

HEALTH SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Health Scrutiny Panel was held on 31 August 2004.

PRESENT: Councillor Dryden (Chair), Councillors Biswas and Mrs H Pearson.

OFFICIALS: J Bennington, S Collins, J Ord and J Wells.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** J Daniel, Middlesbrough CAB.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Lancaster and McIntyre.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Health Scrutiny Panel held on 11 August 2004 were submitted and approved.

HEALTHY LIVING REVIEW - PROGRESS REPORT

Further to the meeting of the Panel held on 15 July 2004 the Scrutiny Support Officer presented a progress report on the review into Healthy Living.

In response to the Panel's specific interest relating to financial matters pertaining to health in particular the negative impacts this could have on individuals, community health representatives from the Citizen's Advice Bureau, the Council's Money Advice Service and Welfare Rights Service had been invited to address the Panel.

An indication was given of the three distinct areas of work and representatives had been asked as to provide information on the extent to which their services were co-ordinated and interacted with other related services.

As previously suggested arrangements would be made for a healthy living seminar to gain the views of various stakeholders regarding the strategic issues requiring attention if a co-ordinated Healthy Living Agenda was to be consistently delivered.

NOTED

WELFARE RIGHTS SERVICE - CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU - MONEY ADVICE SERVICE

The Chair welcomed each of the representatives and reaffirmed the Panel's request for information/evidence on the extent to which the services were co-ordinated and interacted.

In each case background information was provided on the status and staffing arrangements of the services, links between poor health and poverty, and details of the work undertaken and impact on mental and emotional wellbeing.

The main components of each of the presentations were as follows: -

Welfare Rights Service

Work included:

- advocacy and casework, corresponding with the relevant authorities, challenging incorrect decisions and dealing with a broad range of issues from basic information to very complex cases;

- representation at tribunals and appeals to Social Security Commissioners;
- take-up initiatives using the media, leaflets and talks to service-user and carer groups targeting the most under-claimed benefits;
- received Community Legal Services 'Quality Mark' for general help and casework in welfare benefits.
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Projects included:

- GP Advice in partnership with Middlesbrough PCT who funded 70% of the project costs. The service was provided to 26 Practices taking referrals from GP's, nurses and other practice staff and was aimed to provide advice to people aged 50 plus through weekly sessions in 6 surgeries and some home visits.
- East Middlesbrough in partnership with Middlesbrough PCT (funded by NRF to 2006) in providing a multi-disciplinary health improvement team based in Thorntree;
- West Middlesbrough in partnership with Middlesbrough PCT (funded by WMNT to 2006) working as part of a multi-disciplinary health improvement network;
- Asian Advice providing a comprehensive benefits advice service to members of the asian ethnic minority community disadvantaged by language barriers or through age and disability;
- Older Peoples Income Maximisation, a three year project funded by Community Legal Service Partnership Innovation Budget (to 2005) which used housing benefit records to identify over 60's not claiming Pension Credit and subsequently providing a full benefits advice service to clients who responded.

Citizens Advice Bureau

Work involved:

- advice provided from the main office in Linthorpe Road and from 12 outreach sessions located throughout Middlesbrough;
- additional specific projects for example, people on probation, people with mental health problems;
- casework in Debt, Welfare Benefits and Housing had received the Community Legal Service Specialist Quality Mark.

Projects included:

- Representational Advocacy Project which assisted people who experienced difficulties accessing or were not satisfied with the health or social care that they received;
- Mental Health Advice Project which predominantly provided benefits and debt advice at a number of venues in Middlesbrough i.e. Mind drop-in centre, St Luke's Hospital, Lakeside and Parkside Mental Health Resource Centres (project in its first 2 years generated £5000,000 of benefit awards and debt write-offs).

Future Work:

- work with partner agencies to deliver services targeted at specific groups of the ill and disabled;

- ensure generalist services were accessible to ill and disabled people through the provision of local, accessible advice sessions and home visiting services;
- make particular efforts to locate advice services in hospitals or resource centres used by people with health problems;
- develop new initiatives to reduce the impact of ill health.

Middlesbrough Council Money Advice Service

Work involved:

- provides a money advice service for residents experiencing multiple debt problems;
- last year 276 people had been assisted with debts between them totalling £842,646 the figures for which had reduced in recent years as a result of a staffing restructure;
- the service was currently configured to provide outreach surgeries in the Town Centre, Eastbourne Road, Brambles Farm, Berwick Hills, Easterside, Whinney Banks, My Sisters Place and proposed future out of hours surgery (identified as an area for improvement by 40% of Voiceover respondents);
- where appropriate home visits were available and a self-help pack distributed to encourage vulnerable clients to make initial steps in tackling their debts without specialised assistance;
- the focus of the service was on low-income clients;
- referrals from social workers based at Parkside, St Luke's and James Cook University Hospital; Community Psychiatric Nurses within the crisis intervention team at Sunningdales; First Steps drug and alcohol rehabilitation to assist vulnerable consumers in this sector.

The Panel sought clarification on a number of points and focussed on the following areas and in their subsequent deliberations: -

Joint Working- Internal /External:

- (i) representatives were members of the Middlesbrough Community Legal Services Partnership a network of providers from statutory sector, voluntary sector and private solicitors developing complementary services, partnership working and effective inter-agency referrals;
- (ii) although the agencies provided separate Money Advice services, the Community Legal Service regarded this as a strength as it provided consumer choice and the opportunity of referral if a conflict of interest arose;
- (iii) signposting and referral protocols which worked effectively to ensure clients accessed specialist advice from the most appropriate source;
- (iv) current joint funding bids such as that by Welfare Rights, CAB and Age Concern for advice provision for Older People in Hospital;
- (v) joint take-up campaigns and a wide range of publicity measures in an endeavour to attract the most vulnerable who need to seek appropriate advice;
- (vi) joint funding and partnerships developed on a number of advocacy projects such as those with Middlesbrough PCT;
- (vii) separately funded projects but worked alongside each other such as the East Middlesbrough Project;

- (viii) using Partnership agencies increased the opportunities to obtain appropriate external funding from a range of sources and worked together to provide a wide range of expertise to meet the varying demands for debt/advice assistance and also access to legal services and Government departments;
- (ix) internal Council links and reciprocal working relationships.

Members suggested that further information/written evidence be provided in respect of the following: -

- (a) demand, extent of debt and advice/assistance on a Ward basis in respect of Welfare Rights, Citizens Advice Bureau and Money Advice Service;
- (b) joint working arrangements;
- (c) the outcome of joint take-up campaigns and the range of publicity measures in an endeavour to attract the most vulnerable to seek appropriate advice;
- (d) details of the debt advice network and in particular, how it operates and is co-ordinated to ensure that the demands of the service are met and information on the referral mechanisms.

As part of the Panel's concluding remarks Members considered that from the evidence so far received, the debt advice service was not regarded as a core business and as such was vulnerable to changed circumstances and experienced difficulties in accessing required resources to cope with the increasing demands of the service.

AGREED as follows: -

1. That the representatives be thanked for their presentations and contribution to the subsequent deliberations.
2. That further information and written evidence be provided on the various aspects of joint working as outlined above.

NEXT MEETING - SEMINAR

Further to the previous meeting of the Panel it was suggested that a meeting of the Health Scrutiny Panel be held on Wednesday 6 October 2004 commencing at 9.30 a.m. at the MTLC, if available, to be followed by the proposed Healthy Living Seminar.

NOTED AND APPROVED