

## TAMESIDE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP

### MINUTES OF A PROVIDER GROUP MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2006

<b>Present:</b>	Annette Goodfellow	-	Tameside Citizens Advice Bureau (in the Chair)
	Fiona Barratt	-	Bromley, Hyde and Robinson Solicitors
	Eden Carruthers	-	TMBC Public Information
	Julie Collins	-	Housing Options Centre
	Trish Deauville	-	Pluck Andrew and Co Solicitors
	Stephanie Fearn	-	TMBC
	Caroline Gregory	-	Neighbourhood Renewal, TMBC
	Martin Goodsell	-	Greater Manchester Shelter
	Keith Hanson	-	People First Housing Association
	Karen Heathcote	-	Library Service, TMBC
	Lauren Hulse	-	Bromley, Hyde and Robinson Solicitors
	Karen Morgan Hopwood	-	The Pension Service
	Lorraine Pattison	-	Jobmatch, TMBC
	Gillian Rees	-	Adult Learning, TMBC
	Helen Stonehouse	-	TMBC Carers Centre
	Roger Thompson	-	Welfare Rights Service, TMBC
	Linda Walker	-	Partnership Secretary, TMBC
<b>Apologies</b>	Alan Franco	-	CLS Co-ordinator, TMBC
<b>For absence:</b>	Gill Williams	-	Tameside County Court
	Carol Eckersley	-	DWP
	Andrew Shanahan	-	Beevers Solicitors
	Alex Mattur	-	Parker Bird Solicitor
	Sarah Bartram	-	Parker Bird Solicitor
	Julie Vickers	-	New Charter Housing Trust

#### 1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2006, having been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

#### 2. MATTERS ARISING

##### ***Item 2 – Review of Debt Advice in Tameside***

Annette Goodfellow advised that the Citizens Advice bid to the DTI for funding face-to-face advisers across the North West Region had been successful. This would mean an additional 2 advisers in Tameside.

##### ***Item 2 – Review of Housing Advice in Tameside***

Caroline Gregory reported that New Charter Housing Trust would be providing funding for a Financial Inclusion Manager to take forward the work of the Money Information Network Tameside (MINT) and this post had now been advertised.

##### ***Item 4 – Welfare Benefits Advice***

Roger Thompson informed members that there were still ongoing issues relating to overpayments and delays in processing information relating to Tax Credits.

### ***Item 8 – Financial Services Ombudsman***

Annette Goodfellow advised that there will still places available on the Financial Services Ombudsman training event on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2006 commencing at 10.00 am in the Etherow Lounge, Ashton Town Hall.

### **3. EMPLOYMENT ADVICE IN TAMESIDE**

Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstance, the Greater Manchester Pay and Employment Rights Advice Service were unable to attend the meeting and it was agreed to invite an officer to the September meeting to provide a progress report.

Annette Goodfellow advised that the CAB employed one employment caseworker jointly funded by the Legal Services Commission and Tameside MBC dealing with both eligible and ineligible clients. It was recognised nationally that it was very difficult to target eligible clients because most people with employment problems were in work and earning or had left work but had capital from redundancy and notice payments. In the year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006, 263 cases were opened. There were 195 complex cases, with the potential to go to Tribunal, and 68 less complex cases.

### **4. CONSUMER DIRECT**

An update report on the launch of the Consumer Direct service which took place on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2006 in the North West was circulated for information. By this time, all but two of the Trading Standards Departments in the North West were transferring their calls to a call centre in Cumbria (which was operated by the Office of Fair Trading) where trained advisors give advice on consumer problems. Anyone calling Trading Standards on the normal Tameside Call Centre number would now be transferred to Consumer Direct.

Where Consumer Direct could not resolve an issue and further help is required they will refer the matter to the local Trading Standards and Consumer Advice. It was noted that certain situations such as doorstep crime, allegations of unsafe goods or counterfeit goods required immediate referral to local Trading Standards offices.

### **5. TAMESIDE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP STEERING GROUP**

Annette Goodfellow reported on discussions which had taken place at the Steering Group meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2006. The LSC had advised on the main core objectives and priorities contained in the Commission's Five Year Strategy and in particular that due to changes to the governance of the CLS both nationally and locally the LSC would no longer facilitate Community Legal Service Partnerships. In view of this consideration had been given to the most appropriate way to take forward the work of the Tameside CLSP. It had been agreed that the Provider Group would continue and that the work of the Steering Group would be incorporated into the Provider Group which would then have an enhanced role in considering wider strategic issues such as performance indicators.

Discussion ensued regarding the format of future Provider Group meetings. It was agreed that they would commence at 2.00 pm and start with consideration of any strategic items to be followed by the planned themes for the Provider Group which would give members the opportunity to take part in both or either of the discussions.

The Commission's intention to develop Community Legal Advice Centres (CLACs) and Community Legal Advice Networks (CLANs) was also considered and it was also noted that discussions were ongoing between Tameside MBC and the LSC North West Regional Office regarding the

development of CLAN in Tameside. Whilst it was agreed that Tameside MBC and the LSC were at an early stage in their discussions, the Provider Group requested that they be kept informed of progress on potential developments.

Reference was also made to the LSC's consultation paper on the introduction of the Preferred Supplier Scheme which proposed to transform the Commission's business relationship with frontline providers of legal aid services – solicitors and advice agencies. Pluck Andrew and Co Solicitors were already a Preferred Supplier having taken part in the Commission's pilot which began in 2004. The possible implications for smaller organisations was discussed and it was acknowledged that the implementation of the Preferred Supplier Scheme would inevitably concentrate the provision of legal advice services in fewer organisations which would be expected to expand to ensure that there was no reduction in the availability of services to the public.

## 6. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS/BACKGROUND STATISTICS

Consideration was given to performance indicators and the key points to note were as follows:-

- **Tameside County Court Possession Summonses** – It was stated that the Government was concerned that the number of possession hearings nationally was increasing and as part of its prevention of homelessness agenda would be asking registered social landlords what action they could take to reduce the number of evictions.
- **Council Tax Liability Orders** – It was noted that the number issued peaked three months following the issue of Council Tax Bills. It would also be useful to have a breakdown of this information into geographical areas if it was possible.
- **% take up of PC Guarantee Credit** – Work still continuing to increase take up and this also means access to other benefits for successful claimants.
- **Council Tax Benefit (60+)** – Fairly static and in line with national figures. Substantial amount of work ongoing to increase take up.
- **Attendance Allowance** – Fairly static and work ongoing to ensure this is maintained.
- **Pension Credit** – It was proving extremely difficult to increase take up despite a number of initiatives in place. However, it was recognised that there would always be a certain number of people who did not want to claim.

## 7. ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to the Action Plan which had been circulated with the agenda and the following issues were noted:-

### ***Supportive Communities***

- **Ensure maximum take up of Tax Credits to ensure all sections of the community benefit in government investment in tackling child poverty.**  
National research had shown that take up in the first year of tax credits among families without children was significantly lower than for those with children, with 13 per cent of those entitled claiming and the challenges of reaching this new group.

### ***A Learning Community***

- **Support opportunities for volunteering in relevant agencies as aid to skills and knowledge development amongst economically inactive so as to improve employability.**  
Annette Goodfellow reported on a project to recruit and train people as CAB volunteers from the Ashton St Peter's and Haughton Green areas. So far, five volunteers representing a good cross section of people had completed the course and others were in the pipeline.

## **8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Provider Group would be held on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September and the theme would be immigration and discrimination advice with an update report from the Greater Manchester Pay and Employment Advice Service.