

TAMESIDE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP

MINUTES OF A PROVIDER GROUP MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 11TH MARCH 2003

Present:	Michelle Brennan Julia Bentley Alan Franco Linda Walker Ruth Cheesbrough Elizabeth Simpson Andrew Shanahan Ahmed Ali Nazrul Hoque	Partnership Consultant, LSC Consumer Advice & Trading Standards, TMBC CLS Co-ordinator, TMBC Partnership Secretary, TMBC Welfare Rights Service, TMBC Welfare Rights Service, TMBC Beever's Solicitors TREC Exchequer & Customer Services, TMBC
Apologies:	Trish Deaville Martin Goodsell Richard Goodall Jim Gourley Annette Goodfellow Roger Thompson Elesha English Mandy Kinder Steve Moss Denise Pinder William Hackwell Pam Tweedie	Pluck Andrew Solicitors Shelter Gruber Garratt Solicitors MENCAP CAB Welfare Rights Service, TMBC Greater Mcr Probation Service Exchequer & Customer Services Housing Aid, NCHT Bromley Hyde and Robinson Hackwell Ashworth DIAL Tameside

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held on 3rd December 2002, having been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

2. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Further to discussion at the previous meeting (3rd December 2002), Andrew Shanahan provided the group with an update on the development of a Homelessness Strategy in Tameside. A multi agency working group had been established and had undertaken a review of homelessness levels and an in-depth consultation exercise was taking place which would include interviews with a number of key agencies, focus groups and hostels. On completion of this exercise a draft Strategy would be produced in May 2003 with the final document being published by July 2003. Andrew Shanahan agreed to provide a further update at the next meeting scheduled to take place in June.

Elizabeth Simpson reported on a recent meeting held with Emily Blanchet from the Housing Strategy Group and in particular proposed changes at the Housing Aid Centre.

3. PARTNERSHIP PRIORITIES

Michelle Brennan reported that the Legal Services Commission had produced a strategy which identified the region's top ten priorities for additional investment should funds become available. Tameside featured in the top ten in respect of housing and debt advice.

Michelle added that a employment adviser jointly funded by the Legal Services Commission and Tameside MBC was now based at the Citizens Advice Bureau in Ashton. However, approximately two thirds of those seeking advice were ineligible clients. Increased publicity to promote this service to ensure eligible clients in need of employment advice were accessing the service was planned.

4. BEACON COUNCIL SCHEME

Alan Franco reported on the success of the Older People and Benefit Take Up event held on 26th February 2003. Elizabeth Simpson also reported on arrangements to hold a further beacon event to be held on 26th March 2003 on Mental Health Awareness and Access to Advice. She outlined the programme and aims of the objectives of the day which had previously been circulated.

It was noted that the Carers Centre would be leading on a number of activities during Carers Week commencing on 10th June 2003. Further information to follow.

5. PARTNERSHIP INNOVATION BUDGET

(a) Older People and Benefit Take Up

Ruth Cheesbrough circulated a report which summarised the projects achievements since its commencement in January 2002. Over 1000 older people in the Borough had been visited and helped to claim more than £700,000 a year in increased income. A monitoring form detailing a cumulative summary of claims was attached to the report. Average weekly increases in benefit were around £16 per week but could be considerably higher if disability benefits were payable. Some examples of recent case studies were also given as well as samples taken from customer feedback forms which highlighted the success of the project.

(b) Mental Health and Debt Advice

Elizabeth Simpson reported that the project, which had now been running for nine months, was working well and she distributed statistical information to support this. Referrals were being taken from statutory and voluntary mental health services. Advices sessions were taking place at various locations and

new venues were being considered to increase accessibility to the service. A copy of a recently published debt handbook was circulated and this was being used to complement the training being provided.

(c) Second Round of Applications

Michelle Brennan stated that the Regional Legal Services Committee had received a total of 38 bids. Two bids had been submitted from Tameside, namely –

- Dial Tameside – funding for additional caseworkers
- Tameside Mind – funding to convert part of their premises

The recommendations of the RLSC had been forwarded to the national group and results were expected at the end of March.

6. DEBT PROJECT – TAME VALLEY PARTNERSHIP

Alan Franco explained that this was a two year funded project to provide one debt caseworker managed by the Citizens Advice Bureau and the recruitment process would commence in the near future. Office accommodation in the Hyde area was presently being refurbished to provide outreach sessions.

7. REFERRAL SCHEME PROTOCOL

Providers discussed progress with the referral scheme. It was agreed that a reminder should be sent to all providers to ask them to ensure that the practice of completing referral forms was being maintained.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that future meeting would be held on the following dates:

Wednesday 11th June 2003
Tuesday 9th September 2003
Tuesday 9th December 2003