

TAMESIDE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP

MINUTES OF A PROVIDER GROUP MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 6TH DECEMBER 2005

Present:	Alan Franco	-	CLS Co-ordinator, TMBC (in the Chair)
	Anne Ashton	-	Shelter
	Fiona Barratt	-	Bromley, Hyde and Robinson Solicitors
	Lynn Bainbridge	-	Adult Learning, TMBC
	Sarah Bartram	-	Parker Bird Solicitors
	Wendy Buckley	-	Pluck Andrew and Co
	Ruth Cheesbrough	-	Welfare Rights Service, TMBC
	Margaret Dawson	-	Money Adviser, TMBC
	Stephanie Fearn	-	Joint Pension Team, TMBC
	Nancy Forbes	-	New Charter Housing Trust
	Annette Goodfellow	-	Tameside Citizens Advice Bureau
	Karen Heathcote	-	Library Service, TMBC
	Lauren Hulse	-	Bromley, Hyde and Robinson Solicitors
	Janet Hunt	-	Housing and Regeneration, TMBC
	Susan Hyde	-	Sanctuary Housing
	Howard Lomas	-	Housing Options Centre
	Joanne Matheson	-	Money Adviser, TMBC
	Karen Morgan Hopwood	-	DWP
	Gillian Rees	-	Adult Learning, TMBC
	Andrew Shanahan	-	Beevers Solicitors
	Ray Slamon	-	Tameside Carers Centre
	Roger Thompson	-	Welfare Rights Service, TMBC
	Julie Vickers	-	New Charter Housing Trust
	Linda Walker	-	Partnership Secretary, TMBC
	Gill Williams	-	Tameside County Court
	Janine Yates	-	Senior Money Adviser, TMBC
Apologies	Eden Carruthers	-	Public Information Team, Social Care & Health
For absence:	Bernard Conboy	-	Tameside Project
	Beate Dasarathy	-	Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit
	Carol Eckersley	-	DWP
	Peter Marland	-	Ashton Pioneer Homes
	Denise McDowell	-	Greater Manchester Low Pay Unit

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held on 6th September 2005, having been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

2. MATTERS ARISING

Item 5 – “Making Legal Rights a Reality”

A meeting had recently taken place between the Legal Services Commission and Tameside Council's Chief Executive to discuss in more detail the possibility of a Community Legal Advice Network (CLAN) being piloted in Tameside. The consultation period for the Legal Services Commission's strategy had now ended and it was expected that there would be an announcement from the Legal Services Commission in the New Year with the intention that potential projects may commence from the start of the new financial year in April 2006.

3. CHILDREN'S CENTRES

Bob Shaw, Sure Start Team Leader, gave a detailed presentation on the range of services for children and their families which would be provided through the development of children's centres which were central to the Government's child care strategy, providing the infrastructure for delivering on the Every Child Matters outcomes. This would mainstream some of the best practice developed via the SureStart local programme and the Tameside Early Years Development and Child Care Partnership where the local authority would have the key strategic planning role and accountability. Five centres had originally been created from the local programmes and the planned development of further centres during Phases 1, 2 and 3 would result in around 20 centres becoming operational across the Borough by 2010.

A variety of services including integrated education (free entitlement) and chargeable care, health, education, training and family support would be provided through children's centres. It was intended that the centres become mainstream, community services which would be developed with the active involvement of children, parents, carers and the local community.

In response to a query regarding facilities for children with disabilities, special educational needs, and those being looked after by grand parents, Bob explained the high levels of support available to providers to ensure that all children have a right of access to child care services. Discussion ensued on the lack of contact centre facilities in the area and the role that the children's centres could play in addressing this issue. It was also noted that the Children's Information Service for Tameside (TOPS) based in Ashton, tel 339 6705, provided a comprehensive information and advice service on child care provision in Tameside.

The Chair thanked Bob Shaw for his informative presentation.

4. FAMILY ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICE (FAInS)

Wendy Buckley, Pluck Andrew and Co, advised on this initiative to help couples and families in dispute which was introduced as a pilot by the previous Lord Chancellor and managed by the Child and Family Services Unit at the Legal Services Commission. The project builds on existing best practice and existing services to enable people to access a range of services through a single point of reference. The family solicitors involved in the scheme had undertaken a programme of professional development.

In practice this involves the client completing a questionnaire, prior to the initial meeting with the solicitor, which will be used to identify what areas and issues the solicitor can assist with and referral and/or signposting to other agencies for any other matters which need to be addressed. A personal action plan is also agreed with the client which authorises the solicitor to make referrals, sets out what action is to be taken by the solicitor and what steps the client needs to take.

5. REVIEW OF DEBT ADVICE IN TAMESIDE

Janine Yates, Team Manager, Mental Health Money Advice Service, advised that the service was now funded through the LSC under a not-for-profit debt contract which provided for four Money Advisers and the Team Manager. Separate funding for two workers from the Youth Offending Team and Drugs Intervention Team also supported this service. Annette Goodfellow, District Manager Tameside CAB, gave details of the work undertaken by two specialist debt caseworkers and also general debt advice provided under the "core" service. Statistics on the numbers of clients seen and key emerging issues to note were circulated to members of the Group.

Both services were experiencing a rise in the number of clients seeking advice regarding bankruptcy and information was given on the establishment of the British Gas Energy Trust which was willing to consider meeting bankruptcy court costs. Both Tameside MBC and Manchester CC

had decided to make some Council Tax debtors bankrupt or propose this as an option in order to elicit payment. Additionally, inconsistencies regarding the negotiations for the repayment of Council Tax debt was highlighted and it was felt that these would be better managed through a corporate debt collection policy.

Annette also advised that North West CAB's had submitted a bid for the provision of extra face to face advice services as a part of a recently announced DTI funding opportunity and she was presently collating information to accompany this bid.

6. REVIEW OF HOUSING ADVICE IN TAMESIDE

Andrew Shanahan, Beevers Solicitors, presented a report on the review of outreach advice scheme at Tameside County Court involving advisers from Beevers Solicitors, Tameside CAB, Shelter Manchester and Parker Bird Solicitors. It was noted that the number of possession actions issued by registered social landlords had fallen from 899 in the 12 month period from January to December 2002, to 627 in the period January to December 2003, and 501 in the 12 month period between 1st October 2004 and 30th September 2005. It was recognised that there could be a number of factors which would have an influence on these statistics but the presence of the County Court Duty Scheme could well be a significant factor in helping to reduce this figure. This significant and sustained reduction was encouraging.

It was also noted that the number of possession actions issued by private landlords had increased, however, the number of suspended possession orders granted to them had actually fallen and the number of outright orders had increased only slightly. The private landlords were therefore not necessarily being successful in the additional possession actions that they were pursuing. The number of mortgage possession actions had increased which could be attributable to fluctuations in interest rates and also other factors such as second mortgages/secured loans.

Julie Vickers advised that New Charter Housing Trust viewed possession as a last resort and referred to the Trust's Corporate Collections Policy and the work of Money Information Network Tameside (MINT) in working with tenants to resolve issues and prevent homelessness.

Howard Lomas, Housing Options Centre, outlined work being undertaken on early intervention and prevention of homelessness and the new appointments system which had recently been introduced was proving successful. The Housing Options Centre was looking forward to moving to new premises on Old Street in Ashton during March 2006.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Provider Group would take place on Tuesday 7th March 2006 and would focus on two areas of law: Family advice and Welfare Benefits advice.