

Notes of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee
Social Inclusion Working Group
22nd September 2014

Present: Councillors: Kate Rowbottom (Chairman), George Cockman, David Coldwell, Duncan England, Christian Mitchell, Tricia Youtan

Apologies: Councillors: Godfrey Newman, David Skipp

Also present: Councillors: Frances Haigh, David Sheldon

By invitation: Sondra Fulbrook, Village Agent for Billingshurst and Shipley
Andy West, Home Services Manager, Age UK Horsham District

1. TO APPROVE AS CORRECT THE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16TH JUNE 2014

The notes of the meeting held on 16th June 2014 were approved as a correct record.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

There were no announcements.

4. VILLAGE AGENT SCHEME

Sondra Fulbrook and Andy West attended for this item and gave a presentation about the pilot Village Agent scheme. Sondra was the Village Agent for Billingshurst and Shipley and there was also now a Village Agent, Chloe Stubbs, for Ruspur and Colgate.

The aim of the free service was to identify vulnerable older people living in rural communities in the District and to provide one-stop support to help to alleviate loneliness and social isolation.

The agents were employed by Age UK Horsham District, with funding also being provided by Lions and Rotary clubs, Horsham District Council, and the Charles Hayward Foundation.

The agents were the first point of contact for older people and/or their carers when they required information and support. Village Agents had knowledge of what services were

available and could link people to those services. They also networked with local organisations to build good working relationships and to create a joined-up approach.

The scheme helped individuals by referring them, when appropriate, to Age UK Home Services: Help at Home (providing general domestic, gardening and handyperson work to allow older people to stay independent), Home from Hospital (free practical support and assistance to older people and vulnerable adults in their own homes for up to six weeks after leaving hospital), Home Visiting (free volunteer support to older people after coming home from hospital and companionship to housebound persons), and Information and Advice (help with understanding allowances and benefits, help with completing claim forms and assistance with considering financial aspects of housing and care options).

The scheme aimed to reach 950 people in a year and it was on target to achieve that goal. The Village Agent Scheme had been invited to join the Billingshurst Community Partnership.

The agent was employed part time for 10 hours a week; consideration would be given to whether that was sufficient going forward. Funding had been secured for three years for the existing schemes but future funding opportunities would be sought to enable the project to continue and to allow it to expand in other village locations in the District.

The Working Group appreciated the work of the scheme and welcomed the successes it had achieved. Members asked if older and vulnerable people in Horsham town were also helped. Members were informed that Age UK Horsham District had identified pockets of deprivation and had promoted a service that advised older people about how to claim relevant benefits. Age UK Home Services were also available. Age UK would provide, from late 2014, a Relative Support Service at Horsham Hospital to give relevant information to relatives and carers.

Members asked about the future prospects for securing funding for the Village Agent scheme; Andy West expressed cautious optimism.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Working Group, thanked the Age UK representatives for their attendance and the presentation.

5. REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES – UPDATE

The Working Group noted that some Councillors had, as requested, provided reports and information about their representation on outside bodies at the recent Council meeting. Further reports were expected at future Council meetings.

Some of the outside bodies had ceased to exist; the list of the Council's representation on outside bodies would be updated.

6. REVIEW OF POVERTY AMONGST AN AGEING POPULATION – UPDATE

The Working Group noted that the Head of Community and Culture had agreed to expand the Council's 'Older People' web page to include details of and links to relevant information for local older people about services, helplines, organisations and relevant documents. Those details might also be added to the Horsham District Wellbeing website provided by West Sussex County Council in partnership with HDC.

An article would appear in the spring 2015 edition of the Horsham District News magazine to signpost readers to that information. Telephone numbers for those services and helplines would also be listed, rather than just links to websites, because Members had previously recognised that some older people may not want to use computers to access services and information, and some may not be able to afford internet services.

7. CHANGING PLACES CAMPAIGN – UPDATE

The Working Group was informed that the newly-opened toilet facility at the Pavilions in the Park leisure centre was not listed on the Changing Places website when Horsham or a local postcode was typed into the 'Find a Toilet' search box. It was listed on a separate web page for 'Other changing facilities' within South East England.

The HDC Equalities Officer had been asked about that and the explanation was that the facility did not completely meet the specification for a Changing Places accreditation because the room was slightly smaller than the required standard and because of some other very minor shortfalls. He had liaised with Changing Places to get the Horsham facility listed on their website.

The Chairman suggested that the Equalities Officer be asked to contact Changing Places again to encourage them to list the Horsham facility when a general search was made on their website.

8. PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROVISION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS WHO ARE IN FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Councillor David Sheldon had submitted a work programme suggestion to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to ask for a review of the effectiveness of provision for local residents in financial hardship. The Committee had agreed that the Social Inclusion Working Group should undertake the review.

Councillor Sheldon outlined the proposed scope of the review. It was to consider what provision existed in the District to support and advise those in financial difficulty, what the Council could do to support and publicise those services, to identify any gaps that might exist, and consider whether there was a risk to current services if existing funding was not available in the future.

He suggested that the statistics about levels of poverty within Horsham District could be examined, areas of need identified, and consideration given to what was provided by relevant agencies and charities, whether or not that was sufficient, before making any recommendations.

Members discussed how best to conduct such a review and which organisations to invite to provide information. Members suggested that the review could enquire about the advice provided at the Council's reception to signpost local people who were in financial need to benefits and services.

The Working Group agreed to ask Councillor Sheldon to refine the scope and terms of reference of the proposed review for discussion at the meeting on 1st December 2014. Relevant background data would also be requested for consideration at that meeting.

The meeting finished at 7.03 p.m. having commenced at 5.30 p.m.

CHAIRMAN