

**TAMESIDE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP**

**MINUTES OF A PROVIDER GROUP MEETING**  
**HELD ON TUESDAY 7<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2004**

<b>Present:</b>	Annette Goodfellow	Tameside CAB (in the Chair)
	Anne Ashton	Shelter
	Sarah Bartram	Parker Bird
	Janet Crawford	Parker Bird
	Stephanie Fearn	Tameside & Pension Service Joint Team
	Alan Franco	CLS Co-ordinator TMBC
	Jim Gourley	Ashton & District MENCAP
	Karen Heathcote	Tameside Libraries
	Nicky Jones	Housing Support, Younger Adults
		Assessment Team, TMBC
	Elaine Kaye	Housing Strategy, TMBC
	Ian Metcalfe	Tameside Probation Service
	Irfan Munir	Bromley, Hyde and Robinson
	Michelle Neville-Cooper	Revenues Division, TMBC
	Andrew Shanahan	Beevers Solicitors
	Elizabeth Simpson	Welfare Rights Service, TMBC
	Sharon Stevenson	Housing Support, Deaf/Visual Impairment
		Team, TMBC
	Linda Walker	Partnership Secretary, TMBC
	Gill Williams	Tameside County Court
	Anne Worthington	Customer Services, TMBC
	Janine Yates	Mental Health Money Advice Team, TMBC
<b>Apologies:</b>	Pat Purcell	Customer Services, TMBC
	Judith Burrows	Tameside Magistrates Court
	Alison Heylin	Rogerson Galvin Solicitors
	Julie Vickers	NCHT
	Martin Goodsell	Shelter
	Carol Eckersley	Pensions Service
	Wendy Buckley	Pluck Andrew Solicitors

**1. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2004, having been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

**2. MATTERS ARISING**

Gill Williams stated that the recently produced Consumer Information Pack had been well received at the County Court.

**3. TAMESIDE COMMUNITY RADIO**

This item would be considered at the March 2005 meeting of the Group.

#### **4. DEBT ADVICE PROVISION**

##### **(a) Mental Health Debt Advice Project**

Elizabeth Simpson and Janine Yates gave an update on the Mental Health Debt and Money Advice project which was now well into its last year of funding. The project offered face to face debt advice for people with mental health problems through advice services based at Brindle House, MIND, Council Offices and the Hospital. Referrals were taken from statutory and voluntary mental health services and more recently the Probation Service. In addition, the project has been involved in providing training initially staff based in statutory mental health services but more recently housing providers and revenues staff. Links had also been established with the CAB debt workers to share experiences and concerns regarding local creditors with a view to establishing a joint approach to these organisations.

The project also attended regional meetings such as the North West Discussion Forum of Money Advisers which included banks and utility companies to raise awareness of the issues faced by this client group. They also attended the North West Financial Literacy Group and were a partner in the Money Information Network Tameside (MINT).

##### **(b) Tameside Citizens Advice Bureau**

Annette Goodfellow circulated information relating to the work the Bureau had recently undertaken and highlighted issues of concern. Inconsistencies in respect of Council Tax collection was discussed and it was agreed that the Bureau would contact the Exchequer Service to take this forward. Irresponsible lending and offering credit to people in receipt of benefits was also a key issue. Annette felt that creditors were developing a hardening of attitude towards debt and suggested that a corporate debt policy could be a way forward. It was noted that New Charter Housing Trust had developed a collections policy and perhaps this could provide a starting point.

Annette also gave details of the Acresfield Money Management Project. The impact of the change to the Bankruptcy rules under the Enterprise Act 2002 were circulated.

#### **5. HOMELESSNESS**

##### **(a) Directory of Information**

Andrew Shanahan reported on the initial work he had been undertaking regarding the compilation of a directory of temporary accommodation provision for members of the public who presented themselves as homeless at advice agencies in the Borough and for whom the local authority did not have an obligation to rehouse. Karen Heathcote added that once the directory had been finalised it could be added to the Library Service database. The Provider Group would be kept informed of developments.

##### **(b) Homelessness Forum**

Elaine Kaye outlined her role as Senior Housing Strategy Officer, TMBC, and the work of the Homelessness Forum in monitoring and assisting in the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy. An action plan to support this work had been formulated and copies were distributed and the key issues were identified as follows:

- Development of an Accommodation Strategy with mental health services.
- Analysis of statistics from County Court Duty Scheme.
- Joint project with Shelter to encourage RSLs to send out information on County Court Duty Scheme.
- Mediation Services commencing in January 2005.
- Review of Temporary Accommodation – alternatives to bed and breakfast.
- “Night Stop” – possibility of increasing provision.
- Tenants leaving short hold accommodation – presentation/newsletter to private sector regarding good practice.
- Greater Manchester Homelessness Strategy – work commencing in New Year.

The Chair thanked Elaine for her update report and it was agreed to circulate a copy of the action plan with the minutes.

## **6. EMPLOYMENT EQUALITY (SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND RELIGION OR BELIEF) REGULATIONS**

Ahmed Ali reported that the Tameside Racial Equality Council had received DTI funding to help businesses and individuals understand their new rights and responsibilities under the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation and Religion or Belief) Regulations which aimed to:

- outlaw discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief in employment and vocational training; and
- provide protection to all workers from unfair discrimination, harassment and victimisation on these grounds.

Ahmed advised that a draft information leaflet and arrangements for a launch event were being finalised, the details of which would be circulated to Provider Group members in due course.

## **7. DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 2005/08**

Alan Franco presented the Partnership’s draft Strategic Plan 2005/08 which reviewed the Strategic Plan 2002/05 including key achievements, the current strategy for each category of law together with any outstanding issues. It also detailed the future activities of the Partnership which had been developed with a view to supporting the key measures of the Tameside Community Strategy and captured the general direction for advice services for the next three years. He asked providers to consider the Strategy and to forward any advise him of any comments/observations. Once the document had been finanlised a detailed action plan would be produced to support the Strategy.

## **8. BENEFIT TAKE-UP STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN**

Alan Franco submitted a Benefit Take-up Strategy which set out the aims and objectives of the Council in endeavouring to maximize benefit take-up and ensuring that activities are evaluated by monitoring the effectiveness of planned actions. An action plan was also considered which focused primarily on the work of TMBC to promote the take up of benefit both undertaken and planned. He asked providers to contact him if they identified any potential gaps.

Discussion ensued on the complexity and length of application for housing and council tax benefit. Alan Franco attended a national committee relating to the take-up of benefits and stated that Ministers were aware of this fact. The Exchequer Service would feedback the concerns of this group and the possibility of reviewing those available.

#### **9. TAMESIDE CLSP STEERING GROUP**

Alan Franco advised the meeting of the issues considered at the Steering Group held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2004 which included:

- Money Information Network Tameside (MINT)
- North West Regional LSC Conference – presentations by Elizabeth Simpson and Andrew Shanahan
- Mental Health Debt and Money Advice Project – exit strategy

#### **10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Provider Group would be held on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2005 and would focus on welfare benefit advice.