

Plymouth Welfare Rights Forum

Warspite Room
Council House

Thursday 28th May 2009
1.00 to 4.00pm

1. Welcomes & Apologies

Gloria (Chair) welcomed those present:

Pat Healy	DIAC/Benefit Angels
Donna Ryall	Plymouth Mind at The Zone
Gary Edwards	PCC Housing Benefits
Austen Mintern	The Zone
Denis Johnston	PCC Housing Advice outreach
Scott Robertson	Alabare Floating Support Services
Pat Newton	PCC Welfare Benefits
Matt Allison	JCP
Mark Poole	Money Advice Plymouth
Chris Johnson	JCP BDC
Mo Rafferty	William Sutton Homes
Gill Joyce	The Pension Service
Steve Guy	Money Advice Plymouth
Les Cole	Fraud Investigation Service JCP
Jo Ashton	Rent Arrears Intervention Officer PCC
Karen Sharpe	Plymouth CAB
Gloria Davenport	Plymouth CAB

Apologies:

Bruce Abbott	DAN
Alison Jane	Money Advice Plymouth
Julia Slade	LARK
Mary Partridge	Colebrook Housing
Christina Elia	Saltash CAB

2. Minutes of last meeting

Corrections:

Pathways to be contacted by JCP. Not Chris

Action: KS to email Matt re contacting

Matters arising:

D.R. Handbooks not arrived **Action: KS to chase**

Dave Hay re last minutes – his action

3. Statutory Sector Reports

3.1 Housing Benefit

Gary Edwards:: Very busy, increasing workload. Focus on new claims over changes in circumstances and has put 'urgent process' in place
Been to Toshiba, Princess Yachts to come – offering help with claims/processing
LHA – have had complaints from landlords redirect payments.
Rent Service visit re: BRMA – likely to be leaving as it is (after consultation)
Training Council Tax and Customer Service Staff to cover HB processing to relieve burden

Mark Poole: O/P HB Case – being recovered at £14.15 – has he missed something? GE to look into if details sent

3.2 Disability Benefits Centre

No report, no apologies sent
Action: KS to contact again

3.3 HMRC

No report

KS has been in touch with Lyn Faulkner – they have had major changes in their Customer Directorate department. They will consider sending rep to next Forum

* CAB to send round consultation form – email back with comments

* Tax Credits leaflet – final version and any comments from consultation

3.4 JCP

See also separate report from Chris Johnson

3.4.2 Put more staff into new claims

3.4.3 Experienced staff covering more complex cases

3.4.5 FCC staff coming to September 09 Forum meeting

3.4.6 SF - crises loan team – too busy to come down

Chris emailed précis of report from them to KS

Answered 70% calls more recently (was 30 – 40% at times)

Matt: Change to crisis loan applications for living expenses – if 3 made within year, will be invited for F2F app – debt advice information

35% “fail to attend” rate out of 32 appointments/week

Very busy. 70-80 claims per day for benefits

New claims: Working towards date of contact + 3 – i.e. from telephone call to interview

'Live load' is 5,000 – i.e. signing on

'Live load' is 2,500 at Devonport

Crisis Loans – 529 payments made in April

Jobseeker regime – Flexible New Deal – more services become available to job seeker from day 1 (as opposed to waiting 26 weeks)

Employment rate levels (April 09):

73.6% (national average is 74%)

Working with employers through Rapid Response Team

Job fairs successful

Care industry quite buoyant

Construction picking up

Mark Poole : Q: ESA forms being sent out for IS top up

Chris: Chased this up – operator should now understand at FCC

Donna: IS have told Donna they want it on ESA form

- has done this with a letter to say this is only IS top up

Mark Poole: can get IS claim form from website

Chris: will clarify with FCC and IS departments what process to follow

- issue around false declaration being signed by client

Pat: Problems with call backs (re arrears case) – promised within a week and not received. Rang again, still not received call

Chris: If continues to be problem, email him

Austen: Problem with young people not receiving benefits (homeless young people put into interim account)

Matt and Chris: need to look at particular cases to see where getting stuck

3.5 Pension Service

Very busy. Also going to employer events – address those nearly 60

15,000 cases of those over 80 will be reviewed (not at the 'non review' stage that most over 80's)

National Insurance contributions being reduced to 30 years for full pension (when standard retirement age goes)

Over 60's don't often claim CCGs – lack of awareness? SF not publicised?

PS will be encouraging pensioners to make CCG claims

3.6 Social Inclusion (PCC)

No report.

Action: KS to discuss with Darin re future reports

4. Themes for future meeting

Pathways – What's on Offer

- KS emailing Matt for contact with A4E

5. AOB

- Denis: Project:

Developing Outreach Service re homelessness prevention. Attract private renting and owners – before crisis. PCC provides for council tenants at the Housing Offices

Looking at venues at present. Start off as drop in – take HB offices for first month to see if useful. Problem: no access to system so will have to take back to office

Mo: William Sutton has own list as well as taking PCC registered claimants. Specialist having estates for 60 years old plus (or 55 plus)

- Matt: bag of return envelopes (distributed)
- Chris: re minutes from HMRC meeting – realistic view?
KS – FH was obstructive
 - Colin Shingler helpful – is this why Derek replaced?
- DBC not attending – why?

Chris:

Suggestion: have meetings 3 monthly instead? (reducing number an issue)

► Keep a log of problems re DBC – email them and ask them to address/come down to present to forum

(e.g. Pat has client who did supersession by phone – client didn't check info, just signed – client then lost benefit)

Also, complaints to Medical Services, followed up by them interviewing clients – then said clients were lying – needs reporting

GMP reports still substandard (doctor wrote details on back of envelope and complete at office – client has to sign piece of paper - not very professional)

Request someone from DBC and or Medical Services to come to forum

Tribunal holding up case pending investigate into doctor conduct

Action: Gloria to check procedures

Mark: Contradictory evidence between telephone interview and what is transferred to claim form

Action: KS to request DBC presence at Forum

Date of next meeting

Thursday 30th July 1 pm – 4 pm.

Please note change of venue

**Plymouth CAB Training Room
2nd Floor Cobourg House
32 Mayflower Street**