

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HEALTH ENGAGEMENT PANEL HELD
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON
TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2009 AT
7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor K Darby (Chairman).
Councillors P R Ballam, R I Taylor.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Barfoot	- Environmental Health Promotion Officer
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Marian Langley	- Scrutiny Officer
George A Robertson	- Director of Customer and Community Services
Brian Simmonds	- Head of Community Safety
Paul Thomas	- Environmental Health Manager Commercial

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Sue Darker	- ACS Assistant Director and Chairman of Hertfordshire Drugs Partnership
Lindsay Edwards	- Head of Young People's Substance Misuse and Crime Reduction Services (HCC)
Chris Hannaby	- Chief Executive, Vale House stabilisation Services (Hertford)
Mercedes Johnson	- Project Manager/Director Streetfm Voluntary Organisation
Sue McRitchie	- Joint Commissioning Manager for Drug and Alcohol Services (HCC)/NHS

7 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Gilbert, D Hone and M Wood. It was noted that Councillors P R Ballam and R I Taylor were substituting for Councillors D Hone for M Wood respectively.

8 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed and thanked everyone for taking the time to attend and take part in the discussion. The Chairman outlined the format for the evening which would take the form of a number of themed questions.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTION9 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2009 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

10 HEALTH AND PUBLIC HEALTH STRANDS IN LOCAL DRUG AND ALCOHOL STRATEGIES (DISCUSSION)

The speakers explained the main functions of their respective roles in terms of the health and well being of East Herts residents, their specific objectives and how these directly contributed to the health and well being of East Herts residents.

Each of the speakers explained how their respective organisations operated to provide a co-ordinated and holistic approach to families across the county who were affected by substance misuse.

Lindsay Edwards commented that around 80% of children on the Child Projection Register did have a parent or carer who was using alcohol or drugs and referred to the cycle of drugs through generations which can develop if this was

not addressed. This was a countywide issue. Funding for this work was being pursued via the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Sue McRitchie commented that partnership working in Hertfordshire was robust and continuing efforts were being made to ensure that agencies did not work independently “in silos”. This view was re-enforced by Sue Darker who commented that the family as a whole needed to be taken into account and encouraged to take part in the treatment of the problem and in ensuring that individuals affected were brought back into employment and had adequate housing. She explained her role on a multi-agency Protection Panel and how this linked in with other partners. Further work was needed in working with Primary Care Trusts (PCT) and General Practitioners.

Chris Hannaby explained that Vale House, treated substance misusers, and how the organisation’s also played a role in relation to controlling HIV and HEP “C” and helped individuals who might be suicidal.

Mercedes Johnson explained that Streetfm’s core services aimed at providing young people with accurate information about drugs and alcohol and dispelling street myths. Their approach was harm reduction and to provide information so that individuals could make informed decisions.

The Director of Customer and Community Services asked what scale and pattern of substance misuse were seen in East Herts and whether there was an evidence of changing trends. The speakers indicated that there was a pattern and this was outlined.

The Head of Community Safety explained that many of the statistics used came from the Police, and of the issues associated with information from this one source. He explained that there were hot spots in the County, i.e. some areas were closely associated with cannabis and other Class ‘A’ drugs. He commented that from a licensing perspective, every pub was shown, by use drug testing kits, to have evidence of a Class ‘A’ drug and that between 50-

65% of recorded crime was alcohol related. He supported a holistic approach by looking at the problem of substance misuse from a family perspective and working in a co-ordinated manner with partners with shared and integrated information. The Head of Community Safety accepted that protocols would need to be established and confidentiality observed.

The speakers supported this approach and commented that partnership working was robust, although the voluntary agencies were more cautious about the sharing and use of client data. Trends in drug usage and alcohol misuse were explained.

In response to a question on social demographics and misuse, Sue McRitchie explained that there was evidence of greater misuse in areas of deprivation, but this was not the only indicator. Alcohol misuse might be being used by other social groups which had not come to the attention of the Police or health services. She explained the long-term health problems of alcohol abuse. She referred to a “time bomb” of older people who were now starting to show health related problems from long- term use.

Councillor R I Taylor commented that alcohol and drug related problems happening in East Herts might be presenting themselves at NHS facilities over the borders in Harlow and how this could skew the statistics

Lindsay Edwards explained that the County Council’s statistics did not come from the Police. She commented on statistics obtained directly from children in primary and secondary education, which revealed that 29% of children in Year 8 and 59% of children in Year 9 had drunk alcohol in the week prior to the survey questionnaire being filled in. The figures for younger female drinkers were higher in East Herts than other Hertfordshire Districts. Statistics on smoking had improved. Work was ongoing in relation to promoting a Validate Proof of Age Scheme.

Councillor R I Taylor asked what significant achievement had been made by partnership/project towards improving

the health and well being (and harm reduction) of people in East Herts over the past 12 – 18 months. The Head of Community Safety commented on the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership's (CDRP) excellent liaison with licensing staff and the Police. He referred to the success of an arts project aimed at helping people feel better about themselves.

Sue Darker commented that the Drugs Partnership had successfully bid against 150 other areas to pilot a drug change project. This aimed at working with people who had undergone rehabilitation programmes in prison and how things could be done differently when they left prison, e.g. making sure housing benefits, rent deposits etc were set up before they were released.

Chris Hannaby commented that Vale House day service had achieved a lot with no funding and 80 clients on their books. She commented on the number of agencies Vale worked with and gave a recent example of helping a woman recovering from substance misuse in being reunited with her children and back in employment.

Mercedes Johnson commented that more than 2000 young people had used streetfm's services in the past year, the majority of which were located in East Herts. Work was ongoing with schools requesting the organisation's services and working alongside the Police and Community Support Services Officers on The Crucial Crew sessions.

Lindsey Edwards referred to the success of a partnership project working on Sele Estate. The project had involved working with the Police, schools, residents, Youth Connexions, Child UK to provide an activities programme covering 32 areas for 11-19 years olds. The project was aimed at young people who were at risk and already using alcohol and to try to get them to reduce their usage. Regular diaries showing consumption showed a 45% reduction in alcohol usage.

Sue McRitchie commented that Drug and Alcohol Services was pushing the Home Office to challenge perceived

norms. She commented that there were still issues in relation to getting services to work in partnership rather than in silos. From next month, there would be a county wide central allocation meeting which aimed to ensure that the right services were provided to the right individual and that there were linked pathways to other services. She referred to the opening of Passmores House offering stabilisation, rehabilitation and detoxing services just over the boarder from East Herts.

In response to a question concerning the main barriers and challenges faced by the organisations working in East Herts, the Head of Community Safety asked that further data from ambulances and Accident and Emergencies (A&E) would provide the service with useful information in determining what might be happening at licensed premises and in terms of victims and offenders. He commented that the less resources the Council had, the more information was needed in order to find smarter ways of working. Lindsay Edwards commented that better data could be secured from the ambulance services than A&E.

Chris Hannaby commented on the lack of information about ongoing pilot studies. She commented that many studies start in West Herts and did not go any further. She referred to problems with day services and lack of funding. She commented that funding of places from the Council could help them achieve match funding.

Lindsay Edwards commented that East Herts had the highest number accessing the County's treatment centre. She commented on the rural nature of East Herts and how this impacted on drug usage statistics. Issues of drugs and mental health links were discussed. The speakers also agreed that, the lack of widespread deprivation and generally low figures in East Herts meant that it was difficult for the District to attract projects and funding allocations. She commented that more work was needed to embed the services provided so that more secure core funding might be sought from other sources rather than rely on Government project funding.

Mercedes Johnson commented that streetfm was a small organisation and was very affected by lack of funding. She commented that unless funding could be found they might “go under”. They were currently being supported by the YMCA.

Sue McRitchie acknowledged that there was a lot of data available to support intervention programmes but that it was about ensuring that those services managed people in the most efficient way possible. She commented on the need to change the culture and getting smarter about interventions and how services could help.

The Chairman asked whether there was anything as a District the Council could do or failed to do which made the organisations’ work more difficult. The Head of Community Safety referred to the “Know your Limits” scheme being promoted in pubs, clubs and gyms which was considered to be a success.

Lindsay Edwards commented on the fact that it was “Alcohol Awareness Week” and that there was a lot of good joint work happening. She hoped that the Council could act as “champions” for some of the messages about projects and schemes such as the Enhanced Health School Status and Validate Proof of Age schemes. She asked that Local Strategic Partnerships take a robust overview of partnership working to get the best out of resource partnerships. She further commented on rural transport issues and allowing access to public buildings for front line workers to meet clients.

Sue McRitchie agreed that the use of public buildings would be useful.

Chris Hannaby sought acknowledgement from the District for the essential work undertaken by Vale House. She commented on their current number of housing allocations (3) and requested that this be increased to 4 to match numbers graduating from her year long programme.

Mercedes Johnson commented that there were no other preventative services going into schools. She further commented that the YMCA and CVS had been very helpful in helping the organisation survive and providing advice and monitoring reports. She referred to the increased levels of bureaucracy in terms of securing funding. Professional Indemnity Insurance was causing Streetfm additional financial problems.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel thanked the speakers for their feedback on the work of the organisations and the time and trouble in attending.

RESOLVED – that the discussion be noted.

11 FEEDBACK FROM CHAIRMAN – HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 7 JULY 2009

The Chairman commented that Councillor D M Hone had attended a meeting of Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee on 7 July 2009. The only item of discussion was their work plan.

The Chairman commented that there would be a meeting of the Health Scrutiny Committee at Hertfordshire County Council on 21 October 2009 and one item on the agenda was the plan to merge the two local PCTs. Councillor R L Parker, via Officers, had expressed concern on this matter and on the news that Herts and Essex would not have an Urgent Care Centre. Councillor Parker was keen to know how the Hertfordshire PCT would co-ordinate matters given the size of the population and said in particular, that the Council would want to know how the new Herts PCT would coordinate with its Essex counterparts, given East Herts' close proximity to Essex and the fact that much of East Herts' community accessed healthcare in Essex.

The Scrutiny Officer commented that Members' Information Bulletin Number 22 had contained an item on the confusing information being circulated about the Urgent Care Centre. She commented that there was going to be another PCT

meeting 1 November to look at the issue and of procurement. The Chief Executive had been in discussions with the PCT. It was suggested a speaker be invited to attend the next Health Engagement Panel to speak further on this issue and that the venue be moved to Bishop's Stortford. This was supported.

Members considered the size of East Hertfordshire population, particularly in the Bishop's Stortford and Sawbridgeworth areas which they felt, warranted an Urgent Care Centre as currently, residents needing such treatment were forced out of the District. There were problems associated with access and transportation to Harlow PAH as the 333 Bus no longer operated.

Councillor R Taylor commented that over the last three years, the small PCTs had combined and that the people in Bishop's Stortford viewed the situation with dissatisfaction. He further commented that so many services had departed.

The Chairman commented that East Herts was not the only District unhappy with the changes. She further commented that the majority of the population lived in the west and that most of the resources were directed there.

The Director of Customer and Community Services suggested that the Panel might want to consider a response to the PCT merger consultation along the lines of *"..the model that the PCT are using to provide services to more heavily populated areas is not the model they need to use to deliver health care in the more rural areas and the need to consider something which will address the needs of residents in East Herts.*

Given the earlier comment from Councillor R I Taylor, the Chairman suggested that the speaker who gave a presentation to an earlier Health Engagement Panel (8 December 2008) on transportation issues in relation to East and North Hertfordshire PCT (Mr David Neilan of Hertfordshire County Council Passenger Transport Unit) be invited to attend a future meeting to provide an update on transportation matters. This was supported and the work

programme was amended.

The Scrutiny Officer commented that other issues under consideration at the Hertfordshire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee for possible future Topic Group reviews included the Health and Well Being of Offenders and the Health and Well Being of the Armed Forces returning to the UK. The main agenda tomorrow also indicated that updates would be provided on the Flu Pandemic and on the LINKS.

RESOLVED – that the update be noted.

12 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

The Health Engagement Panel reviewed its work programme. The Scrutiny Officer re-confirmed Members’ wish to invite a speaker on the Urgent Care Centre to the next Health Engagement Panel and that the meeting be moved to Bishop’s Stortford. Members also supported the suggestion that Mr Neilan be invited to attend a future meeting to give an update on transportation matters in the District.

RESOLVED - that the work programme for 2009/10, as now amended, be approved.

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm.

Chairman
Date