



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Women's Forum

Minutes of a meeting of the Women's Forum held at Northampton's Guildhall and on Teams on Tuesday 29 November 2022 at 11.00 am.

Present Pauline Woodhouse (co-Chair), Lindsey Atkins, Matthew Peleszok, Rachel Duncan, Bree Lamb, Hina Shafi, Debs Burns, Dawn Cummins, Morcea Walker, Katy Johnson, Divya Terry, Angie Kennedy, Cllr Janie Duffy, Mavis Mundirwa, Sally Woods, Maddy Allen, Eleri Neale, Aiesha Bailey, Ryan Griffiths, Debbie MacColl

45. Welcomes, Introductions and Apologies

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting and introductions made around the screen and the room. Apologies were received from Cllr Anna King, Cllr Cathrine Russell, Neelam Aggarwal, Sarah Franklin and Syrah Nazir.

46. Code of Conduct

Everyone was reminded to put their hand up (real or virtual) if they wanted to speak.

47. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record. Actions were around International Women's Day and will be picked up on the agenda.

48. BAME Sub Group Update

The last meeting had been held on 8/11/22 and the minutes have been circulated to Forum members. Mavis reported that Power of the Mind had a family get together on 26 November as part of the 16 Days of Activism activities. It was a bit disappointing as not many service providers had attended and it was meant to be all about them promoting their services. Another event was planned for 9 December at the Grosvenor Centre with 8 organisations already committed.

Pauline added that a conversation about the future of the group in the New Year would be appropriate as there had maybe some loss of sight as to why the group had been set up originally. However, she did emphasise that she did support all the activities that were going on. Morcea added that it was a very useful group, she could see great value in having something unique and there was an obvious need. Mavis added that she had stepped in part way to Chair the group but felt that it was time for her to now step down and someone new take on this position in the New Year. However she would continue to support where she could. Rachel stated that any opportunity to review should be taken positively but that she was very sad to see Mavis step down. The group had moved on but there were limitless possibilities for the group to take on and Divya was happy to keep attending and see where it went.

Action - January agenda item discuss future of BAME subgroup.

49. **Introduction to Money & Pensions Service**

Dawn Cummings said she welcomed the opportunity to speak at the meeting to raise awareness about the service and the money helper as it was a really tight time for a lot of people needing help. Women were adversely affected by a lot of what was happening.

The service was set up in 2019 as an arms-length service to DWP funded by levies. It was not for profit and there was no charge to users. Money & Pensions was the umbrella organisation with Money Helper sitting underneath with the objective of providing support when people needed it, help them to save when they could and to know about their pension. There were 5 million families affected by fuel poverty, also a lot of people had issues with debt, scams and paying their bills generally. There was a lot of support available but it could be a bit overwhelming and difficult to know where to start. A lot of work is aimed at the most vulnerable in society but there was also a lot aimed at the squeezed middle. The website had a bill prioritiser which was a new tool developed during the Covid pandemic which allowed people to put in their bills and it would prioritise them, first of all keeping a roof over their heads, with mortgage or rent payments a priority. There were lots of hints and tips, for example Anglian Water have a priority services register where you can apply for a discount. Also a debt locator tool which brings up all the agencies locally to you that give advice and support. A lot of this relies on digital access which not everyone has but there are also a lot of free printed guides available on request.

Women can be adversely affected by pensions, especially the Waspi generation – a lot of advice and guidance is available including Pensionwise which can be very helpful for a lot of people, also advice in finding lost pensions. She told of one example of a homeless man who was ex-military – he was given assistance to track down his pension which was backdated and was enough to get him off the streets and set up.

Mavis asked if Dawn went out to the community to give advice. Dawn responded that there were not many of them but were happy to attend events where a lot of people could be engaged with at one time. However, they were not able to give one to one sessions.

Janice stated that the Weston Favell surgeries had a meeting every 2 months with about 70 attendees and could Dawn attend that – Janice and Dawn speak outside the meeting.

Useful links –

[The Money and Pensions Service | Building financial wellbeing](#)

[Everyday money | MoneyHelper](#)

Pauline stated that she welcomed the printed guides as not everyone had access to the internet and often older people had limited attention span.

Morcea added that in addition people could access the WNC website Cost of Living page - [Cost of living support | West Northamptonshire Council \(westnorthants.gov.uk\)](#)

50. **OFPC Budget Consultation**

Stephen Mold stated he wanted to start a conversation around the Police and Fire budgets and funding for next year and would shortly be releasing a survey to get the view of residents. Normally the funding from the Home Office is announced the week before Christmas with 45% coming from the tax-payer and 55% from central Government. The amount from Government was calculated for each area, for example Bedfordshire received £35m more than Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire £4m less. The Government was looking at the funding formula to see if it was fair. Northants had one of the fastest growing populations. Police and Fire were not immune to inflation and officers needed pay rises to keep up with the cost of living the same as everyone else. Stephen reminded people that only 18% of their Council tax bill went towards police & fire. The average household annual bill was about £2k meaning £278 to police and £68 to fire. What he wanted to do was to increase contributions by £15 for police and £5 for fire.

In the county there were 1,500 police officers protecting hundreds of thousands of people, the numbers had grown by about 400 over the last few years and the county had one of the largest reductions in burglary in the country. The fire service had been in a very tight financial position when it came from NCC with an aging fleet with the youngest fire engine being 15 years old when the useful life age was also 15 years. One of the pumps had actually exploded due to fatigue. Eight had now been replaced but there was more work to do. Significant work had been undertaken to save money by sharing of services and buildings with £1.8m saved the previous year on IT alone.

Ryan asked whether the fire brigade unions needed to be considered when financial planning and how would that impact? Stephen responded that negotiations were done as a collective. The absolute maximum that could be afforded was 5% and there was nothing more that could be offered in terms of affordability. However, if things did go down the strike route, there could be savings as fire fighters did not get paid during a strike, there would, of course, be a level of risk.

Sally asked what wouldn't happen if the additional funding was not achieved. Stephen responded that there were always choices, but he remained committed to the number of police officers and neighbourhood offering, investing in youth workers, case workers and neighbourhood officers. However, they had not done a good job of recruiting PCSOs who were a valuable part of policing, currently being 20 under establishment. There was a need to save 1% of turnover to reinvest in services. Sharing of buildings, selling off unused buildings for example Kettering and Corby buildings had had various sales falling through and needed to be disposed of. There was nothing that particularly worried him at the moment but if the response was no to the increase there would be some things that could not happen.

Maddy stated that training of new recruits was a concern to her with only ½ day for domestic abuse, she would like to see more training given and did not think it was taken seriously enough. It was time to change the narrative from 'why did she wear that skirt?' to 'why did he do that?' Stephen said he did not recognise that but would be happy to discuss further outside the meeting. There were several initiatives such as Op Kayak looking for sexual predators in the night-time economy, working with the

college around boys' attitudes to girls and the recent launch of the Flair app. He had heard all the terrible stories from the Met and wanted to know about Northants and how people found the service and maybe focus groups would be the way to do that.

Post meeting note – the consultation is now open and can be accessed here - <https://www.research.net/r/OPFCC2023counciltaxconsultation>

Press release and QR code are at the end of the minutes.

51. **IWD Update**

Debbie reported that the 2023 International Women's Day event would need to be delivered on a very small budget due to the Council's spending restrictions. Compromises had had to be made but it was not thought it would be particularly noticeable by attendees.

Debbie would be sending out the stall booking form with priority for Forum members until the New Year. It was not known yet if free parking in the basement could be offered to attendees as procedures were being changed in the new year.

One of the Guildhall's contracted caterers had been approached to see if they would provide a pay as go café service for the event. They had not yet responded. Otherwise there would not be refreshments except for teas/coffees for stall holders.

Debbie was working with Asy Ho from Nat West, Kerry Reynolds from Metro Bank and Sally Woods to deliver some business workshops.

Inspirational woman nominations would open on Thursday 5 January, closing on Monday 6 February. In order to remain within budget it was necessary to restrict shortlisting to a winner and a runner up in each of the 2 categories and unfortunately there would be no special recognition award this year. Following feedback from shortlisted nominees and attendees of the event, this year the shortlisted nominees would be invited to a small reception in the Jeffrey Room to meet the judges, then everyone would move downstairs to the stage in the Great Hall for the announcement of the winners. Last year's winners of the business and Community awards would be invited to the judging panel for 2023.

52. **Community Information Exchange**

Mavis told the group about the Freedom programme every Wednesday 8-9.30pm online for BAME women. Anyone wanting more details to contact Mavis.

Eleri informed the group that the police were about to start consultation on their race action plan and she would be sending out details during the next few days.

We hope everyone has a very Merry and Safe Christmas and look forward to seeing you all in the New Year.

53. **Items for Future Meetings**

Future of BAME subgroup
International Women's Day 2023

54. **Dates for Next Year**

Tuesday 31 January 2023 – 11am – 1pm – Holding Room, The Guildhall and Teams
Saturday 4 March 2023 – 11am – 3pm - International Women's Day, The Guildhall
Tuesday 30 May 2023 – 11am – 1pm - Jeffrey Room, The Guildhall and Teams
Tuesday 25 July 2023 – 6pm – 8pm - Jeffrey Room, The Guildhall and Teams
Tuesday 26 September 2023 – 11am – 1pm - Jeffrey Room, The Guildhall and Teams
Tuesday 28 November 2023 – 6pm – 8pm – Jeffrey Room, The Guildhall and Teams

On request we have introduced a few evening meetings as a trial.

Press Release from OFPCC:-

News release

22 December 2022

Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner asks for views on 2023/4 funding

- **Proposed increase of £15 a year for an average Band D household – 5.3% or 29p a week – for policing**
- **Proposed increase of £5 a year for an average Band D household – 7.3% or 10p a week – for fire & rescue**
- **Residents asked to give their views in online consultation**

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Stephen Mold has launched a consultation on the level of council tax precept for policing and fire and rescue services in the county next year, warning that these services are under pressure from the financial challenges facing the country.

Northamptonshire Police and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service are funded by a combination of central government grants and local council tax. Around 18% of the council tax paid by households in the county comes to local police and fire services.

This year, the settlement from the government is based on the expectation that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner will ask for an increase in the local council tax precept of £15 or 5.3% a year for policing and £5 a year or 7.3% for fire and rescue – both significantly below the rate of inflation.

Stephen Mold said that police and fire services would continue to be squeezed by the impact of rising prices, and even with an increase at this level, both services will need to look for savings.

"Over the past few years, we have invested in more police and firefighters and improved services - and that comes at a cost. Maintaining gains we have made may just be sustainable with this level of increase. While we may still have to make savings, the extent depends on the support taxpayers are prepared to give. I understand the pressures that every household is facing and I genuinely want to know what people are prepared to pay for their emergency services," he said.

Northamptonshire Police

Northamptonshire Police is on target to have the most police officers it has ever had, with 1,500 by March 2023. An additional 330 officers have been recruited over the last few years, some funded through the Government's recruitment scheme and some through local council tax investment.

Stephen Mold said that a council tax increase in the coming year of £15 for policing would allow police officer numbers to be kept at this level and for investments that will increase efficiency to be prioritised.

"Having more police officers has enabled a new focus on neighbourhood policing and proactive policing on the crimes that really matter to people. This is what people have told me that they want from their local police.

"We have worked to be as efficient as possible, by sharing buildings and supporting staff between police and fire, for example. We'll continue to do that where we can, but we will still face considerable pressure on our budgets next year."

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services noted that Northamptonshire Police is "structurally underfunded", and Stephen said he continues to lobby the Home Office to review the formula which decides how much funding each area receives.

"The funding formula is not fair across the country, so that council taxpayers in Northamptonshire pick up more of the bill for policing than residents of other counties.

"That's not right and it puts us at a real disadvantage. I have lobbied the Home Office and our local MPs for a review of the funding formula to make it fairer for everyone, and I will continue to press for that change," Stephen Mold said.

Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service is the second lowest-funded fire service in the country.

Since transferring to the governance of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, investment from local council taxpayers and extra investment from the Government has bought stability.

Twelve new firefighters have been recruited, bringing the number to 254, and outdated equipment has been replaced. The most recent report from

HMICFRS found that Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service had progressed from 'requires improvement' to 'good' for both efficiency and effectiveness.

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Stephen Mold said that given these improvements, the impact of inflation will be particularly harsh on the county's fire service.

"NFRS has made great progress, but the service is incredibly lean. The impact of years of under-funding have made a mark and we are only just reaching stability and able to plan. There are small reserves to draw on, but that is not a sustainable way to operate an essential public service.

"A council tax increase of £5 or 7.3%, will not cover rising costs, but it will go some way towards helping us maintain progress. But with such a lean model, we may still have to look for further savings where we can," Stephen said.

Consultation

"People have made their priorities for their emergency services clear to me; I now want to know what they think about the precept increase that would help these priorities to be met."

The consultation runs until 4.30pm on January 17, 2023, and can be found at <https://www.research.net/r/OPFCC2023counciltaxconsultation>



The Commissioner's budget proposal will go to the Police, Fire and Crime Panel early in the new year.

Ends

Note: The increase is based on a Band D household, which is the national average. Information on council tax bands can be found on the relevant local authority website