

# ITEM NO. 1

## TAMESIDE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP

### PROVIDER GROUP MEETING

18<sup>th</sup> March 2008

**Commenced:** 2.30 pm **Terminated:** 3.50 pm

<b>Present:</b>	Alan Franco	CLS Co-ordinator (TMBC) (in the Chair)
	Ahmed Ali	(TREC) Equality and Diversity Centre
	Ruth Cheesbrough	TMBC Welfare Rights Service
	Ilys Cookson	Asst Executive Director, Exchequer and Support Services, TMBC
	Stephen Disley	Parker Bird Whiteley
	Caroline Gregory	TMBC Neighbourhood Renewal
	Janet Higgins	TMBC Disability Services
	Karen Morgan-Hopwood	The Pension Service
	Alistair Newton	TMBC Trading Standards
	Kathy Powis	Tameside & Glossop Primary Care Trust
	Susan Riley	Tameside CAB
	Ursula Sharma	GM Immigration Aid Unit
	Roger Thompson	TMBC Welfare Rights Service
	Shelley Timpson	TMBC Carers Centre
	Julie Vickers	New Charter Housing Trust
	Linda Walker	Partnership Secretary
	Sarah Walters	Greater Manchester Shelter
	Janine Yates	Tameside MBC Welfare Rights Service

**Apologies for Absence:** Maggie Stansfield Tameside Hospital

#### 1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2007, having been circulated, were approved as a correct record.

#### 2. HEALTH IMPROVEMENT IN TAMESIDE – CONNECT FOR LIFE

Kathy Powis, Tameside and Glossop Primary Care Trust advised on the Connect 4 Life free service aimed at people who were at risk of developing long-term health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or stroke, and offered personalised health advice, and the opportunity to make individual healthy lifestyle improvements.

At present the project was focusing in the most deprived communities in the area – Hatterlsey, Hyde, Denton South and the Ashton regeneration area. The service was primarily accessed through GPs for people aged between 40 and 64 years to deliver the most benefit to save lives through improving health and reducing the risk factors. Those able to take part in the programme and recognise they have two of the following risk factors:

- Overweight
- Eat less than 5 portions of fruit and veg a day
- Suffer from stress
- No regular physical activity
- Smoke

Following referral, a client would be allocated a coach who would make arrangements for a consultation where the risk factors and issues concerning the individual were identified. An action plan would then be agreed which would be used as a monitoring tool and reviewed after six months to ascertain the progress which had been made.

Initial results from the project, which was now an integral part of the Health Improvement Service, had been very encouraging and the Trust would be giving consideration to expanding this primary prevention model more widely across the Borough.

There was potential for providers of debt advice in the Borough to encounter people who would benefit from the services offered by Connect 4 Life and details of the referral process would be distributed to Provider Group members.

The Chair thanked Kathy for her informative presentation.

#### **AGREED**

- (1) That details of the referral process to the Connect 4 Life initiative be circulated to members of the Provider Group.**
- (2) That a summary report on progress with the initiative be submitted to a Provider Group meeting in approximately six months time.**

### **3. WELFARE BENEFITS ADVICE**

Susan Riley advised that during 2006/07 Tameside CAB advised on welfare benefits matters through their generalist advice service and Welfare Benefits Team. The LSC contract was relinquished in April 2007. Details of the category of welfare benefits and the total number of new cases dealt with during 2006/07 were circulated. Of the 2,961, Disability Living Allowance (care and mobility) was the highest enquiry area, followed by Housing Benefit, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support and Tax Credits.

<http://www.tamesidecab.org.uk/Downloads/complete%20annual%20report%202008.pdf>

In terms of policy issues, the Bureau was continuing to assist clients facing problems regarding the overpayment of Tax Credits and the recovery of these was causing hardship but there was also a lack of response from HMRC to requests to waive recovery. Some clients were also experiencing difficulties using the telephone based claim system for Crisis Loans and had attended the Bureau for assistance with making a claim.

Ruth Cheesbrough added that the Tameside Welfare Rights Services was also dealing with a number of complex cases around rights to reside which were time consuming and the consequences for the clients could be devastating.

There was an increasing demand on the service generally with referrals being received from a variety of sources. In many cases this was not helped by the difficulties in getting through to the DWP and contacting the appropriate person to deal with the matter as staff in different departments did not appear to be communicating with one another and becoming increasingly remote.

Particular reference was made to a number of personal injury compensation claims where a client had received a payment, had not declared this award to the DWP and had been issued with an overpayment demand. This situation could have been prevented had the client been appropriately advised regarding the possibility of setting up a Trust.

Copies of the Tameside Welfare Rights Service Annual Report 2006/07 were circulated for information. <http://www.tameside.gov.uk/welfarerights>

Karen Morgan-Hopwood advised on the work of the Tameside and Pension Service Joint Team in helping older people to maximise their entitlements. It was noted that one in three of home visits results in a successful claim. The Service's Annual Report 2006/07 was circulated for information in addition to a statistical analysis of the number of successful claims for benefit submitted so far in 2007/08 and the total of extra benefits for people living in Tameside. <http://www.tameside.gov.uk/pensions>

Julie Vickers reported that New Charter Housing Trust had a small scale benefits advice service to assist tenants experiencing difficulties. It was also noted that Greater Manchester Shelter had a contact to provide debt advice and community care advice in Tameside.

Ilys Cookson also made reference to the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2008, which was a new way of working out housing benefit for private tenants. Tenants and landlords would be able to find out in advance how much rent would be covered by way of Housing Benefit. There would be no change to the entitlement rules which would still be means tested on income and capital. Full details of the Local Housing Allowance together with a safeguard policy would be distributed to members of the Provider Group for information.

Reference was also made to the difficulties being experienced when liaising with Job Centre Plus now based in East, West and Central Manchester teams and the Partnership would be willing to assist the Job Centre Plus Local Partnership Manager in setting up a meeting with interested agencies to discuss these issues.

#### **AGREED**

- (1) That the update reports be noted.**
- (2) That contact be made with the Job Centre Plus Local Partnership Manager to discuss the possibility of setting up a meeting with interested agencies.**

#### **4. FAMILY LAW**

Stephen Disley, Parker Bird Whiteley, advised on the increasingly restrictive means testing in respect of eligibility for legal aid for family cases. This was resulting in increasingly fewer firms willing to undertake legal aid work and the number of clients having to travel to other areas to access this service was increasing. It was noted that judges had also been expressing their concerns that people were now attending court without appropriate representation. Difficulties were also being experienced in dealings with the CSA and overpayments of tax credits, making it difficult to resolve financial matters and causing additional stress on already fragile relationships between parents.

#### **AGREED**

**That the update report be noted.**

#### **5. HOUSING ADVICE**

Sarah Walters advised that Greater Manchester Shelter was part of the County Court Duty Scheme in Tameside and attended housing advice sessions at the Tameside Citizens Advice Bureau. In addition, the Service also provided a session at the Mental Health Unit, Tameside General Hospital, for assisting patients with housing issues.

Discussion ensued on the increase in county court possession summonses being issued for mortgage arrears which appeared to be as a result of people falling into arrears as they had overstretched their finances when taking out second and sometimes third loans on their property.

#### **AGREED**

**That the update report be noted.**

## **6. LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT – HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE**

Consideration was given to the following cumulative quarter two performance measures relating to increasing the incomes of older people which it was noted had exceeded their targets in terms of successful claims:

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Performance</b>
Disability Living Allowance/Attendance Allowance	260	345
Pension Credit	308	393
Council Tax Benefit	103	156

**AGREED**

**That the report be noted.**

## **7. TACKLING INDEBTEDNESS IN TAMESIDE**

### **(a) Council Tax Liability Orders**

It was noted that the number of liability orders issued was fairly static with a large number being issued in June of each year.

### **(b) Tameside County Court Possession Summonses**

Details of the number of County Court possession summonses for rent arrears and mortgage arrears were circulated for information. As previously discussed, the upward trend on the number of possession summonses, which mirrored the national picture, issued for mortgage arrears was continuing.

**AGREED**

**That the report be noted.**

## **8. LOAN SHARK LENDING**

Alistair Newton, Tameside Trading Standards, gave details of a new service which had been established in the North West to encourage members of the public make contact if they had been victims of loan shark lending. Issues which were brought to their attention would then be investigated and details of this service would be circulated to Provider Group members. It was suggested that this could also be promoted in children's centres, by the Third Sector Coalition in their publications and also through other community groups. Those agencies who wished to find out further information about the project should contact Tony Quigley on 0121 693 1125 or email: [tony\\_quigley@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:tony_quigley@birmingham.gov.uk).

## **9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

A schedule showing the date and themes for meetings in 2008 was agreed as follows:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Theme (area of law)</b>	
17 <sup>th</sup> June 2008	(i) Employment	(ii) Consumer
16 <sup>th</sup> September 2008	(i) Immigration	(ii) Discrimination
16 <sup>th</sup> December 2008	(i) Housing	(ii) Debt

All meetings to commence at 2.30 pm and would be held in the Council Offices, Ashton-under-Lyne.

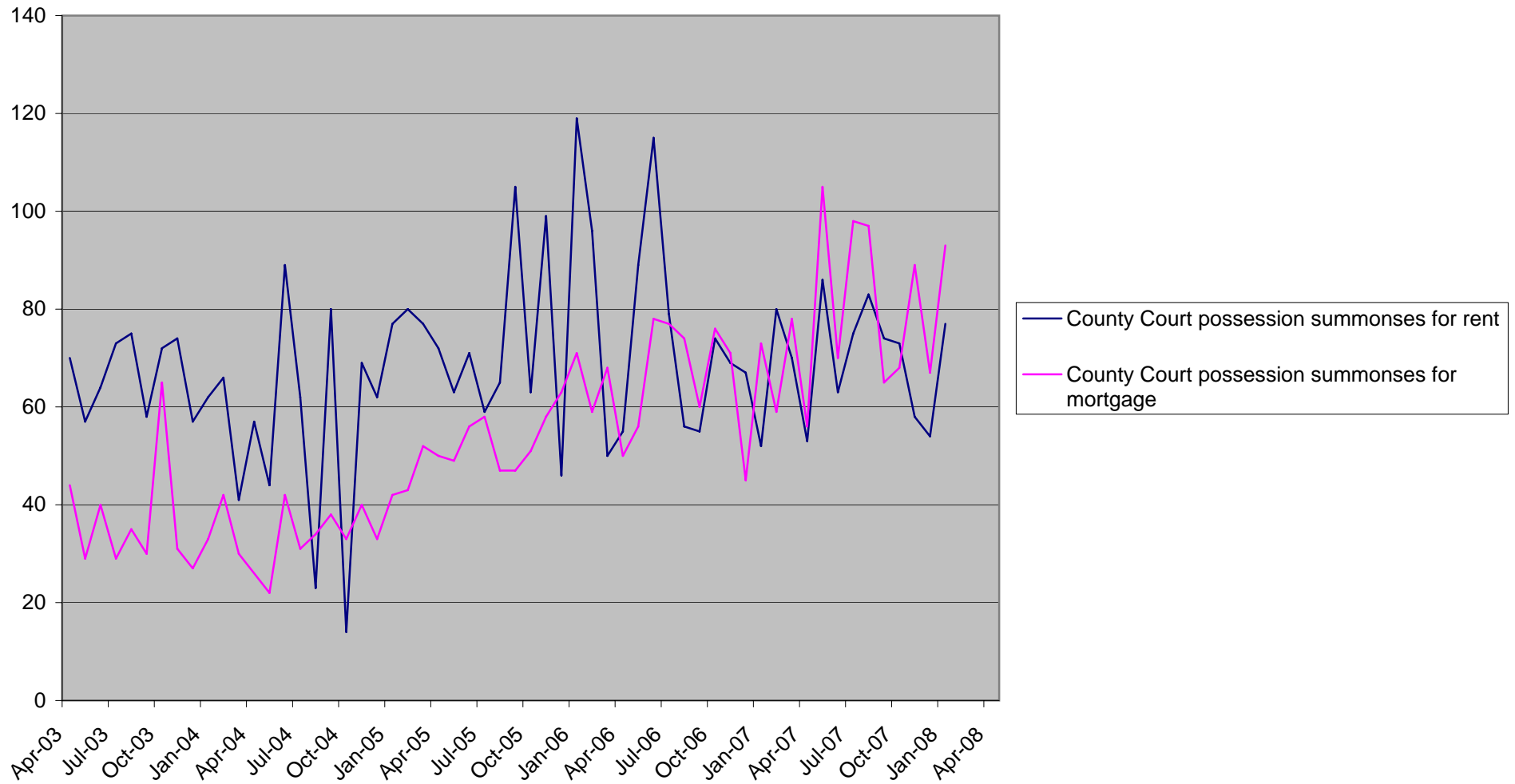
	County Court possession summonses for rent	County Court possession summonses for mortgage
Apr-03	70	44
May-03	57	29
Jun-03	64	40
Jul-03	73	29
Aug-03	75	35
Sep-03	58	30
Oct-03	72	65
Nov-03	74	31
Dec-03	57	27
Jan-04	62	33
Feb-04	66	42
Mar-04	41	30
Apr-04	57	26
May-04	44	22
Jun-04	89	42
Jul-04	62	31
Aug-04	23	34
Sep-04	80	38
Oct-04	14	33
Nov-04	69	40
Dec-04	62	33
Jan-05	77	42
Feb-05	80	43
Mar-05	77	52
Apr-05	72	50
May-05	63	49
Jun-05	71	56
Jul-05	59	58
Aug-05	65	47
Sep-05	105	47
Oct-05	63	51
Nov-05	99	58
Dec-05	46	63
Jan-06	119	71
Feb-06	96	59
Mar-06	50	68
Apr-06	55	50
May-06	89	56
Jun-06	115	78
Jul-06	79	77
Aug-06	56	74
Sep-06	55	60
Oct-06	74	76
Nov-06	69	71
Dec-06	67	45
Jan-07	52	73
Feb-07	80	59
Mar-07	70	78
Apr-07	53	56
May-07	86	105
Jun-07	63	70
Jul-07	75	98
Aug-07	83	97
Sep-07	74	65
Oct-07	73	68
Nov-07	58	89
Dec-07	54	67
Jan-08	77	93
Feb-08	0	0
Mar-08	0	0

2003/04 averages are  
2004/05 averages are  
2005/06 averages are  
2006/07 averages are  
2007/08 averages are

64 (rent)  
61 (rent)  
76 (rent)  
72 (rent)  
70 (rent)

36 (mortgage)  
36 (mortgage)  
56 (mortgage)  
66 (mortgage)  
81 (mortgage)

## Tameside County Court Possession Summonses



## Tameside Council Tax

### Debt Recovery

	No. of CTAX liability orders issued
Apr-03	470
May-03	1238
Jun-03	2378
Jul-03	1154
Aug-03	669
Sep-03	975
Oct-03	846
Nov-03	790
Dec-03	571
Jan-04	712
Feb-04	0
Mar-04	989
Apr-04	537
May-04	619
Jun-04	2700
Jul-04	705
Aug-04	736
Sep-04	714
Oct-04	784
Nov-04	384
Dec-04	247
Jan-05	636
Feb-05	174
Mar-05	557
Apr-05	443
May-05	125
Jun-05	2678
Jul-05	761
Aug-05	975
Sep-05	526
Oct-05	908
Nov-05	553
Dec-05	673
Jan-06	1010
Feb-06	495
Mar-06	541
Apr-06	461
May-06	447
Jun-06	2974
Jul-06	714
Aug-06	943
Sep-06	1035
Oct-06	806
Nov-06	0
Dec-06	0
Jan-07	513
Feb-07	0
Mar-07	60
Apr-07	155
May-07	1408
Jun-07	0
Jul-07	0
Aug-07	3035
Sep-07	1641
Oct-07	1105
Nov-07	
Dec-07	
Jan-08	
Feb-08	
Mar-08	

### Tameside Council Tax Debt Recovery

