The Forum had a busy year taking stock of where we were at. A part of this stocktaking was to gauge what resources we required to support the Forum in the challenges and work ahead.

The Forum was lucky to receive money from Awards for All 2016 funding to update the Forum’s technology and to design a website. The work on the website is continuing and should be up and running next year.

The Forum continued its advocacy work in the following areas:

- Benefit referral advice
- Employment Peer Support
- Advocacy for services and independent living

During the year the Forum dealt with approximately 21 substantive queries dealing with a range of matters outlined above. This requires often home visits and individual one to one support for people with disabilities to ask our advice and support. This year the Forum also assisted several children with disabilities acting with the consent and supervision of the parents. All three cases where successful and involved everything from making Housing Executive property accessible to advocating for a young child to have his views reflected in court proceedings.

The year also saw changes to social security benefits in particular the rolling out of the work capability assessment and Personal Independent Payments (PIP) implementation. The Forum continue to make public representation on behalf of disabled people about these changes and expressed its concerns to a number of statutory agencies including Department for Communities and the Equality and Human Rights commissions.

The North West Forum was invited to attend the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) the closed session with the UNCRPD Committee in Geneva. The event was financially supported by Disability Action who prepared the shadow report.
and the Forum voices were part of that report. This recognised the Forum’s long historical struggle for human rights.

The Forum also met with the Deputy First Minister regarding its concerns in relation to the issue of disability as a key priority within the government’s agenda. The Forum advised Mr McGuinness of the Articles in the UNCRPD where the UK government was currently non-compliant with the standards set within the Convention.

The Forum continue to be active in wide range of fora pushing our agenda not just across the North West but across the whole of Northern Ireland. We are happy to report that several of our members are represented on various committees including the Equality Coalition, Inclusion Mobility Transport Advisory Committee, NI Human Rights Consortium and finally members will know that the Forum was appointed Co-Chair of the Disability Employment Forum alongside the Department for Communities – a feather in the Forum’s cap.

The huge challenges for the years ahead are the obvious ones – cuts to public services, cuts to social security, inadequate anti-discrimination laws and the implications of Brexit. Whilst some compare these challenges to the onset of Armageddon but the Forum will continue to fight with all its might for disabled people in the North West and throughout Northern Ireland.

Once again, I wish to thank all the members of the Forum for their unlimited support to the Forum and especially the Officers who support me as Chairperson.

Paul McCloskey
Chairperson representing the Trustees.