

# TAMESIDE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP

## PROVIDER GROUP MEETING

5<sup>th</sup> September 2006

**Commenced:** 2.00 pm

**Terminated:** 3.35 pm

<b>Present:</b>	Alan Franco	-	CLS Co-ordinator (TMBC) (in the Chair)
	Ahmed Ali	-	TREC
	Yvonne Cartey	-	Economic Development, TMBC
	Carol Garton	-	Trading Standards, TMBC
	Caroline Gregory	-	Neighbourhood Renewal, TMBC
	Martin Goodsell	-	Greater Manchester Shelter
	Keith Hanson	-	People First Housing Association
	Karen Heathcote	-	Libraries Service, TMBC
	Lesley Hunter	-	GM Pay & Employment Rights Advice Service
	Anne Okiwei	-	Sure Start St Peters
	Carol Renshaw	-	Tameside & Pension Service Joint Team
	Julie Vickers	-	New Charter Housing Trust
	Linda Walker	-	Partnership Secretary, TMBC
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	Sarah Bartram	-	Parker Bird Whiteley
	Eden Carruthers	-	Social Care and Health, TMBC
	Trish Deaville	-	Pluck Andrew and Co
	Beate Desarathy	-	GMIAU
	Carol Eckersley	-	Tameside & Pension Service Joint Team
	Stephanie Fearne	-	Tameside & Pension Service Joint Team
	Annette Goodfellow	-	Tameside CAB
	Barbara Lowndes	-	TACO
	Karen Morgan-Hopwood	-	Tameside & Pension Service Joint Team
	Michelle Neville-Cooper	-	TMBC
	Andrew Shanahan	-	Beevers
	Helen Stonehouse	-	Carers Centre, TMBC
	Malcolm Watson	-	Assistant Chief Executive, TMBC

### *Partnership Issues*

#### **1. LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT (LAA) UPDATE**

Alan Franco presented a report which provided the Partnership with a progress update on the development of the Tameside LAA, the priorities identified by the four block negotiating groups and details of performance measures and the associated supporting actions. Consideration was given to a summary of the outcomes/priorities identified and it was noted that whilst the information and advice sector may have an impact on a number of these outcomes, the Partnership would be involved the following priorities to a greater extent:

##### Healthier Communities and Older People

- Energy efficiency interventions for older people (60+)
- Involvement – older people participating in volunteering
- Support/independence – assistance from the Benefit Advice Providers (Joint Team, Age Concern, CAB etc.) and access to sub-threshold/community services

### Safer and Stronger Communities

- Housing/Homelessness – prevention of homelessness/non-decent social housing/vulnerable people in non-decent private sector housing

### Economic Development

- Employment – areas with the highest rates/people aged 50 or over
- Dependency on benefits

## **2. PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Consideration was given to the Partnership's Performance Indicators, the key points of which were highlighted as follows:

- **Tameside County Court Possession Summonses** – There was a slight upward trend, more so in terms of mortgage rather than in rent, which indicated a certain amount of volatility regarding the ability of people to maintain their household finances. These figures were also being fed into the Housing Partnership as a way of keeping a track of the potential level of people presenting themselves as homeless.
- **Council Tax Liability Orders** – It was noted that there was a slight increase in the number of liability orders issued which peaked three months following the issue of Council Tax bills. In terms of further analysis, it may be possible to determine if it was the same people each year who received liability orders.
- **% take up of PC Guarantee Credit/Council Tax Benefit (60+)/Pension Credit** – Work continuing to ensure people continue to receive the benefits they are entitled to.
- **Attendance Allowance** – Fairly static and work ongoing to ensure this situation was maintained.

## **3. LEGAL AID: A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

Consideration was given to an executive summary of the LSC's consultation paper "Legal Aid: a sustainable future" which related to the reforms for the procurement of Criminal Legal Aid, Civil, Family and Immigration and Asylum matters. The proposals had provoked some controversy particularly the suggestions that for civil matters the LSC would be introducing a standard fee for all categories of law.

In terms of not-for-profit organisations, this was a complete reverse of the present system where they received a standard amount to provide 1100 hours casework per year. In order to receive a similar level of funding an organisation would have to deal with around 300 cases. Concerns regarding the introduction of these fees leading to the possibility that some organisations may deal with more straightforward than complex cases in order to generate sufficient income was discussed. Organisations with a LSC contract have been forwarding their responses to the consultation document and Alan Franco encouraged members of the Provider Group to view the full consultation document on the LSC website at [www.legalservices.gov.uk](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk) or the Department of Constitutional Affairs website at [www.dca.gov.uk](http://www.dca.gov.uk) and participate by responding direct to the LSC by 12<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

Alan Franco updated the meeting on the potential development of a Community Legal Advice Network (CLAN) in Tameside. He would be contacting the LSC to establish, in the light of the proposed reforms referred to above, the level of funding the LSC were prepared to make available within the constraints of the fixed fees and the outcomes envisaged by the LSC.

#### **4. SPECIALIST SUPPORT SERVICE**

A copy of a letter from the Legal Services Commission to confirm with all eligible suppliers that the funded Specialist Support Service had been extended until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007 to enable a review of the projects to be undertaken.

#### ***General Business***

#### **5. MINUTES**

The Minutes of proceedings of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2006, having been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

Further to Minute 2, it was noted that MINT (Money Information Network Tameside) had now recruited a Financial Inclusion Manager who would be commencing on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

#### **6. EMPLOYMENT ADVICE IN TAMESIDE**

Lesley Hunter, Employment Rights Advisor, stated that the Greater Manchester Pay and Employment Rights Advice Service had formerly been known as the Greater Manchester Low Pay Unit. This service, funded by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, provided employment rights information, advice and support services across Greater Manchester through a free, confidential, telephone advice service. In the last financial year, around 2,500 queries were dealt with, 7½% of which were from Tameside residents. The main queries related to parental rights such as maternity, paternity and adoptive leave. However, it was expected that there would be an increase in queries relating to the introduction of new Government regulations which proposed increasing statutory holiday entitlement in recognition of the fact that not everyone is permitted bank holidays. It was also noted that there was an increase in queries from migrant workers and a research group had been established to address the issues being faced by them and what could be done to improve the situation.

GMPERAS can also offer second tier advice and training to other advice agencies on a wide range of employment issues. A number of fact sheets and leaflets providing a resource for agencies and individuals could be found on the GMPERAS website at [www.gmemploymentrights.org.uk](http://www.gmemploymentrights.org.uk).

#### **7. IMMIGRATION AND DISCRIMINATION**

Ahmed Ali reported on the work of Tameside Racial Equality Council which was financially assisted by the Commission for Racial Equality and Tameside MBC. For the last four years the organisation had been successful in delivering under contract with the CRE providing comprehensive free racial discrimination casework service to residents of all ten Greater Manchester local authorities. The Equality and Diversity Centre of Excellence currently holds the CLS Quality Mark for casework and the CRE Core Standard Level 3.

Referrals of clients were made through the CRE and also the Provider Group Networks in the AGMA wide area and the service was continuously promoted through CABs, Law Centres, publicity materials and word of mouth. In supporting clients, last year, the Equality and Diversity Centre of Excellence obtained over £300,000 compensation for victims of racial discrimination. However, for the vast majority of clients compensation was not the primary issue and the preferred outcome of the interventions was to enable clients to carry on achieving in their workplace on the basis of their own merit. The race discrimination case statistics by location for relating to April 2005 to March 2006 were circulated for information and it was noted that there had been 1206 enquiries and of the 375 actual cases, 130 applications had been made to an employment tribunal.

Funding issues were discussed and the importance of ensuring a continuous and sustained level to strengthen the work of the organisation in delivering its much needed services. The organisation's website was in the process of being updated and would be online in the near future.

## **8. CLS DIRECT – PUBLICITY MATERIALS**

Alan Franco advised that CLS Direct were launching a new range of leaflets publicising the services available for clients contacting the CLS Direct national helpline. Further copies could be obtained by completing the order form circulated with the agenda.

## **9. ASYLUM SEEKERS**

It was noted that Tameside MBC no longer had the contract for dealing with asylum seekers entering the Borough. Concern was expressed regarding the lack of information being received from the two organisations providing homes in the area to ensure that families were best placed for access to services and information. Anyone with details of families moving into the area were asked to contact Caroline Gregory, Neighbourhood Renewal, to ensure that the Council has a better picture of what the situation is in Tameside in order to try to reduce risks and promote better access to information and services.

## **10. DISABILITY RIGHTS SEMINAR**

Members were notified of a Disability Rights Seminar to be held on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2006 from 10.00 am to 2.00 pm in the Etherow Lounge, Ashton Town Hall. A speaker from the Disability Rights Commission would be providing an overview of the Commission's Services and how it can help organisations and advisers. A second speaker from the Trafford Law Centre would be advising on the role and remit of the caseworker, improving access to legal services and an overview of the law including case studies and exercises. Further details and a booking form would be circulated in due course, but in the meantime those wishing to book a place were asked to email [linda.walker@tameside.gov.uk](mailto:linda.walker@tameside.gov.uk).

## **11. MALCOLM WATSON, ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Alan Franco advised that Malcolm Watson, Assistant Chief Executive, TMBC and the Partnership's Chair and lead officer would be retiring in November 2006. Members of the Provider Group wished to record their thanks for his contribution to the success of the Partnership and wished him well for the future.

## **12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Provider Group would be held on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2006 and the themes would be Housing and Debt matters.