



# Adults and Community Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes - 13 January 2015

### Attendance

#### Members of the Adults and Community Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Paula Brookfield (Chair)  
Cllr Patricia Patten (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Ian Claymore  
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar  
Cllr Rita Potter  
Cllr Bishan Dass  
Cllr Barry Findlay  
Cllr Stephen Simkins

#### Employees

Deborah Breedon	Scrutiny Officer
Sheila Collett	Head of Service
Martha Cummings	Voluntary Sector Coordinator
Tony Ivko	Service Director - Older People
Helen Winfield	Welfare Rights Officer

---

## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*     *Title*

- 1 Apologies**  
Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Cllrs Payal Bedi, Ian Claymore and Linda Leach.
- 2 Declarations of Interest**  
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 Minutes of the previous meeting (18.11.14)**  
Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to an amendment on page 8 of the minutes relating to efficiency savings in staff from the implementation of the Care Act. It was agreed that the comment should read that Cllr Steve Evans acknowledged that the centre was due to close in October and confirmed that the service would not force people to leave and that the the closure would happen in a managed fashion.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

5 **Wolverhampton Citizens Advice Bureau**

Jeremy Vanes, Chief Operating Officer Wolverhampton Citizen Advice Bureau and Helen Child future Chief Operating Officer provided a presentation 2015: a timer of great change'.

The presentation gave oversight of the 2014-15 year and what impacted on the plan, as follows:

- What was the 2014-15 plan
- What happened outside the CAB
- What happened inside the CAB
- How were CAB doing
- What will 2015 bring
- What CAB need to deliver
- What is the point

The reduction in jobs meant that the CAB had to use resources differently, to keep the footprint but emphasis on building telephone advice.

Some expected changes did not materialise such as the increase in mortgage rate and implementation of Universal Credit (UC) under the Welfare Reform Act. There have been good news changes to legislate pay day lenders which will reduce the number of debt enquiries.

CAB have had to manage the budget carefully and have trained volunteers to work alongside paid staff to sustain a level of delivery of public services.

The CAB has 20% fewer staff but the number of clients / enquiries growth means more work. The Chief Operational Officer advised that CAB has to be realistic about the budget and that there has to be a limit to what can be delivered.

The Chief Operational Officer advised that 2015 is going to bring more work relating to pension pot advice. CAB Wolverhampton has been selected by Government to be the delivery unit for the Black Country and that recruitment of a small team was underway. He advised that the Dudley legal company providing legal aid advice has withdrawn from the working arrangement.

The Chairman of the CAB Frank Reeves thanked Jeremy Vanes for being a most effective Chief Operating Officer and welcomed the incoming Chief Operating Officer Helen Child. Cllr Ian Claymore endorsed the comments as a member of the CAB Board.

Jeremy Vanes advised that the partnership working with CAB has worked well in particular over the last two years there has been some interesting collaborative working. He indicated that legal aid and advice on employment law are services that will no longer be provided by CAB and voiced concerns that there is no capacity to advise people at work.

Cllr Stephen Simkins expressed concerns that any policy changes or further austerity measures can increase in homelessness, numbers of looked after children and other financial strains which could trigger an increase in demand for advice and support in the City. He considered what the Councils duty is and how the Council can broker

relationships. Tony Ivko, Service Director Older People advised that there is no statutory provision but that the recent Scrutiny Review of 'Welfare Reform – Unclaimed Benefits' concluded and made recommendations relating to advice and support and how we map out services across the City. He advised that the existing spend is being used more creatively using welfare rights staff to liaise and train voluntary organisations. The scrutiny panel heard that more work is happening relating to volunteering policy and partnership working.

In response to questions from the Chair, Cllr Paula Brookfield, Jeremy Vanes advised that the CAB is getting better at partnership working and that no one organisation can do much without partner support in the current climate. In response to questions relating to food banks and food theft he advised that there is a national debate about food banks and that it is not clear how to map out and deliver them. The panel discussed the unmapped faith groups that regularly feed people and considered that the rise in food theft may be an indication that something is going on, but that food banks and faith group hand-outs may be masking how hungry people are.

In response to questions from Cllr Bishan Dass the Chief Operating Officer advised that the CAB depend quite a lot on the Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC) for advice and support in relation to immigration.

Cllr Jasbinder Dehar welcomed the work with the University with law students and suggested that the social policy course students could also be considered. Helen Winfield, Welfare Rights, advised that volunteer recruitment is on a continuous basis but the difficulty is in retaining the volunteers.

## 6 **Wolverhampton Compact - Its Value and Future**

Cllr Elias Mattu, Saffi Price, Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council (WVSC) Sheila Collett, Head of Economic Inclusion and Martha Cummings, Voluntary Sector Coordinator, Wolverhampton City Council were in attendance at the meeting to provide a report on the new direction for the Wolverhampton Compact.

Wolverhampton launched its compact in 2005, the compact lays down the rules of engagement between and within the sectors in a series of principles. Underpinning the principles are six codes of practice that provide more detailed guidance. The Cabinet Members indicated the timeliness of the report coming before scrutiny; a refresh is due to changes to structures and lead officers across the partners signed up to the compact and he emphasised the importance of maintaining the strengths of the compact across partnerships to ensure all organisations in the sectors are joined up and working together in Wolverhampton. Panel were advised that Wolverhampton Compact has won awards on six occasions and wants to maintain the quality in the refreshed compact.

Saffi Price, WVSC, advised that since first being developed things have changed enormously, the refreshed compact needs to reflect the emergence of new structures including the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) which did not exist in 2005. She indicated that from the voluntary sector perspective the compact is key to working together to maximise

resources and equally as important to ensure that the most effective organisation to deliver is identified. She indicated that there is no value in refreshing unless there is genuine buy in from all partners.

The scrutiny panel were advised that the compact revisit is at a very early stage, there is a will to refresh it but no talks have started yet with PCC, CCG or other stakeholders.

The scrutiny group welcome the refresh of the compact and asked officers what the scrutiny panel could do to assist the process, by unblocking barriers. The Chair suggested that the social value of the compact needs to be highlighted when refreshing the document to capture all organisations and volunteering opportunities. Anthony Ivko, Service Director Older People highlighted that Community hubs hold volunteering opportunities and as they are run by the community for the community there should be talks with the hubs about the compact. He highlighted a barrier that has recently come to light in the form of Job seekers allowance claimants being sanctioned when volunteering, because volunteering is not considered to be 'actively seeking employment'.

Martha Cummings indicated the relevance of having training schemes and opportunities to unlock working age volunteers. She indicated that there is a cost to everything and that there is a need to access funds where available and make sure they are accessible to the voluntary sector. There is a need to help bring the money into the City, it doesn't matter which organisation or who as long as the funds come into the City. Cllr Stephen Simkins suggested that the refresh should include a mapping exercise of all voluntary organisations in the City.

Sheila Collett highlighted that volunteering is key for many to gain skills for employment and for confidence to get back into the work place. The Chair acknowledged that a Volunteering Strategy will start to pull information together, to build community cohesion and that the compact gives the forum to have the discussions to establish the ground rules.

The Chair supported what had been presented totally and highlighted the need for everyone to get behind the compact and the vital nature of it to building on the success.

Cllr Barry Findlay welcomed the report and acknowledged that the compact is vital for effective partnership working. He particularly highlighted the social benefit that can be derived from having a fit for purpose compact.

The panel felt that the benefits of volunteering and of working in partnership through the compact far outweigh anything being saved by not refreshing.

The panel also highlighted the need for working age people to be able to gain experience through volunteering and the Department of Works and Pensions need to acknowledge volunteering without imposing sanctions to Job Seeker Allowance (JSA) claimants.

Helen Winfield, Welfare Rights Officer, advised that some people who volunteer think that volunteering will affect benefits and because of this they are not filling in the right information to DWP. If people tell DWP that they are volunteering an alternative day

can be given and work experience can be taken into account, if DWP know they will not put JSA claimant commitment into dispute.

The panel discussed what a volunteering programme could look like, including support for people with work experience; project work with university / college and broker a discussion with schools relating to work experience.

In response to a question from Cllr Rita Potter Saffi Price advised that volunteering is a good way to get work experience and apply for jobs coming up in the organisation. She advised that there are lots of things a voluntary organisation do that deliver front line services.

In summary the Chair indicated that the scrutiny panel are fully in support of refreshing the compact and requested that updates are received by the panel.

Resolved:

The scrutiny panel:

1. endorse the proposal to undertake a review of the compact and to undertake a refresh if required
2. note the continued approach to seek cross-party engagement from councillors at all stages of the review
3. note the need to seek buy in from other public bodies
4. note the need for joint working across departments in the Council and with organisations citywide for effective implementation