

Fairness Commission Scrutiny Panel held on 15 January 2015 at 11.00am



10. Present

Councillors: M G Jones (Chair) (MJ), C A Cheshire (CC) and G Thomas (GT)

11. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

12. Officers Present

Lindsay Adams (Community Development Manager) (LA)
Carrie Burton (Transformation Manager) (CB)
Heather Girling (Democratic Services Officer) (HG)

13. Also Present

David Clay (Senior Development Officer, C CVS) (DC)
Lee Furlong (Client Services Manager, CAB) (LF)

14. Disclosure of Interest and Whipping Declarations

Councillor C A Cheshire	Personal Interest, Trustee – Crawley CVS
	Personal Interest, Patient Representative Crawley CCG
Councillor G Thomas	Personal Interest, Representative - West Susses Age UK

15. Notes

The notes of the meeting held on [24 November 2014](#) were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair. Councillor Jones added that he had spoken to Dr Darren Paffey regarding the Southampton Fairness Commission and would circulate notes to the Panel (**Action MJ**).

16. Witness Session

The Chair provided a brief background on Fairness Commissions and then witnesses were asked to highlight the current issues in Crawley and thoughts on Fairness Commissions.

CAB confirmed that presently a large majority of concerns relate to benefit issues. There is a concern with debt, mostly around the use of credit, which has been well reported and it is important to assist people to manage their situations. The service would like to complete more preventative work in order to assist people manage their budgets. It was highlighted that problems with benefit payments result in debt which in

turn also result in difficulties with housing. This is time consuming work for the service to address.

In terms of a Fairness Commission, CAB believed that having the Council understand the issues and having a support network in place for possible continued funding and a platform for the service to ask questions would be a valuable resource.

CVS provides the majority of support to voluntary organisations and stated that these organisations are seeing an increase in demand for their services. There are additionally small community groups emerging that are attempting to tackle issues. It was commented that there needs to be an awareness of the wider voluntary sector and act as a central point to provide training and capacity building.

In terms of a Fairness Commission, CVS believed that there would be value, however work would need to be carried out within the voluntary sector to share information.

The question was asked whether the Brighton Road location was a hindrance to people attending the services. CAB answered that whilst there was good space, the geographical location does impact on footfall and this was noticeable when CAB had the Advice Shop as footfall was significant. CVS also agreed that whilst the building provided good space, a more central location would be more practical and they too had experienced similar issues.

It was discussed that perhaps it would be beneficial to focus on the available data and the evidence as this would highlight the issues. It was apparent that debt was a concern, particularly as even a short gap in benefit or income can have a profound effect. It would be beneficial to identify the data and to ensure the resources were in place in order to collaborate on the issue and feedback the results. CAB acknowledged that the service would be keen to focus on pre-work to assist individuals in budgeting, awareness and early intervention with creditors. It was commented that the major issues should be highlighted in order to work with the key organisations. It would be important not to replicate the Local Strategic Partnership. It was added that perhaps an all Members' seminar may prove useful to brief Members on the current work of the voluntary organisations and CVS forums.

Another issue highlighted in addition to debt was mental health concerns. This has become a top priority identified in the Local Picture data and has an impact on individuals' capacity to manage situations. The Transformation Manager updated the Panel that the Community Safety Partnership has applied for funding for a Mental Health Worker to work with the Housing and Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour Teams.

One option considered was to identify an issue and engage with front line workers to disseminate the information and assist in training, in a similar way to the Crawley Talks Money project. This was proven successful as was able to reach the 'grass roots' level.

It was acknowledged that some organisations are struggling with increased demand, particularly as there is now a need to identify different ways to promote volunteering opportunities. It was commented that the turnover of volunteers has increased which has resulted in a strain on service provision as there is a continual requirement to re-train.

The Community Development Manager confirmed that information could be provided from Community Development on the work the team is currently involved with. The Local Picture data reports are also produced. Within the Community Development

Team, officers are located by Ward and able to meet with organisations to respond to issues and 'grass roots' concerns, for example the Think Family Neighbourhoods project. The team is able to obtain clarity on local issues and liaise with residents.

It was discussed that it would be beneficial to collate data across the town to identify areas of deprivation and service priorities. Currently funding can be ward specific and consequently it is not serving the whole town and reaching other areas or linking to service priorities.

It would be beneficial in producing a new community profile, which would compile data from a variety of sources and assist in targeting service priorities for teams similar to Community Development. The Transformation Manager recommended inviting Jacqueline Clay, Shared Intelligence Project Manager (WSSC) to a Panel meeting as this would be beneficial in terms of highlighting data and possible issues. It was commented that individuals move on and out from deprivation areas and as a result it would be important to focus on the town as a whole.

The Panel thanked all of the witnesses for attending the meeting. Their attendance was much appreciated and all of the contributions had been most helpful.

17. General Updates and Further Meetings

It was agreed that all Panel Members would reflect on the various issues that had been raised during the course of the meeting prior to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Panel scheduled for 19 February. It was agreed that Councillors Jones, Cheshire and Thomas would meet informally on Friday 30 January to discuss and agree the way forward (NB agenda deadline 5 February).

It was commented that the Council's Corporate Equalities Framework had been replaced with an Equalities Statement and the completion of equality impact assessments was now at officers' discretion. It was commented that in principle the right mechanisms should be in place to assess equalities and to ensure the satisfactory implementation of equality standards across the Council.

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 19 February, time amended to 2.00pm, in the Civic Hall – Beech.

The fourth meeting will be held on Thursday 9 April 2015 at 11.00am, in the Civic Hall – Beech

It was felt that the fifth meeting should be booked but may not be necessary if the Panel has made sufficient progress – Thursday 14 May at 11.00am

18. Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 1.00pm.

M G Jones
Chair