

Women's Forum

Minutes of a meeting of the Women's Forum held at The Guildhall & on Teams on Tuesday 30 January 2024 at 11.00 am.

Present: Pauline Woodhouse (Co-Chair), Lauren Fitzgerald, Sally Wood, Nadia, Sarah Franklin, Manni Couniham, Elona Latifi, Dawn Thomas, Tina Matthew, Ellis James, Eleri Neale, Lorraine Lewis, Emma Ling, Debs Burns, Debbie MacColl

95. Welcomes, Introductions and Apologies

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting around the room and the screen. Apologies were received from Cllr Anna King (Co-Chair), Rachel Packman, Cllr Rosie Humphreys, Neelam Aggarwal, Charlene Ward-Greef, Matthew Peleszok,

96. Code of Conduct

As attached to the Agenda.

97. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes were agreed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

98. New Regulations for Elections - Voter ID

Since May 2023 voters have been required to show ID when voting in person at a Polling Station. We hadn't really had any issues with voter fraud previously, but need to follow the rules. This May's election will be the first election for WNC since the change. The Team had been looking at what other areas had done in order to learn from them rather than making the same mistakes. Staff in the Polling Station will be required to ask a voter for their legal name and address, then to see their ID.

First of all you need to be registered to vote – the easiest method is online through [Register to vote - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)

If you have recently changed your name, email electoral services - electoralservices@westnorthants.gov.uk

Acceptable forms of ID can be found here - [Accepted forms of photo ID | Electoral Commission](#) If you think your ID does not look like you, it might be worth updating it.

If you do not have any acceptable ID you can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate for free. VAC has been introduced as a free form of photo ID and can be applied for as many times as you need to. It cannot be used for ID for anything else. [Apply for](#)

photo ID to vote (called a 'Voter Authority Certificate') - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) If you need one, it is best to do it as soon as possible, the absolute deadline is 5pm, 6 days prior to the election. When taking a photo keep your hair out of face so it is visible. Glasses can be worn.

Gender markers will not be checked. So far, some where between 0.25 – 1.4% people had not been given a voter paper. You will not be given one if the Polling Station staff have **reasonable doubt** you are not the person you claim to be. Staff will be trained before elections to check voter certificates and you will not be discriminated against. There is the option to request it is checked in a private space – you do not need to give a reasonable reason for this. No one except the Presiding Officer or a Poll Clerk can check your ID. You can request a woman, but there is currently no legislation that says there needs to be a woman in every station. Mirrors will be provided so any face coverings can adjusted.

If you prefer a postal vote, register through this link - [Apply for a postal vote - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) No ID is currently required.

If you are away and want a proxy to vote for you, apply through this link [How to vote: Voting by proxy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) Your proxy will need to supply their ID but not yours.

The next elections are: Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Thursday May 2nd 2024. The next General Election must take place before January 28th 2025 but it is anticipated sometime in 2024.

Election notices etc can be viewed here - [Election notices and future elections | West Northamptonshire Council \(westnorthants.gov.uk\)](#)

If you are interested in working the elections follow this link - [Employment opportunities at elections | West Northamptonshire Council \(westnorthants.gov.uk\)](#)

Electoral Services can be contacted:-

- electoralservices@westnorthants.gov.uk
- 01604 837111
- [Electoral services | West Northamptonshire Council \(westnorthants.gov.uk\)](#)

Pauline asked Ellis if they went out into the community to share this information with groups. Ellis stated that they were a small team and did not have much capacity but would see what they could do. More than happy to speak to people if they came to the Guildhall. As far as different languages went canvassers for the annual canvas in the autumn had a language guide to take out but that was all at present. Eleri stated she would take any leaflets out to the harder to reach community groups. Dawn was interested to know if there were any women in the team who could deliver as some groups would be more comfortable with that. Ellis said yes, there were and he would take that back to the Team. She also asked about students. Ellis responded that students could vote in the place they lived and also the place they lived while studying but needed to register for both. Applications were dealt with fairly quickly but best not to leave it until the last minute.

Everyone thanked Ellis for an interesting and informative presentation.

99. **'No More' Week**

No More Week, against domestic abuse and sexual violence was the first week in March and the run up to International Women's Day. It was anticipated it could be marked during the IWD event in some way. Further details can be found - [NO MORE WEEK 2024 • NOMORE.org | Together we can end domestic & sexual violence.](#)

In addition in, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness Week ran from 5 – 11 February and there would be a stand in the One Stop Shop on Thursday 8 February.

100. **International Women's Day**

Debbie reported that most of the stands were taken and the Great Hall would be the Community area and the Court Room the Women's Business Network area. There would also be workshops and book launches as well as performances on the stage. The Shortlisted Inspirational Women nominees would be invited to a reception at 1pm ahead of the presentation on the stage at 2pm. The Rock Choir would then close the show.

Lauren asked if there were any weddings as they could park the fire engine outside (last year it had been outside The Bank) with the bunting on it. Debbie to enquire. Also if the stand could be the same place as last year by the plug socket so they could bring the game again.

Elona offered an Albanian National Dance performance which Debbie snapped up!

The names of the shortlisted Inspirational Women should be available 19 February or shortly afterwards – look out for a press release.

101. **Community Information Exchange**

Tina, NRC - Started running survivor workshops for women and girls aged 14 years plus to give a voice to that community. The next one was at the Umbrella Fair on Saturday.

Lauren, Fire & Rescue – The Fire Service now has a crisis line for firefighters past and present with mental health concerns, PTSD and as a response to the misogyny reports from London. It wasn't specifically for women, but it was somewhere those with the protected characteristics could go for support.

Manni, Ramgarhia Board Northampton – Looking forward to IWD and had booked a stall. They were currently looking for an activity for children during half term, somewhere they could walk to from their base in Cromwell Street which was a registered Welcome Space and open to all. They had a senior citizens café / hobby morning, run by older ladies, which was getting interest from other ages. A free meal

was provided with activities such as knitting. They were currently looking for support with yoga.

Elona – Albanian community event in Leicester Street hub every Wednesday 9am – 1.30pm with activities such as warm space, coffee, language for Albanian mums. Also getting other nationalities. Traditional Albanian activities on Sundays 2.30-5.30pm.

Sally – Women's Business Networking events had been really successful with the next one planned for 25 April, everyone welcome. Lovely atmosphere with a good balance of business and community. Meetings were hybrid but more to be gained through attending and networking in person.

Sarah – Promoting service to all those affected by gambling, their own or someone else's. There was no waiting list and people were generally contacted within 48 hours of referral. Those impacted did not have to wait for the person themselves to seek help, but could be accessing support straight away. Trying to take away the stigma as people do not want to talk about gambling. Always happy to attend community events and would be attending IWD again this year. Also happy to attend community meetings to talk about the service. Statistically every community has people who are impacted, it was completely hidden. Gamcare had been around for over 25 years but still many people have not heard of it.

Emma, Royal and Derrigate – Currently have the co-production of The Frogs and the Clown Theatre with accessible, BSL and caption performances. Looking ahead, they are collaborating with BBC Radio Northampton, NHS and UoN on the annual Headfest to support and inform people around mental health and wellbeing. The Derrigate hosted last year but unfortunately, with RAAC in the building, there was not enough space so it would be held at the Riverside Campus on 22/23 June with a few events at the Derrigate.

Lorraine, Lewis Foundation – The Grosvenor Centre shop had started as a way of raising money with donated end of line stock but had found a new purpose. Every Wednesday and Friday students from Northgate School were getting workplace experience by working in the shop, doing everything including front of house, to prepare them for paid work. The shop was open Monday – Saturday 9.30-5.30.

Dawn – writing the strategy for year. This year would be the PCC elections and a General Election which would affect the funding and where it came from. Always trying to raise the profile in the community including violence against men and boys who made up 8% of clients. Non binary made up 0.5%.

Debs, WNC now had 102 Welcome Spaces across all communities.

Two years since the invasion of Ukraine and they were looking to mark it in some way on 24 February. The newsletter went out to 1,800 people including community leaders so if anyone had anything to be included please send to forums.nbc@westnorthants.gov.uk by 25th of the month latest.

Future of the Forum – Debbie said that the previous year had seen a dramatic dwindling of members attending meetings, so much so, the future of the forum was in doubt. Was it still fit for purpose or should it just concentrate on the International Women's Day event? We want your views, please complete this short anonymous survey - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZWCM6PP>

102. **Items for Future Meetings**

Discussion about the future of the Women's Forum

103. **Date of Next Meeting**

6pm Tuesday 28 May 2024 at The Guildhall and on Teams