

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Communities, Housing and Infrastructure
DATE	15 March 2016
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	A New Group for People with Disabilities in the City.
REPORT NUMBER	CHI/16/038
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report updates members on the progress made in establishing a new group to deal with issues around disability in the city.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

The committee is asked to

Agree the draft constitution, the Mission Statement and Pledge, the application and election process and arrangements for the inaugural meeting of the new group.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The funding for catering, sign language interpreting and venue costs, in a similar way to the costs of the Disability Advisory Group, will be made from the budget allocated to disability equality within the Communities and Housing budget. As a council sub-group, the group will be clerked by committee clerks. The proposal from the Stakeholders' Group to hold one in three meetings of the new group on a Saturday morning, will incur overtime costs for the committee clerk for 2.5 hours every 6 months.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There will be a cost implication for training for the new Chair and Vice-chair which will be met from the Equalities Team project budget. In the case of external venues being used for future meetings, the priority would be to source council buildings in local neighbourhoods.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

The Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee at its meeting on 27 August 2015 agreed to the dissolution of the Disability Advisory Group, and approved Model 2, with the new group remaining part of the council's committee structure with a change in culture, structure and processes to become more accessible and welcoming. This new group would set and follow a work plan to deliver SMART actions and positive outcomes for the communities it serves.

The committee instructed officers to progress the implementation of the approved model in conjunction with appropriate stakeholders, to include the drafting of a new constitution incorporating the values, remit, roles and changes to ways of working, using the feedback from the engagement exercise.

The Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee met on Wednesday 20 January 2016, when it was agreed that the Stakeholder Group should meet for a final occasion to discuss the draft constitution, election process and arrangements for the inaugural meeting of the new Group. It was also agreed that the new Group should determine its own name.

This stakeholder group has contributed to the draft constitution, the Mission Statement and Pledge, the application and election process and to the arrangements for an Open Meeting in March 2016 to promote the new group.

The draft constitution appears as Appendix 1, the Mission Statement and Pledge at Appendix 2, the External Members and Councillors' Code of Conduct at Appendix 3 and the draft Application Form for membership at Appendix 4.

The draft Constitution (Appendix 1) is a fairly sterile document which deals mainly with matters of procedure. Most of the information is concerned with membership tenures and voting procedure etc., with little scope to expand on the Group's wider vision. That is where the Mission Statement comes in.

The Mission Statement (Appendix 2) sets out the broader aims and visions of the Group in more detail, and also goes on to provide some further information, like how the Group intends to work and interact with the Council and with local communities. The Mission Statement reflects the input from the Stakeholders' Group.

The importance of remaining focussed on the Group's remit and maintaining the standards set out in the Mission Statement cannot be underestimated, so all new members will be asked to sign a pledge, promising to adhere to both the Constitution and Mission Statement.

Since October 2014, it has been strict Council policy that all External Members of Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Groups be required to sign the document entitled 'External Members and the Councillors' Code of Conduct' (Appendix 3). This is aimed at upholding the democratic process, ensuring that appropriate standards of behaviour are maintained and that data protection legislation is adhered to. The signing of this document will therefore be a condition of membership of the new Group.

People interesting in joining the new group will be invited to apply. There should be no assumption on the part of former members of the Disability Advisory Group that their membership will automatically transfer to the new Group. Since this is a new group, this will not be the case. A fair and transparent process will take place.

Advertisements will be placed in local newspapers and other media outlets to promote this opportunity to the widest possible range of people. Those who express an interest will be asked to complete a brief membership application, with which assistance will be available. The application form will be accompanied by the values/ mission statement and any other relevant paperwork, making it clear that a membership role in this new group is not an easy job and that it carries responsibilities. The resulting applications will be reviewed by an independent group. The selection process will therefore be completely impartial, and will follow the principles of disability, age and ethnic diversity, resulting in a membership which is more representative of the city's disabled population.

As previously stated, the Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee agreed on 20 January 2016, that selecting a name should be left as a matter for the new Group. In response to this decision, the matter will now be deferred to appear on the new Group's inaugural agenda, along with the appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair.

6. IMPACT

Improving Customer Experience –

The proposal to have a new and effective group, contributing to a more robust equality impact assessment process will help us to plan and design our services around current and future customer needs as much as possible, building in customer need at the beginning of our processes rather than bolting on at the end.

Improving Staff Experience –

This proposal offers the opportunity for staff to re-engage positively and constructively with people with disabilities and to reach a broader, more representative range of people. The staff involved are enthusiastic and committed to this change process and welcome the change in culture which this new group may bring.

Improving our use of Resources –

The council will benefit from the new group being open, transparent and accountable and being more outcomes focussed. The new group will develop its own work plan to deliver SMART actions and be able to demonstrate its impact. The new group should act as a contact point for consultation and take an active role in the equality impact assessment process, therefore improving the Council's use of resources.

Corporate –

This report fits within the Council's Equalities Outcomes which have been developed in line with the Council's vision; *Aberdeen - the Smarter City*. We will ensure all citizens are encouraged and supported appropriately to make their full contribution. In order to address this, we will challenge inequalities wherever they exist and bring our communities closer together.

The Equality Outcomes, since they are all about improving services and access to services for the citizens of Aberdeen, offer positive opportunities for joint working with partner organisations on projects/activities - a new and fit-for-purpose group for people with disabilities can be a positive way of demonstrating this.

This proposal as part of the Council's commitment to equalities fits with the underlying principle of equalities across all the thematic groups within Community Planning.

Public –

This report is highly relevant to ensuring that the council meets the General Equality Duty.

The earlier EHRIA at Appendix 4 of the report of 27 August 2015 indicates that the proposal for the future will contribute positively to all three parts of the General Duty; to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations.

The EHRIA demonstrates a positive impact, particularly on people with disabilities, older people and families with young children. A pro-active partnership group acting as a "critical friend" can act as a catalyst for positive change. If access improves for people with disabilities, then it improves too for older people and parents/ carers pushing prams and buggies.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Delivering on the published Equalities Outcomes will help public authorities comply with their legal duties under:

- a. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the public sector equality duty), and
- b. The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012

This proposal, and the work around its development, seeks to address the negative feedback received and negative perceptions about the previous DAG, and how it has been operating. The proposal aims to turn these around by involving a wider range of people with disabilities, their views and experiences, and also of organisations representing people with disabilities who currently feel excluded and unrepresented.

The new key group for people with disabilities can bring added value to the council as it can act as a credible sounding board for council plans and policies and signal their impact on people with disabilities in the city.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Notes from Wendy Davies ODSC Facilitator meeting of 18 November 2015 and 4 February 2016.

“Disability Advisory Group – the Future” report to Communities Housing and Infrastructure on 27 August 2015 and “A New Group for People with Disabilities in the City” ,report of 20 January 2016.

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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