

TAMESIDE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP

MINUTES OF A PROVIDER GROUP MEETING
HELD ON 2ND MARCH 2004

Present:	Andrew Shanahan	Beevers Solicitors (in the Chair)
	Ahmed Ali	TREC
	Ruth Cheesbrough	Welfare Rights Service – TMBC
	Patricia Deaville	Pluck Andrew and Co Solicitors
	Angela Forbes	Tameside County Court
	Alan Franco	CLS Co-ordinator, TMBC
	Annette Goodfellow	Tameside CAB
	Jim Gourley	Mencap
	Karen Heathcote	Tameside Libraries
	Naomi James	Rowlands Solicitors
	Alistair Newton	Consumer Services – TMBC
	Pat Purcell	Customer Services – TMBC
	Carol Renshaw	Pension Service
	Elizabeth Simpson	Welfare Rights Service – TMBC
	Ray Slamon	Carers Centre – TMBC
	Roger Thompson	Welfare Rights Service – TMBC
	Linda Walker	Partnership Secretary – TMBC
	Gill Williams	Tameside County Court
	Kathryn Wood	Pluck Andrew and Co Solicitors

Apologies: Michelle Brennan (LSC)
Job Centre Plus
Primary Care Trust
Bromley Hyde and Robinson

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held on 9th December 2003, having been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

2. MATTERS ARISING

Item 4 – Consumer Support Network – Alistair Newton, Consumer Services, TMBC, advised that he would be the council representative dealing with Consumer Support Network issues. Those involved in the Network agreed to make arrangements to meet to progress matters.

3. WELFARE BENEFITS ADVICE IN TAMESIDE

Elizabeth Simpson, Tameside Welfare Rights Service, advised that the Service was split into three teams which had their own area of speciality:

- Disability Focus Team
- Older Persons Focus Team
- Mental Health Focus Team

She added that the teams were all working to capacity but were continually looking at new ways of working to maximise service delivery and ensure accessibility for clients. An Advice Line was in operation on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings which provided the main access to the service. Officers dealing with telephone enquiries would endeavour to resolve issues and if this was not possible then an appointment would be made with the appropriate team. The service also provided a successful training programme.

Discussion ensued on the number of appeals and high number of successful outcomes at tribunals made by the service on behalf of clients. This could be attributed to clients not accurately documenting their care needs when completing initial or renewal forms. A number of Tameside MBC Customer Service staff had also received training on form completion. It was noted that concerns regarding the chairmanship of some tribunals had been reported to the Regional Chairman of the Appeals Service.

Annette Goodfellow advised on the position at the Tameside CAB office. Statistics were provided which indicated that there had been a gradual increase during 2003 but a significant increase in approaches by clients both for new claims and renewals from December 2003 onwards. There had also been an increase in clients seeking disability benefits advice. Each Friday was designated for DLA/AA appointments only and due to recent changes to legislation there had been an increase in Carers Allowance claims.

Alan Franco reported on plans to create a joint team dealing with take-up comprising an existing team of staff from Tameside MBC already involved in this work and staff from the Pension Service which was likely to become operational within the next three months. Alan agreed to keep providers informed of developments.

4. SOUTH MANCHESTER RACE DISCRIMINATION SERVICE

Ahmed Ali, Tameside Racial Equality Council, gave a progress report on the development of the South Manchester Race Discrimination Service covering Tameside, Salford, Trafford, Manchester and Stockport. The Service provided a free help, advice and full representation service to all people who may have been discriminated against on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, citizenship or ethnic or national origin. A team of Legal Action Officers could be contacted at the TREC offices or appointments made at one of a number of venues in each local authority area. An information leaflet was distributed giving details of the comprehensive service provided. Plans were under way to broaden the area of benefit to cover Oldham, Wigan, Rochdale, Bury and Bolton. Ahmed added that between January and December 2003 the RDS had managed to secure over £200,000 compensation for clients and a more detailed report on the achievements of the RDS would be circulated with the minutes.

5. TAMESIDE CLSP – STEERING GROUP

Annette Goodfellow advised that the Steering Group had met on 13th February and reported on the following matters which had been discussed:

- Review of the County Court Duty Scheme
- Partnership Initiatives Budget
- New Matter Starts
- Action Plan Update

It was agreed that a copy of the review of the County Court Duty Scheme would be circulated to the Provider Group.

6. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that future meetings of the Provider Group would be held on the following dates:

Tuesday 8th June 2004
Tuesday 7th September 2004
Tuesday 7th December 2004

The June meeting would focus on employment advice and the Greater Manchester Low Pay Unit and Tameside CAB would be invited to give a short presentation.