
nawra

national association of
welfare rights advisers

**Minutes of the meeting held on
Friday 9th December 2011 in York**

Present:

Wendy Smart	
Ian McKinnie	Action for Blind People
Giles Charter	Advice Train
Robert Jenkinson	Age UK York
Angela Barham	Age UK York
Helen Berrill	Age UK York
Paul Robinson	Alnwick CAB
James Wright	AME
Campbell McCree	Berwick CAB
Eileen Franklin	Blyth Valley Disabled Forum
Sue Browne	Bolton Council
Daphne Hall	Bristol City Council
Sarah Roy	CAB/Macmillan
Julia Latimer	Carlisle City Council
Anthony Lewis	CCC
Esther Doona	Chesterfield CAB
Kelly Smith	Child Poverty Action Group
Martin Williams	Child Poverty Action Group
Alan Markey	Citizens Advice
Kate Fincham	Citizens Advice
Fiona Seymour	Citizens Advice
Sue Royston	Citizens Advice
Ruth Tindley	Corby and Kettering CAB
Grace Helliwell	City of York Council
Allan Reynolds	Derby Advice
Tony Pickering	Derbyshire County Council
Juan Ramirez	Derbyshire Housing Aid
Paul Mortimer	Derbyshire Welfare Rights
Bee Walsh	DHA
Sonia Pennant	Dudley Council
Phil Hanns	Durham Council
Kathryn Wright	Durham Council
Julie Burton	DWR DCC
Helen Porter	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Glynis Stevenson	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Natalie Sweeting	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Denise Lodge	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Mike Drury	East Rising of Yorkshire Council
Maggie Erdmann	East Rising of Yorkshire Council
Gareth Morgan	Ferret
Paul Brooks	FIAS/ Suffolk County Council

Louise Pearson	Flintshire County Council
Anne Rivers	Foundation – Housing Options
Pauline Golden	Future Prospects
Anne Dewar	Hambleton CAB
Sue Wright	Harrogate CAB
Heather Brook	Harrogate CAB
Gary Layzoll	Harrogate CAB
Sue B	Herts County Council Money Advice Unit
Corin Hammersley	Howells Direct
Lorraine Podmore	Howells Direct
Elaine Floyd	ISOS Housing
Lee Forrest	ISOS Housing
Paul Rose	Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust
Nick Ruff	Kirklees Benefits Advice
Damian Williams	Kirklees Benefits Advice
Jim McKenny	Kirklees Council
Joe Power	Kirklees Law Centre
Mike Ellison	Leicestershire County Council
Linda Willars	Leicestershire County Council
Jeanette Jones	Liverpool Hope University
Patrick Hill	Manchester Mind
Sheila Fitzsimmons	Mental Health Matters
Jane Chapman	Mental Health Matters
Suzi Meaney	Middlesbrough Council
Lorraine Brown	Middlesbrough Council
Malcolm Bateman	Middlesbrough Council
Frank Richardson	NARPO Merseyside
Jan Owen-Pam	National Autistic Society
Paul Macklin	National Deaf Children's Society
Amanda Pye	Neath Port Talbot Council
Debra White	Neath Port Talbot Council
Jackie Hankins	Neath Port Talbot Council
Allison Brennan	Neath Port Talbot Council
Eileen Newman	Neath Port Talbot Council
Carolyn Heaven	Neath Port Talbot Homes
Peter Southall	Neath Port Talbot Homes
Tracy Fallon-Topham	New Charter Housing Association
Andy Malik	Newcastle Law Centre
Paul Codd	North Lincolnshire Council
Keith Thompson	Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust
Helen W	Perennial
Shawn Mach	Rightsnet
Jane Emerson	Rotherham Council
Sally Marshall	Rushcliffe Advice Network
John Bracewell	Ryedale CAB
Richard Bundy	Salford CAB
Debbie Witton	Salford Council
Baljinder Bajwa	Sandwell Council
Lesley Brockbon	SBC
Gina Culling	Scarborough and Ryedale Carers Resource
Aggie Szymanska-Skelton	Scarborough CAB
Rachel Boyes	Scarborough CAB
Ella James	Scarborough CAB
David Ponton Brown	Scarborough Council

Michael Connor
Jeff Barker
Varinder Jagra
Billy Park
Dave Lowrie
Roger Thompson
Rhoda Cooke
Sam Royston
Phil Bremner
Richard Porter
Heather Theobald
Liz Wilson
Mo Aldred
Nigel Wheatley
Will Hadwen
Sangeeta Enright
Damian Keogh
Stephen W
Steve A
Jill McMahan
Caroline Hadlington

Staffordshire County Council
Stockton Council
Stockton Council
Stockton Council
Stockton Council
Tameside Council
Taunton Citizens Advice Bureau
The Children's Society
Wakefield Council
Welfare Benefits Unit
Welfare Benefits Unit
Welfare Benefits Unit/ Yorkshire Housing
Whitby Disablement Action Group
Wolverhampton Social Services
Working Families
Worklink, Kirklees Council
Wrexham Council
Wrexham Council
York CAB
York Carers Centre
York Carers Centre

Apologies: Maureen Arthur (Barnet CAB); Simone Caudell (Orbit Housing); Mark Perlic (Wolverhampton Council); Clive Millman (Jesus Fellowship Church); Shaun Kelly (Leeds Welfare Rights)

Welcome: Heather Theobald – Welfare Benefits Unit

Minutes from previous meeting: minutes of the meeting held in Edinburgh on 2nd September 2011 agreed.

Guest speaker: Kate Pickett – The Equality Trust

Kate Pickett is professor of epidemiology at the University of York, and a National Institute for Health Research Career scientist. She co-founded the Equality Trust, a non-profit organisation seeking to explain the benefits of a more equal society, and is the co-author of *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. Originally published in 2009, the book has been widely acclaimed and was voted one of the top 10 books of the decade by New Statesman magazine.

Kate's presentation examined the compelling evidence that inequality has a negative impact on society. In rich countries, a smaller gap between rich and poor means a happier, healthier, and more successful population. Meanwhile, more economic growth will not give us better lives. In fact, there is no relation between income per head and social well-being in rich countries.

If the UK were more equal, we'd be better off as a population. For example, the evidence suggests that if we reduced inequality then murder rates, obesity, imprisonment and teenage births would all reduce and mental health and levels of trust would improve. It's not just poor people who would do better. The evidence suggests that people all the way up the income scale would benefit, although it's true that the poorest would gain the most. The findings are the same whether you look across developed nations, or across the fifty states of the USA.

She also explored the political context in which the evidence has been presented and received.

See www.equalitytrust.org.uk for slides, data, research digests, articles, analysis pieces, podcasts and videos on inequality and the work of the Equality Trust.

Paul Mortimer – Derbyshire Welfare Rights

Q. Where on the political spectrum can this conversation take place?

A. During its time in power, Labour focussed more on poverty than inequality. One of the reasons for writing the book and establishing the Equality Trust was to highlight the importance of inequality and keep it on the political agenda. It is up to Labour to articulate it into policy terms.

Guest speaker: Nancy Kelley – Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Nancy Kelley is deputy director of Policy and Research at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. She leads JRF's work on Place and Poverty. See www.jrf.org.uk for more information.

The benefits of the recent long period of growth have not been distributed equally. While the rich have got a lot richer, the poor have not seen much increase in their incomes. This has created more inequality. The Labour government focussed on child and pensioner poverty and progress was made through income transfers. For example, pensioner poverty was reduced by half in the last ten years and of the £201 billion spent on benefits each year, just over half is now going to pensioners. Child poverty was also reduced, especially through providing extra support for lone parents. However, during this time working age people were left behind. Half of working age adults who are out of work are living in absolute poverty. The people most likely to be left behind are those in age groups closest to the child and pensioner groups (16-24 and 55-65 year olds). Work is not necessarily the best route out of poverty: 53% of adults in poverty are working. The problem is the quality of the 'hollowed out' labour market in a de-industrialised economy. The jobs that are available tend to be insecure and low paid.

Despite the economic crisis, the new government has stuck with the mantra that work is the best route out of poverty. There is renewed emphasis on tackling what is perceived to be 'benefit dependency' and the use of sanctions as 'work incentives'. The impact of sanctions is mixed. Research suggests that they do force people to take up jobs, but these tend to be of low quality and short-lived. There is likely to be a negative impact on children and claimants have a poor understand of the sanctioning system.

Universal Credit (UC) aims to be a less complex system. There is a bigger earnings disregard and a single taper which provides more incentive to get a job and provides support in and out of work. However, the incentive to have two earners in a household reduces even though we know that in order to reduce child poverty, both parents need to be in work. JRF analysis has found that the introduction of UC will produce 2.5 million winners, 1.4 million losers and 2.5 million people whose situation will remain unchanged.

The IFS has projected that UC (if it works) will lift 450,000 children out of poverty by 2021. However, the other changes to the benefits system will do more harm than UC does good. Tax credit and housing benefit cuts, child benefit freeze and the shift from up-rating by RPI to CPI will increase levels of poverty. The IFS predict that child poverty will rise from 2.6m to 2.9m in 2015/16 and 3.3m in 2020. The child poverty target will be missed by quite a margin.

JRF have been doing some work on income adequacy. The Minimum Income Standard is an ongoing project to establish how much people need to achieve a minimum acceptable standard of living in the UK today, based on what ordinary people think should be in a household budget and experts' views of what is adequate. It aims to influence debates about the nature of poverty in the UK. The figures are updated annually. For 2011 it was found that a single person needs to earn at least £15,000 a year before tax to afford a minimum acceptable standard of living. A couple with a single earner and two children need at least £31,600. Out-of-work benefits remain well below the requirement for a minimum living standard, but pensioners claiming Pension Credit have incomes close to their minimum needs. Over the past three years, benefit levels have deteriorated relative to the income required to meet people's minimum needs. The rise in personal tax allowances in April 2011 means that for a single person to afford the minimum, the wages required have increased by less than inflation. For families with children, by contrast, the earnings required to make ends meet have risen much faster than living costs, because Child Benefit has been frozen and tax credits reduced for many families. Most importantly, tax credits helping low-income families to cover childcare costs have been cut. Typically, families requiring childcare would have to earn over 20 per cent more in 2011 than in 2010 to meet the shortfall.

JRF believe that the government needs to think about income adequacy rather than the poverty line. They need to reconsider recent changes to the benefits system that make it worse. There needs to be a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy, not one that only targets certain groups. There needs to be support for workers rights, new industries and local level innovation for good quality jobs. We need to be smarter about education and skills to help young people to succeed in the modern labour market.

Guest speaker: Jonathan Bradshaw – Professor of social policy at York University and chair of Welfare Benefits Unit.

Jonathan Bradshaw is angry.

In 2009-10, the UK had the lowest level of child poverty since 1981. Now, it's increasing rapidly. There are rising numbers of people living in absolute poverty and regressive cuts to public spending are loaded on to women in particular.

The re-assessment of IB claimants has been a cruel and incompetent disaster. Universal Credit is going to be more of an administrative mess than tax credits ever were.

The political discourse is in an awful state, with talk of "120,000 problem families" and attempts to water down the Child Poverty Act by changing definitions.

Welfare rights workers have a more important job than ever.

Workshops:

- A. *Welfare reform and disability issues*
Sue Royston – Citizens Advice
[notes at www.nawra.org.uk]

- B. *Welfare reform for children and families*
Sam Royston – The Children's Society
[notes at www.nawra.org.uk]

- C. *The abolition of council tax benefit and the new localised schemes*
David Ponton Brown – Scarborough Borough Council
[notes at www.nawra.org.uk]
- D. *Mental health and the Work Capability Assessment*
Patrick Hill – Manchester Mind
[notes at www.nawra.org.uk]

Information exchange:

1. Early DLA renewal

Keith Thompson – Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Claimants who undergo the WCA (either for a new claim or a conversion from IB) are receiving a DLA580 renewal form early. It's not clear why this should be happening.

2. Abolition of EMA and problems with ESA

Kathryn Wright – Durham Welfare Rights

Since the abolition of Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), some young person have claimed ESA. However, in doing so their family loses CB and CTC and they can be made worse off. It's difficult to withdraw an ESA claim and families don't necessarily understand the need for a better off calculation.

Sometimes it's the opposite problem: the young person needs to claim ESA but HMRC will not stop paying CTC and CB.

3. Disability hate crime

Chris Graham – Durham Welfare Rights

There has been an increase in disability hate crime. This might be partly explained by better recording of statistics but must also be due to increased hostility towards disabled people as benefit claimants. The government and the press regularly portray disabled benefit claimants as workshy fraudsters.

NAWRA could make an FOI request to the Home Office to find out the national and local figures.

4. Congratulations Ruth Tindley PhD!

Congratulations Dr Ruth Tindley of Citizens Advice Corby & Kettering in completing a PhD thesis at the University of Leicester on 'Access to social security benefits for people who are unable to work because of mental illness'. This is available in the 'documents' section of the NAWRA website at http://nawra.org.uk/archive_documents

Future meetings:

9th Mar 2012 – London

Our next meeting will be held at Amnesty's Human Rights Action Centre in Shoreditch, east London. Capacity is limited to 100 delegates so booking will be required. More details will be circulated in due course.

1st Jun 2012 – Neath

Sept 2012 – Glasgow

Dec 2012 – Durham

Can your organisation offer to host a NAWRA meeting in 2013? Please contact Alan Markey, the Chair of the Committee (Alan.Markey@citizensadvice.org.uk) to find out more.

Any other business:

Contact details

Do you receive regular emails (or postal mailings) from NAWRA? If not, it is likely that we do not have the correct contact details for you. Please contact Kelly Smith, NAWRA Secretary at nawra@cpag.org.uk or 94 White Lion Street, London, N1 9PF.

Committee vacancies

There are vacancies for NAWRA representatives in Scotland and North Wales. If you are interested in either of these positions please contact Alan Markey, chair of the committee at alan.markey@citizensadvice.org.uk

Thank you to Heather Theobald and colleagues at Welfare Benefits Unit in York, the guest speakers and the workshop facilitators