

NAWRA

Committee meeting – 22 Jan 2024 – on Zoom

Present: Alan (chair), Lee, Atif, Corin, Gareth, Tom, Julie, Dan, Maureen, Kelly (minutes)

Apologies: Daphne, Greg, Andrew, Zoey, Michael

Communications and publicity

- **Dan** to reconvene the social media working group, involving Will Hadwen and Gary Vaux.
- An advert for NAWRA will appear in the next edition of the Disability Rights Handbook.
- **Kelly** to send updated membership lists to each rep. **All** to contact Kelly with the text of any emails to be sent out to members to ensure correct details/status.

Equality and diversity

- Notes from working group meetings can be found on the [NAWRA website](#).
- So far, seven organisations working with people with protected characteristics have been invited to join NAWRA for free and have accepted this offer. **All** to consider nominating any organisation that they feel meets the criteria for free membership.
- Rita Chadha (ASA) has drafted a monitoring form for us to use to survey our members. **Kelly** to send to the working group for comments.
- The next working group meeting will take place on 5 March 2024 on Zoom. **Kelly** to send a reminder email to working group members.

Governance

- Welcome to Andrew Dutton (Derbyshire County Council), our new rep for the East Midlands.
- There will be committee representative elections in all regions in March 2024 with the exception of the East Midlands and Scotland. **Kelly** to organise the call for nominations and ballots. The deadline for nominations will be 8 Feb 2024.

Policy and campaigns

- Local authorities in England are responsible for designing their own council tax support schemes. There are large differences between schemes. Benefit calculators have collated all the information about each local authority's scheme. However, there has been no comparison between types of scheme and levels of arrears. **Gareth** is thinking of doing some analysis.

We could send an FOI request to every local authority. Alternatively, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) would have the data. This would allow NAWRA members to lobby their own local authorities. **Gareth** to investigate.

Agreed that we will encourage members in England to tell us when there is a consultation on changes to council tax support in their area so that we can alert members. Consultations are likely to be published in summer 2024. **Kelly** to draft an email to members.

- A number of local authorities are consulting on cuts to advice service funding (both in-house departments and grants to the voluntary sector locally). **Kelly** to email members to ask for information about what is happening in their area.
- Household Support Fund cut in England is imminent. Families will be left without financial help from local authorities and the pinch point is likely to be May half term.
- General election campaign preparation (a short manifesto?) to influence the current government and opposition parties. Discussion on whether this would cover technical details or broader social policy matters. The next general election might not take place until the end of 2024. Agreed to discuss this in detail at our committee meeting in-person in Durham on 29 Feb 2024.
- Dan is due to meet Andy Burnham in March to talk about advice sector workforce development. Dan will emphasise the impact on the local economy of cash gains from benefits for residents of Greater Manchester.
- Students working with Central England Law Centre did a survey of NAWRA members about recording PIP assessments. CELC is planning a follow up report and further action.
- Corin will be giving evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee's safeguarding vulnerable claimants inquiry on 24 Jan 2024.
- The Welsh government is extending funding for Dangos for another two years.
- A new edition of NAWRA's benefits updater chart is almost ready. **Tom** to send to Daphne for final draft.
- Congratulations to Daphne who has been appointed to SSAC.
- Gareth has delivered 'Benefits and Pensions' training in London, Manchester, Bristol and Swansea and will run the course in Middlesbrough, Edinburgh and Birmingham in Feb and Mar 2024.

Finance

- Kelly updated the finance report to the end of the third quarter of 2023-24 and circulated it to the committee on 15 Jan 2024.
- **Kelly** to find out the value of NAWRA's reserves.

Next conference

NAWRA will meet at Durham Town Hall on 1 March 2024. Thanks to Julie for hosting.

Future conferences

- Tuesday 4 June 2024 (1.00pm to 4.00pm) and Wednesday 5 June 2024 (9.30am – 1.00pm) – online
- 6 Sep 2024 – in-person in Glasgow (hosted by Glasgow City Council)
- Dec 2024 – online

Potential hosts

- Staffordshire University
- GMWRAG? With Jigsaw? (**Dan**)
- WRAC? (**Gareth** and **Tom**) combined with Cardiff (Tom Evans at Qualia Law)? Or Swansea Council?
- Woolwich? (**Corin**)
- Leeds? (**Zoey**)
- Central Bedfordshire Council (online)
- Central Borders CAB (online)

Potential speakers and workshops

- **Kelly** to upload the '*Future NAWRA conferences – ideas and offers*' working document to Teams.

Next committee meetings

- 2pm on 29 Feb 2024 - In-person in Durham. **Note change of start time**

We agreed to continue holding committee meetings on Zoom as some members have difficulties with Teams accounts.

AOB

- 2025 will be NAWRA's 50th birthday.
- Away day?