

# BOROUGH SERVICES POLICY AND REVIEW PANEL

Meeting held on Monday, 11 April 2016 at the Concorde Room, Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

## **Voting Members**

Cllr Barbara Hurst (Chairman)  
Cllr A.R. Newell (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr T.D. Bridgeman  
Cllr D.E. Clifford  
Cllr A.M. Ferrier  
Cllr C.P. Grattan  
Cllr S.J. Masterson  
Cllr M.J. Roberts  
Cllr D.M. Welch

## **18. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8th February, 2016 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

## **19. CITIZENS' ADVICE RUSHMOOR**

The Panel welcomed Ms. Alex Hughes, Chief Officer at Citizens' Advice Rushmoor (CAR), who attended the meeting to give an update on activities and working arrangements. A pack was circulated to the Panel which included the Annual Report 2014/15, a copy of the presentation and some general information about Citizens' Advice. It was advised that the data for 2015/16 were still being pulled together and would be made available to Members as soon as the report was complete.

The Panel was shown the dashboard of data for the local authority area, which was also distributed with a quarterly newsletter to all Members. The dashboard gave a useful source of data for the area/clients, and highlighted emerging and changing issues. The dashboard also provided information on the channel of contact made with CAR; it was hoped that a shift towards electronic communication, such as webchat and email, would be seen in the future.

Ms. Hughes explained that the aim of CAR was to help people find a way forward, by progressing issues and giving advice to educate individuals to prevent similar issues reoccurring. The data gained helped identify the impacts of policy and regulations, allowing campaigns for change to solve collective issues on both a local and national level. In addition, CAR created benefits to society through the way in which services were delivered, the social value of working with over 150 volunteers in the local area and the benefit of being part of a national network. It was advised that, nationally, Citizens' Advice had recently been rebranded providing a more modern outlook and clean appearance.

The Panel reviewed the statistics relating to issues raised during 2015/16 compared to those for 2014/15, it was noted that CAR had helped with 22,981 different advice issues in 2015/16 compared to 15,855 the previous year. The largest area for concern in 2015/16 had remained issues related to welfare benefits. It was noted that employment issues were generally being dealt with through webchat as this was a more accessible channel for those in work.

Ms. Hughes advised of changes in funding. It was noted that the Council had previously been the largest funder, although Pensionwise, an impartial government service offering advice on pensions, had become the largest funder during 2015/16. Pensionwise was a government initiative of which there were 50 across the country, the branch based locally covered Rushmoor and the surrounding area, including Newbury, Andover, Eastleigh, Guildford and Woking. The core funding from the Council gave the opportunity to be creative with regard to developing staff to meet emerging needs through training and channel shift.

It was noted that, for every £1 invested, CAR generated at least £1.51 in fiscal benefits, reducing the demand on government funds, £8.74 in public value and £10.94 in benefits to individuals.

The Panel reviewed data relating to issues raised by ward across the Borough, the information showed an equal split between Aldershot and Farnborough with Cherrywood and Wellington being the two areas where the most issues were raised. It was noted that a Nepali language drop in service had been established in June 2014. The drop in service ran on a Wednesday morning when Nepali speaking staff and volunteers were available to assist Nepali residents with any issues they may have. The service was generally attended by 30-40 people and was carried out in a non-confidential environment, although appointments could be made if required. It was advised that there were three funded Nepali staff members, one core funded and the other two project funded. The drop in service helped to free up the mainstream service.

Ms. Hughes advised on the value and tangible benefits of volunteers to the service. These benefits included: giving volunteers the experience and confidence to move into work; improved employment prospects and salaries through skill development; improved self-esteem through a sense of belonging through working with the local people; and, increasing community trust. It was noted that volunteering also had a positive impact on tackling mental health issues, such as depression, in turn reducing demand on health services and providing savings for HMRC. It was advised that, if volunteers were paid for the service they provided, the salary bill would be way in excess of the funding streams.

It was noted that CAR provided positive benefits which enabled the local community to prosper. Two in three clients got their problem solved through advice provided by the service. Almost three in four clients experienced negative impacts as a result of their problems. However, once advice had been sought, four in five had stated that their lives had improved in other ways, such as through less stress and depression, secure housing situations, more control over their money and financial situation and better physical health and relationships with others.

During 2014/15, 1,324 employment problems had been addressed, of which two in every three had been resolved. The need to be in work that was safe and secure benefitted both the employee and employer. With regard to self-employed people it was advised that more help was needed, CAR worked with the Economic Recovery Group to identify areas of concern. These included: pension provisions; work life balance; income and benefits; and, bogus self-employment. It was noted that only 15% of self-employed people were currently contributing towards a pension. A link had been made with Enterprise First to provide the right level of support to self-employed people and this was being done through seminars held locally.

The Panel was advised of the provisions to help tackle mental health issues in the local area:

- Healthwatch Hampshire - an independent champion for health and social care who offered advice and advocacy.
- Heathlands - a Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) funded centre for those with severe mental health issues.
- Making Connections – a Vanguard CCG project to link vulnerable clients to the right services and to reduce demand on acute services.

CAR worked in partnership with RBC and provided a great service to their clients, but was always looking for ways to adapt and respond to changing needs. By working in partnership, more could be achieved and they could offer scrutiny, data and insight to help improve local services, such as; the Council Tax Support Scheme, benefit delivery/Welfare Reform and housing and homelessness support. During 2015/16, 5,656 issues relating to benefits and tax credit problems were addressed through CAR, this was an increasing problem and posed challenges to individuals and the Council. CAR offered personal budgeting support funded through the Pensionwise initiative.

The Panel was then advised of the Settled and Safe Programme. CAR had used the mystery shopper technique to investigate letting agents and landlord practices with the aim to improve the local private rented sector. Recommendations from the report had been to: ensure tenants had a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities; work with letting agencies to ensure transparency/benchmarking good practice; work with the Council to support good data gathering; and, improve housing standards using evidence to link to national work on the housing bill.

In response to a query on relationships with stakeholders/partners and what was and wasn't working, it was noted that the constant changes to local services due to commissioning was a challenge and telephone numbers/contacts changed allowing people to fall through the net. It was reported that the multi-agency approach was working well: quarterly meetings were held for project work and working together helped to address the austerity measures forced on services.

The Panel discussed the change in demand for debt advice, as there was now less credit available and changes to payday loan arrangements had been made, with the result that there was less need for advice in this area. There was more

information available for people to help themselves and education on money management had improved. A request was made for more information on prepaid energy meters locally, as these were calibrated at a higher rate than normal energy meters and might cause issues for some residents.

A request was made to carry out a short piece of work, similar to the Settled and Safe Programme, to address homelessness issues in light of the recent problems in Aldershot Town Centre.

The Panel **NOTED** the update and **AGREED**

<b>Action to be taken</b>	<b>By whom</b>	<b>When</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gather information on the number of prepaid meters in the Borough.</li> </ul>	Alex Hughes, Chief Officer Citizens' Advice Rushmoor	May, 2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An item to be added to the agenda for the next mid cycle meeting, relating to a piece of work on homelessness.</li> </ul>	Panel Administrator	May, 2016

## 20. **SUPPORTING TROUBLED FAMILIES**

The Panel welcomed Mr. Tony McGovern, Extended Services Partnership Manager, who attended the meeting to give an update on the Supporting Troubled Families Programme.

Mr. McGovern updated on the national programme, advising that back in 2011 troubled families in Hampshire had been costing the Government in the region of £119 million. A Troubled Families Unit had been established, which took a whole family approach, through information sharing and devising individual family plans. Some funding was available when the process started and the remaining funding was available once a robust support system was in place.

Families had to meet certain criteria to be part of Phase 1 of the Supporting Troubled Families Programme. These included being involved in youth crime and/or anti-social behaviour, having children not in school or an adult in the family that was out of work and on benefits, at least two of these needed to be met to be included in the programme. During Phase 1, all targets had been met allowing all funding to be achieved. As a result, in 2015 Hampshire had been asked to join Phase 2 of the project ahead of most of the country.

It was advised that Rushmoor had joined with Hart in 2014 to establish a local approach to the Programme. A structure had been established, led by Qamer Yasin, Head of Environmental Health and Housing, and Phil Turner, Head of Housing Services at Hart District Council. Quarterly meetings were held of the Local Co-ordination Group, to which all partners were invited. The meetings were held to agree working principles, share information and ensure all partners were responsible for the work being undertaken. In addition, weekly “early help hubs” had been established; these meetings were attended by all partners/agencies and helped to identify families suitable for the programme. Once families had signed up to the programme, monthly case conference meetings were held, when appropriate, to determine the way forward.

Mr. McGovern gave a summary of Phase 1, consisting of 70 families engaged in the Supporting Troubled Families Programme; 53 had shown measurable progress achieving the full £800 funding per family from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Overall, the Council had achieved slightly better results than the county average and continued to make good progress. Benefits included continued savings for Hampshire County Council (HCC), better working practices, increased confidence in whole family working, increased co-operation and co-ordination and a greater range of agencies helping each other and focusing on the same issues.

It was noted that the criteria for Phase 2 had been made broader, allowing more families to become eligible to be part of the Supporting Troubled Families Programme. The new criteria included mental health issues, alcohol and substance abuse and domestic violence. As a result, the number of families involved in year one of Phase 2 matched the number in total of Phase 1. It was noted that the co-location of HCC’s Children and Adult Services, and the Police to the Council Offices had been a huge benefit to the project.

The Panel was shown maps that pinpointed where families were situated across the Borough. Phase 1 had seen a concentration in Cherrywood and Aldershot Park but, for Phase 2, families had been much wider spread across the Borough.

It was advised that an amount of money was available to support families with small problems that could easily be resolved, these were usually small amounts that could remove barriers, such as £5 for a passport photo for a job application or out of school diversion activities. In addition, funding of £30,000 had been made available to projects managed by agencies/partners that supported families.

The Panel then discussed two case studies. The first relating to a single mother with two children who hadn’t been attending pre-school; with the right help the children were now regularly attending pre-school and the mother was studying for an Open University qualification and was now able to help herself. The second study was more challenging, it related to a single mother with six children aged between 11 and 22 years. She had a difficult relationship with authority and a number of the children had ASB’s and reprimands on file. The mother was now on side and the youngest child, who had been out of school for a year, had had his educational needs assessed and things were slowly improving. Work would continue with the family. Mr. McGovern advised that the “tough love” approach was

sometimes needed to deal with families that were hard to engage with for instance “if you don’t do this, you could lose your home”.

In conclusion, the Supporting Troubled Families Programme had made a real difference locally. It had made positive impacts on many families with significant problems and allowed a focus on issues that mattered locally. The programme was a good example of partnership working and had had four successful years so far. The aim would now be to drive it forward to the next level.

The Panel discussed the Nepalese community and the fact that there were none engaged in the Supporting Troubled Families Programme, it was felt that the Nepali community hid certain problems and it was advised that domestic violence was the most prevalent issue within their community. A meaningful way to engage with the Nepali community needed to be established. A discussion was also held around those families that did not want to engage with the programme. It was advised that some families were not ready to engage and there was nothing to be done in those cases. Nevertheless, it was important for families to understand that the door was never closed.

In response to a question, it was advised that Members were not made aware of cases within their wards due to confidentiality arrangements. Members could refer families via Mr. McGovern who would be happy to pass on the information to the relevant agency/partner.

The Chairman thanked Mr. McGovern for his presentation.

## 21. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel noted the current work programme.

The meeting closed at 9.12 pm.

CLLR BARBARA HURST (CHAIRMAN)

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