We have considered our new strategic plan and current thinking is we will work this flexible way in the future with our office being a meeting and social space as well as a workplace.

23. 100% of our staff are empowered to work as flexibly as they want, both before and since COVID-19 lockdown. Staff can work anytime 24/7 if that suits within confines of business need. Simply discuss and agree options with their line manager. The availability of this approach to work has led to greater

cohesiveness and valued based culture. Sickness levels have been stable and remains relatively low.

Barriers to Family Friendly working

24. The following is a list of possible identified barriers to Family Friendly working and are not ILF Scotland barriers per se, but rather societal challenges:
- lack of external and financial provision to carers
 - increasing scarcity and number of subsidised childcare places
 - cost of living; specifically transport costs
 - processing time to gain grant support from Access to Work to support disabled people and people with underlying health conditions due to increasing workloads
 - gaining appropriate technology where individuals require bespoke solutions for work due to global shortages.

Government Policies /Legislation

25. As an NDPB who analogue to the Scottish Government Pay Policy we offer similar policy frameworks and offer similar working practices. As a consequence of understanding fully the environment in which we operate we could identify a number of areas which may influence and expand our offering to support our employees.

Summary

26. As a small, lean organisation, ILF Scotland strategically places staff well-being, diversity & inclusion, flexibility, and development at the heart of its business strategy. Simply put, ILF Scotland wants to be the best it can be for staff, so that in turn staff see us as not only an employer of choice, but that they are as motivated by our culture and practices to be the best they can be for those we support. SMT leads the whole organisation to ensure implementation of our changes ensuring staff feel valued and listened to with changes timeously implemented regularly to suit the changing organisational landscape.