

TAMESIDE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP

MINUTES OF A PROVIDER GROUP MEETING **HELD ON TUESDAY 3rd DECEMBER 2002**

Present:	Pam Tweedie	-	DIAL Tameside
	Michelle Brennan	-	Partnership Manager, LSC
	Roger Thompson	-	Welfare Rights Service, TMBC
	Martin Goodsell	-	Shelter
	Richard Goodall		Gruber Garratt Solicitors
	Alan Franco	-	CLS Co-ordinator, TMBC
	Jim Gourley	-	MENCAP
	Annette Goodfellow		CAB
	Peter E. Holden		Thompson and Cooke Solicitors
	Ruth Cheesbrough		Welfare Rights Service, TMBC
	Elizabeth Simpson		Welfare Rights Service, TMBC
	Richard Edwards		Tameside and Glossop MIND
	Karen Heathcote		Tameside Libraries Information Service
	Andrew Shanahan		Beevers Solicitors
	Kevin Warren		Legal Services Commission
	Manilal Mistry		Tameside Racial Equality Council
Apologies:	Gill Williams		Tameside County Court
	Linda Walker		Partnership Secretary, TMBC
	Joanne Hughes		Age Concern
	Trish Deville		Pluck Andrew solicitors
	Julia Bentley		Consumer Advice and Trading Standards, TMBC

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the proceedings of the previous meeting held on 12th September 2002 were agreed as a correct record.

2. Homelessness Strategy

The Homelessness Act 2002 came into force in July 2002. This requires the local authority to publish a homelessness strategy within 12 months of the Act coming into force. Shelter North West have an implementation officer in post to assist NW authorities in formulating their strategies. Shelter have established a homelessness act website www.homelessnessact.org.uk with further details of the background and implementation of the act.

Tameside Homelessness Forum are holding their AGM on Tuesday 14th January at 10am. For further details contact Emily Blanchet, Housing Strategy Group, Tameside Council.

Andrew Shanahan agreed to be the link between the Community Legal Service Partnership and the homelessness forum.

3. Partnership Priorities

The review of funding priorities for 2003/2004 had been considered by the steering group and will inform the regional strategy which is to be published by the North West Legal Services Committee in January 2003..They have been

asked to identify the top 10 priorities for the region. The regional director of LSC will then make a contractual response. This will be an invitation to bid for contracts in specific areas of law in the high priority areas of the region. Tameside's highest priority is increasing access to specialist housing advice. In addition the subjects of debt and welfare benefits remain areas of high need. The "Review of Funding priorities for 2003/2004" document is attached to these minutes.

4. Beacon Council Scheme

The Beacon Council open day on 15th October was a great success and thanks were offered to all those who had contributed on the day. Details of the presentations made on the day are available on the Beacon Council website http://www.tameside.gov.uk/beacon/beacon_legal.htm

There are 8 Beacon Councils for the Community Legal Service theme: Barnsley, Darlington, Derby, Liverpool, London Borough of Camden, West Riding of Yorkshire, Wirral and Tameside itself. Alan Franco and Linda Walker will be attending a meeting of the Beacon Councils on 10 December in Derby and will circulate details of any of their activities or initiatives that may be of interest. The two next events in Tameside are on the themes of improving access to advice for older people (26th February) and improving access to advice for people with mental health issues (26th March).

5. Partnership Initiative Budget

(a) Older People benefit take-up

Details of progress so far are attached to these minutes. The project has exceeded the target for the number of successful claims due by 31/12/02. Of particular note was the further opportunities offered by the recent extension of entitlement to the Carer Premium to people aged 65+.

(b) Mental Health and debt advice

This project now has a full complement of staff. Referrals were being received from the community mental health teams and the Accident and Emergency liaison team. Good links were being made with creditors. The team would be offering basic debt training to mental health services staff in the new year. A draft leaflet had been produced to explain how to open a basic bank account and comparing costs between providers.

(c) 2003 bidding round.

The bidding guidance for the 2003 Partnership Initiative Budget had been previously distributed. The focus in the guidance was on prevention, dispute resolution, and community education. The Tameside CLS Steering Group will consider any suggested bids at its meeting on 13/12/02. They will score the bids and forward them to the regional committee for consideration at the end of January. The regional allocation of funds is £660,000. A national panel will then make a final decision in April.

DIAL outlined a proposal for extra welfare benefit advisers for disabled people costed at £99,000 approx. over a 3 year period.

MIND outlined a capital bid to provide interview facilities at their proposed new premises at Katherine Street.

The CAB were considering whether a regional bid for a financial literacy project might be appropriate.

6. Self Help Debt Packs

Annette Goodfellow outlined the content and purpose of the self help debt packs produced by the Money Advice Trust. They are provided free to the CAB to distribute to clients. They may be available to other not for profit agencies on application.

The present provision of specialist level debt advice was by 3 staff at the CAB, an adviser at Rowlands solicitors and by the 5 staff of the mental health and debt project. The CAB had made a bid for funding for a further debt adviser to the Tame Valley Partnership. This would be to provide debt advice in the Harbour Farm (Hyde) and Copley (Stalybridge) areas of the borough. These areas had been identified by the Partnership as having a high level of need for debt advice.

7. Appeals and Form Filling Data

The data which had been collected earlier this year now needs to be brought up to date. Providers were asked to update the information they had provided and forward it to Linda Walker in advance of the next meeting. They were also asked to provide projections for the year April 2003/ March 2004.

A representative of the Council's customer service division would be invited to attend the next meeting to describe the extent of their provision of a form filling service.

Agencies expressed concern about their ability to provide appeal representation to all those approaching for assistance. It was agreed that a subgroup would meet at the conclusion of this meeting to agree a method of monitoring unmet demand for a trial period.

8. Referral scheme protocol

Details of the revised and simplified scheme had been previously circulated.

9. Date of Future Meetings

The dates of future meetings were agreed as

Tuesday 11th March 2003

Wednesday 11th June 2003

Tuesday 9th September 2003

Tuesday 9th December 2003

All meetings will commence at 2.30 pm. Venues to be notified.