

Notes of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee
Social Inclusion Working Group
1st December 2014

Present: Councillors: Kate Rowbottom (Chairman), David Coldwell, Duncan England, Godfrey Newman, David Skipp

Apologies: Councillors: George Cockman, Christian Mitchell, Tricia Youtan

Also present: Councillors: Brian Donnelly, David Sheldon

Officers: Trevor Beadle, Head of Community and Culture
Julian Carrington, Community Planning Manager

1. TO APPROVE AS CORRECT THE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22ND SEPTEMBER 2014

The notes of the meeting held on 22nd September 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

The Chairman reported that the HDC Equalities Officer had contacted Changing Places again to encourage them to list the toilet facility at the Pavilions in the Park leisure centre when a general location search was made on their website. That had not been successful; the standards for the scheme had altered before the Horsham facility had been completed. The Horsham 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. The facility was listed elsewhere on the Changing Places website under 'Other changing facilities'.

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

The Working Group considered the refined scope and terms of reference of the proposed review which had been submitted by Councillor David Sheldon.

The Working Group had received background data to inform its discussion: the Office for National Statistics data about economic deprivation, benefits and tax credit claimants for Horsham District, the West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment about deprivation, and the Trussell Trust's figures about increased demand for foodbanks and the primary referral causes.

Members queried whether local residents were receiving the correct level of benefits, what advice was available, and whether the full range of advice relevant to their situation was provided. Members acknowledged that some people could be resistant to accessing help.

The Head of Community and Culture and the Community Planning Manager outlined some of the relevant work and services provided by Horsham District Council. HDC made an annual contribution of £93,000 to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) for its Community Legal Advice Service in West Sussex, the Housing Department made a grant of £10,000 to the CAB to support the work of a Debt Advisor and also participated in My Key (a county-wide housing support service commissioned by West Sussex County Council for vulnerable people who have problems maintaining their home, were at risk of losing their accommodation or were homeless). Environmental Services provided assistance for those in fuel poverty with a Warmer Homes Project. The Health and Wellbeing Partnership provided money for foodbank provision beyond Horsham. HDC's Leisure Access Card provided discounts for those who were on lower incomes. Parking Services could consider payment 'holidays' for those who would struggle to pay parking fines. HDC directed people to services provided by the Local Assistance Network. Housing and Council Tax benefits and Discretionary Housing Payments were provided by the CenSus Partnership.

The officers stated that they, along with the Head of HR, would be meeting representatives of the West Sussex Credit Union; consideration would be given to commencing a corporate membership. HDC might consider providing information about credit unions to lower income employees, following the practice of some other local councils.

The Head of Community and Culture agreed to check what information HDC provided in its social housing tenancy welcome packs, and he would contact private landlords and housing associations to discuss what introductory information they might provide to their tenants.

Councillor Sheldon informed the Working Group of debt advice services located in Burgess Hill and Storrington.

The Working Group noted the set of questions that would form the framework of its review - what was the level of need, what provision was currently in place, what more could HDC do to support and advertise those services, what gaps existed in the provision, what could HDC do to assist in filling those gaps, and what were the risks to current services if existing funding was no longer made available?

The Working Group discussed how, if gaps in services were identified, HDC could work with partners and local organisations to encourage the provision and expansion of certain services. Members felt that gaps in services might exist in rural areas of Horsham District; data for the relevant wards could be examined. Councillor Sheldon suggested that there may be a need to be met for those people who were just above the level of crisis but did not receive support.

Key information could be collated for the public and organisations to easily access. The Working Group suggested publicising services via organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, local churches, the Samaritans and by HDC Councillors disseminating information when attending parish council meetings.

Consideration could be given to including an article or a leaflet in the Horsham District News magazine to list available services for those who may have money difficulties or who were experiencing financial hardship.

The Working Group agreed to gather more information by inviting representatives of key organisations to attend its meetings to discuss how they provided assistance and signposted services.

A Working Group meeting would be arranged for February 2015; that was in addition to the scheduled meeting to be held on 9th March 2015. Representatives from the following organisations would be invited to attend one of those meetings: the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Samaritans, Adult Social Services, Horsham Churches Together, Age UK Horsham District, Horsham Debt Advice Service, and West Sussex Credit Union.

The meeting finished at 6.47 p.m. having commenced at 5.30 p.m.

CHAIRMAN