

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Environment and Community Panel
DATE:	4 th July 2017
TITLE:	Report of the Informal Working Group – Operation of the West Norfolk Disability Forum
TYPE OF REPORT:	Informal Working Group report to Panel
PORTFOLIO(S):	Community – Councillor Adrian Lawrence
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OPEN	

REPORT

PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:

This report provides detail of the work of the Informal Working Group which was set up by the Environment and Community Panel on 15th March 2017 to look at the future operation of the West Norfolk Disability Forum.

Minutes from the Informal Working Group are available to view on the Council's Intranet.

KEY ISSUES:

Feedback from Councillors who sit on the West Norfolk Disability Forum included concerns that the Forum was not productive in its current format. Problems with the Forum were identified by the Informal Working Group as follows:

- Size of the Forum
- Membership of Forum and attendance at meetings
- Managing expectations of external attendees

Concerns were also expressed that the Forum had become a 'talking shop', and no longer delivered its objectives, as set out in its Constitution. Members felt that information was now available in other formats such as public consultation exercises, information in the media and online and queries and concerns could be answered quicker if individuals contacted the relevant organisation direct.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

The Informal Working Group considered the following options:

1. Disband the Forum in its current form and look at other ways of operating to make the Forum more effective.
2. Do nothing.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Informal Working Group recommend the following to the Environment and Community Panel:

1. Disband the West Norfolk Disability Forum
2. Invite Cabinet to give consideration to appointing a Disability/Equalities Champion and further suggest that this role be given the status of a new Portfolio Holder position. This would ensure that it is seen that due and serious consideration has been given to making the changes.

3. That the Environment and Community Panel have the opportunity to look at the Borough Council's Equalities Policy which is due for review and give consideration to establishing an Informal Working Group to input into the review if necessary.
4. That the Environment and Community Panel receive and update on the Equalities Policy on an annual basis.
5. That ways to promote Equality on the Corporate Agenda be investigated.
6. That a page be created on the website to promote the Equality and Disability Champion. An e-form could be created so that members of the public could report issues direct to the Equalities Champion.
7. An e-learning package on disability awareness be made available to staff and Members.
8. The Disabilities Champion to hold open Forums, as required (a minimum of twice a year), which will be open to all.
9. The Disabilities Champion to report to the Environment and Community Panel on an annual basis.
10. That the Opportunity Awards and other events hosted by the Forum be incorporated into other events already organised by the Borough Council.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Informal Working Group feel that their recommendations would provide a route for members of the public to report issues immediately to the Disability Champion, without having to wait for a meeting of the West Norfolk Disability Forum.

The open Forums will provide the opportunity for members of the public to report any issues of concern to the Disability Champion. Through annual reporting to the Environment and Community Panel, the public and members will receive an update on issues raised and dealt with to report on issues raised and dealt with.

REPORT DETAIL

1. Introduction

1.1 On 15th March 2017, the Environment and Community Panel received feedback reports from Council appointed representatives on Outside Bodies. Representatives on the West Norfolk Disability Forum felt that the Forum, in its current format, was not productive and had moved away from its aims and objectives as set out in its Constitution.

1.2 The Environment and Community Panel established an Informal Working Group to review the operation of the West Norfolk Disability Forum. The Informal Working Group met three times and comprised of Councillors Bubb, Fraser and Westrop.

2. Proposal

2.1 The Informal Working Group agreed that the West Norfolk Disability Forum, in its current format, should be disbanded. The Forum looked at alternative ways that the Forum could operate and all agreed that it was important for members of the public to continue to have a route to report issues.

3. Issues for the Panel to Consider

3.1 The Informal Working Group feel that their recommendations provide a better opportunity for members of the public to raise issues. The creation of a Disability Champion and a dedicated web page and e-form provide the opportunity to report issues at any time instead of having to wait for a Forum meeting every three months.

3.2 The Panel may like to consider ways to engage members of the public who do not have access to the internet. If a Disability Champion is created, this could be promoted through Parish Magazines and Ward Members.

3.3 Open Forums would also provide the opportunity for members of the public to attend to meet the Disabilities Champion and raise any issues of concern.

3.4 In 2016/2017 three meetings of the West Norfolk Disability Forum had been held. Details of attendance at the meetings are below and agendas and minutes of the meetings are available on the Borough Council's website:

Date of Meeting	Number of external attendees	Number of Councillor attendees	Number of Officer attendees
20th July 2016	12	5	3
25 th January 2016	11	5	2
18 th April 2017	6	2	3

Agendas for the meeting are sent to 45 external recipients via email and 30 hard copies are posted out to external organisations/individuals.

4. Background Papers

Minutes from the West Norfolk Disability Forum
Minutes from the Informal Working Group
West Norfolk Disability Forum Constitution