

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 5th November 2015 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 9.05pm

Present: Councillors Chris Townsend (Chairman), David Draper (Vice-Chairman), Stephen Cooksey, Rosemary Dickson (substitute for Claire Curran), Paula Hancock, Mary Huggins Duncan Irvine and Paul Potter

Also present: Councillors Margaret Cooksey, Raj Haque, Vivienne Michael, John Northcott and Peter Stanyard.

41. Minutes

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6th October 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

42. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Claire Curran.

43. East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service

The Chief Executive of East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services (ESDAS), Michelle Blunsom, attended the meeting to provide the Committee with an update on its work. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- Domestic abuse could take a variety of forms and affected more than 1 in 4 women and around 1 in 6 men in the UK. Women were more likely than men to experience longer periods of partner abuse, repeat victimisation and injury or emotional effects as a result of the abuse.
- ESDAS had noticed an increasing number of cases of the financial abuse of older people, particularly from their grown up children. It was thought the rise in such cases was due to financial pressures such as the cost of housing leading to children living at home longer.
- There were concerns that the introduction of the Universal Credit benefits scheme could present potential problems for victims of domestic abuse as it meant that payment of benefits would be paid directly to one member of a household. For those victims of domestic abuse in a controlling relationship, this may mean that they would not be able access to these benefits.
- ESDAS engaged with clients through self or agency referral, although agency referral must be with the client's consent. The Service offered advice, information, advocacy and support and undertook risk assessments and safety planning. The Service aimed to minimise risk and maximise safety and did this by listening to a client's individual needs.
- Analysis of feedback received from clients on the service provided by ESDAS had remained fairly consistent since the inception of the Service, 20 years ago, which indicated that the Service was still working towards its core values and continued to meet the needs of its clients.
- ESDAS worked closely with other the agencies in East Surrey who worked on the abuse agenda, including the Police, Probation Service and the South East Area Children's Services. ESDAS also worked with Surrey Downs Clinical Commissioning Group to deliver the IRIS project that trained GPs to identify victims of domestic abuse.
- Services provided included outreach, children's services, a free counselling service, a volunteering project which focussed on harnessing the skills of domestic abuse survivors, group work, legal advice drop-in, a Sanctuary Scheme which provided safety measures to a victim's home to enable them to remain in their home, victim support services in the specialist DV Court at Redhill and training and awareness raising together with other agencies.

The Committee asked various questions of Ms Blunsom on a number of subjects, including partnership work between Surrey Police and ESDAS. It was advised that tackling domestic abuse was a priority for Surrey Police and they had worked in conjunction with ESDAS to provide training for police officers to enable them to identify potential victims of domestic abuse at an early stage. ESDAS would also be working with the police to implement new legislation that had been introduced by the Government to tackle coercive control. Ms Blunsom advised that the number of instances of domestic abuse being reported by the police had risen in recent years, which was seen as a good thing as traditionally domestic violence went unreported.

Members were also interested in the Service's work with children who had experienced domestic abuse and in particular the Saturday Club run by ESDAS. It was advised that ESDAS had a funded full time children's worker and had also received funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner for a further half a post. The Saturday Club was run by a paid member of staff who was supported by volunteers and provided children who had experienced domestic abuse therapy through play.

In response to a question about whether there were difficulties obtaining funding for their activities, it was advised that funding was always an issue and ESDAS had to be very proactive in seeking different funding streams and in fundraising activities. An increasing issue to funding was large organisations from outside of Surrey bidding against ESDAS to provide services.

The Committee thanked Ms Blunsom for attending the meeting and responding to Members' questions.

44. Voluntary Action Mid Surrey (VAMS)

The Committee received a presentation on the work of Voluntary Action Mid-Surrey (VAMS) from their Chief Officer, Sally Dubery. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- One of the core functions of VAMS was to provide services and support for the voluntary sector. This included signposting funding streams through their free grant finder program, providing advice on grant applications, governance advice, the provision of training for volunteers and providing access to back office functions such as photocopying and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.
- Another core function of VAMS was to act in a liaison role for local voluntary groups and to facilitate networking between individuals, groups and the statutory and private sectors.
- VAMS worked with 180 registered charities and 380 not for profit groups including a number of different organisations based within Mole Valley. These included Age Concern Mole Valley, Dorking Good Neighbours, Carers Support Mole Valley, Patchworking Garden Project, Dorking Museum, Rainbow Trust, Families Matter Leatherhead and Ashted Good Neighbours.
- Over the past 9 months, VAMS had interviewed 122 people in Mole Valley for volunteer placements, resulting in these people being referred to 197 groups for placement. Of these people referred for placement, 60 had received a placement of 6 months or more.
- The funding provided by Mole Valley District Council helped to fund a Volunteer Centre (Mayflower Centre) in Dorking which was open 4 days per week, a Chief Officer (9 hours per week), a Voluntary Action Manager (18 hours per week), Voluntary Action Advisor (12 hours per week), a Supported Volunteering Coordinator (7 hours per week) and a Finance Officer (4 hours per week).
- The volunteer hub, known as The Point, had opened at the Mayflower Centre in Dorking in 2014. This facility was open four days a week as a resource for local volunteer groups, providing sub-leasing space to permanent voluntary sector tenants and also affordable meeting rooms.

In response to a question about whether VAMS experienced difficulties obtaining funding, it was advised that it was easier to find funding for projects and voluntary groups, but it was more challenging to find funding for the core service. As a result VAMS were looking at different ways of

working, particularly in regard to looking at alternative funding sources in the private sector.

It was also questioned whether there were difficulties finding volunteers for schemes and projects. It was advised that the level of volunteering had remained static over the past few years, but the types of volunteers had changed. More often potential volunteers were being referred to VAMS from the Job Centre as a means of gaining work experience. VAMS were still receiving general volunteers, but it was more often the case that they had less time to volunteer than previous volunteers.

The Chairman thanked Ms Dubery for her attendance at the meeting and extended an invitation for her to return before the Committee to provide a further update next year.

45. Citizens Advice Mole Valley

The Committee received a presentation from Deborah Jones, the District Manager, Citizens Advice Mole Valley (CA) on their work over the last year. Peter Jackson, Chair of the Board of Trustees, and Ian Tucker, Trustee and Treasurer, were also in attendance. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- Citizens Advice Mole Valley was the new name for the organisation that had previously been called the Leatherhead and Dorking Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Last year the CA had helped over 3,532 people in Mole Valley to resolve almost 14,500 issues with a financial gain of £775,000 for the local community.
- The provision of advice was an essential and valued service by the community and helped to reduce the burden on local and national government agencies and contribute to the establishment of positive communities.
- Going forward, the CA was continuing to work on projects to increase the channels of advice available through the further development of electronic communications facilities and the launch of its website. It was also diversifying its funding to make maximum use of charitable funding, and had launched a campaign to seek funding or other resources from local businesses.

The Committee asked Ms Jones and Messrs Jackson and Tucker a number of questions with information breaking down the location of users of the CA on a Ward basis being of particular interest, It was agreed that this information helped to demonstrate that people living across Mole Valley had problems requiring the help of the CA and not just specific areas. It was agreed that further information relating to Council Wards would be made available for after the meeting.

In response to a question about the impact of the Universal Credit scheme and the possible reduction of Tax Credits, it was advised that CA staff were doing a lot of research to understand the potential needs of clients who will be impacted by these changes. At present the Universal Credit scheme had only been applied to new applicants, so information was limited, but with the scheme being rolled out across Surrey in February 2016 it remained to be seen what impact it would have on existing benefit claimants.

The maximum waiting time to see an adviser for an initial interview was approximately 10-15 minutes. This initial interview may then lead to an appointment being made for more in-depth advice should it be needed.

During the previous presentation from CA in 2014 it had been noted that they had experienced issues increasing the number of volunteers following a change of management. It was advised that these issues had now been addressed with a number of good volunteers joining the team in the past few months.

The Committee thanked Ms Jones and Messrs Jackson and Tucker for attending the meeting and answering questions from Members.