

Salford Unemployed & Community Resource Centre

Minutes of Management Committee Meeting SUCRC on Thursday 26th January 2017

1.1.17 Eddie Garner welcomed all in attendance to the meeting

Present:

Cllr John Ferguson	(CJF)
Cllr Bill Hinds	(CBH)
Hanif Belim	(HB)
Cllr John Walsh	(CJW)
Gerry Phillips	(GF)
Eddie Garner	(EG) – Chaired Meeting
Jack Youd	(JY)
Hayley Hinchy	(HH)
Allison Taylor	(AT)

In attendance:

Alec McFadden	(AM)
John Howard	(JH)

2.1.17 Apologies:

Kester Dean	(KD)
Steve North – Chair	(SN)
Maggie Smith	(MS)

3.1.17 Minutes of the last meeting:

Held 05.12.16

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed to be a true record of the meeting and were approved.

4.1.17 Matters arising:

a) Lease contract

AM reported that this has been ongoing for 12 months despite previously believing that an agreement has been reached. AM has spoken to Cllr Paul Longshaw who agreed to address the issue.

b) Big Lottery

The investigation by the Big Lottery has now finished. Four days after the last MC meeting, the Big Lottery accepted all information provided to them and they transferred the funds that were owing. This had an impact on the Centre as funding bids that had been submitted were put on hold until the investigation was completed. In total, the investigation took 7 months. The Big Lottery are now accepting bids from the Centre, however this puts the Centre 7 months behind schedule.

c) Salford City Council

JF provided an update on the funding request to Salford City Council which was ideally to assist with all staff salaries to pay staff wages to the end of the financial year. Following on from discussions with the Council, this has now developed into the possibility of the Council commissioning the centre to undertake anti-poverty work on behalf of the council. This has resulted in the Council appointing their internal auditor to look at the Centre and the systems and processes that it has in place.

d) Finance committee

It was previously agreed to establish a finance committee as a number of the Management Committee did not have a good understanding of the finances. A meeting was due to be held this week but was postponed. The aim of the committee is to alleviate the pressure on the officers and senior staff and assist on financial matters, funding and planning. The initial meeting of the finance committee will establish its objectives.

AM said that the Council have officers that deal with European funding and he requested their assistance on centre funding bids. ACTION - JF/BH to enquire and report back.

e) Management Committee minutes

It was previously agreed that the minutes of the Management Committee meetings be made available on the website and this has now happened.

f) Illegal money lending team

This is an organisation that is funded by the government. They attended the Centre and undertook staff training. They reported that the average money lender has changed; they could be from any workplace and charge a very high interest rate and it is becoming a big problem. It is also prevalent in prisons which was discovered when SPP started working in the prison.

A service user of the centre said that he would go to Cash Converters to buy a washing machine for £300 but he would end up paying £500 and so AM helped him to open a credit union account. The Centre forms will be changed to ask if a client has ever used an illegal money lender.

It was agreed to support joint working.

5.1.17 Financial Report

JH presented the accounts in two separate formats and stated that when the finance committee come to a conclusion, they may have a more appropriate style of report. The first document details the monthly budget from April 2016 – 15th Jan 2017 and shows the actual amount spent and the budgeted amount and the difference.

AM and JH answered a number of questions to the satisfaction of the meeting. The report was accepted and the budget was deferred to the first finance committee.

6.1.17 Centre Report

Report to the Management Committee of Salford Unemployed & Community Resource Centre

Thursday 26th January 2017 at 5:30pm at SUCRC

1. Introduction

The period since the last Management Committee spanned the Xmas & New Year period. The Level of diversity of the work undertaken and the issues dealt with, and the complexity of problems we are dealing with seem to grow with each and every week.

The keys issues for the January report include:

- (2) Winter Warmer – Little Hulton
- (3) D.W.P Development
- (4) Closing the Gap – Anti Poverty
- (5) Homelessness
- (6) Welfare Team
- (7) ESOL
- (8) Employment Law cases
- (9) Funding Bids
- (9) Salford Prison Project
- (9) Greater Manchester Prison Project

2. Winter Warmer

On 8th December 2016, the Winter Warmer was held in Little Hulton. This was a joint campaign / event with City West and the N.H.S Clinical Commissioning Group & SUCRC to unite the diverse community of Little Hulton.

The event attracted over 120 people and took place at St. Pauls Church Hall. The idea behind the event was to encourage and create awareness of ESOL (English Second or Other Language) & access to the NHS, and encourage community cohesion.

The event was split into a junior / Children's party from 5.30pm-7pm with games, arts & crafts, food, short speeches from CCG, City West, and SUCRC. Each of the 84 Children received a present which were presented by 4 local councillors.

The second part of the event was for the adults of 6 different nationalities. Polish, West Indian, Hungarian, Indian, Bulgarian and British. The theme of the evening was social cohesion and total opposition to hate crime.



3. Department of Work & Pensions (DWP)

At the last meeting it was reported that initial discussions had taken place to create a partnership agreement for joint working.

The first visit to Peel Green DWP for over 4 Years will take place on Wednesday 8th Feb. The delegation to meet the DWP staff will be Alec McFadden, Barbara Bentham, Stuart Green and AbdulKarim Al-Malhi, Stefan Cholewka.

A follow up meeting with the senior civil servants on other issues including funding and mental health will take place this week.

4. Salford Anti-Poverty Strategy / Closing the Gap

The Salford Anti-Poverty Strategy has been circulated for final consultation and is a major step forward (see print out). The centre had representatives on the working party. This is a strategy for Salford, not just the City Council, which means that all organisations should make a positive contribution. This list of practical things that the centre do to assist are listed here:

1. Free employment law advice and representation, with encouragement for workers to join the appropriate Union. The way to tackle poverty in the workplace is by legislation (living wage) and trade union recruitment, campaigns and activity.
2. Campaigns and legal representation against illegal benefit sanctions and the DWP, plus provide unemployed representatives in conjunction with Community Branches.

3. We work closely with Trade Unions and opposition political parties to develop an alternative welfare programme in the interest of the working people. (The 29th April 2016 conference by SUCRC is an example of what could be achieved).
4. Develop and carry out benefit take-up campaigns to ensure that the unwaged and low waged people obtain their legal benefit entitlement (i.e. National Insurance)
5. Free welfare and debt drop in service, advice and tribunal representation at appeal level.
6. Free advice and representation for people with disabilities, up to tribunal level.
7. Research and campaign work to defend the rights of all unwaged and low paid workers, and publish further case studies of benefit and salary abuse.
8. In all contact and work with the people of Salford we encourage and promote the Salford Credit Union.

This joint work will hopefully unite all progressive agencies in a positive campaign and is part of the ongoing Closing the Gap project.

5. Homelessness

The leading candidate to become Greater Manchester's first elected mayor has set up a homelessness action network under Ivan Lewis MP for Bury, which will bring together charities, businesses and organisations dealing with and assisting homeless people, as well as those with first hand personal experience of being homeless.

Ivan Lewis has agreed to visit the centre to talk with the Salford Prison Project staff, and meet with our service users; who most if not all would be homeless without the staff and networks that Salford Prison Project provide. We expect the visit to take place by the end of February 2017.

At present Salford Prison Project has 52 service users and every one of them has a place to stay and sleep, however that is due to both the good contacts and skill of the Salford Prison Project staff.

6. Welfare Team

The welfare staff team continues to grow and excel and the level of work and success is amazing. New people are joining almost every month and this is mainly due to the high profile of centre campaigns against benefit sanctions, and our representation of so many people with disabilities, both physical and mental.

So we are starting to train a small army of advisors and representatives to be able to represent themselves and our ever increasing number of vulnerable people in need of advice and good representation.

The welfare team has been increased by 2 new volunteers; Wayne Massey a retired barrister from Irlam who specialises in housing, welfare law, debt, crime and immigrations. We are making enquiries of the steps required to provide immigration advice.

Robyn is a law student who intends to study and qualify in social law and will volunteer 1 or 2 days per week from the beginning of February. The other 7 welfare volunteers are: Peter Cruickshank, Kester Dean, Ian Wallace, Gordon Jones, Carol Laidlaw, Cllr Kate Lewis and

former volunteer Natasha Hall is now the North West secretary for the welfare and mental health forum.

In terms of the money recouped in the last 12 weeks the figure is £126,934 excluding PIP and DLA cases. 14 tribunal cases have been helped with a further 24 cases due before the end of February. Of the 14 tribunal cases held 7 were won, 2 adjourned (waiting to be relisted) 5 were lost of which 2 will be subject for a further legal challenge from the Centre.

We continue to see a large increase in clients scoring zero points at assessment, we are monitoring our high level of success rates to illustrate how invalid the initial assessments are.

New trends include:-

- New layers of younger social security judges very hard against working class people
- Very high number of cases going to tribunal
- These two facts are clearly linked as the government / DWP would not recruit so many new young judges if they were not sure of having sufficient cases for them
- We are now researching the actual % increase in tribunal cases in Greater Manchester and nationally.

There have been rumours that future green DWP paper from the Secretary of State may suggest a cost being introduced for social security cases. Given what happened when a similar legislation was introduced to the employment tribunal cases this would be a matter of great concern.

We now have our first benefit cap case, a female single parent with four children and mental health problems. The family benefits have been capped reducing their income by £120 per month, Salford City Council are offering discretionary help.

7. ESOL

At present ESOL courses are taking place at the centre 3 days per week. Monday, Tuesday and Friday, plus Tuesday Evenings. However as a result of the new working partnership with City West and Salford N.H.S C.C.G we are looking to raise funding for ESOL in Little Hulton.

The need for ESOL classes is very clear and we have just had a successful grant from Awards for All for 'Combating Hate & Race Crime' through education.

The week commencing 6th February is the National 'Against Hate Crime' week. This would be the perfect time to launch the campaign and the ESOL classes.

8. Employment Law

The number of employment law enquires and cases continues to rise but sadly because of current legislation the majority are not eligible to go to the employment tribunal. However, the Centre is still able to assist in many cases by mediating with the employer and encouraging the client to become members of the appropriate union.

Since the beginning of November 2016 we closed 10 cases. 5 cases were dismissal, 2 cases won one received compensation £8850 and one kept his job. Three cases closed because there was no chance of success mainly due to the client been in employment for less than 2 years. They were referred to our benefit department for help with social security

issues after establishing that they were unfairly dismissed though they cannot claim against their employer because of the legal reasons.

We also closed 5 cases of unlawful deduction from wages all cases won with clients getting awards for the total of £6583.

8 cases are still open 2 unfair dismissals, 3 discrimination, and 3 unlawful deductions.

During this period provided advice and legal help for 32 clients

9. Prison Project

This section of the report covers:

- Salford Prison Project
- Greater Manchester Prison Project
- Meetings with Graham Brady MP
- Funding Bids

9.1 The quality and level of work of the Salford Prison Project has been maintained and improved over the past few months. We now have 52 ex-offenders on the project, the majority of referrals have come from Purple Futures, the C.R.C and Shelter.

Every service user has been provided with secure accommodation, full state benefits, a new CV, a bank account or credit union membership, links and referral to the drug and alcohol addiction services. A start to basic education on the way to becoming work ready. Peer mentoring has been a major success particularly linked to Wednesday's Healthy eating session.

The Breakfast Club is running 4 mornings per week and is run by 3 service users on Fridays, the average number of clients / service users has now gone up to 44 per week.

We were successful with a £5000 donation for the Breakfast club from the Tony Lloyd Fund.

Last week the Henry Smith Foundation came to interview and assess our £105,000 funding bid. Hanif, Stuart and myself were interviewed and the 3 service users who run the breakfast club were questioned and interviewed for around 30 minutes. Henry Smith complimented us on the quality and success of our work and informed our team that they would be recommending that our bid be funded in full. If successful this will start from April 2017 for 3 years.

9.2 The Greater Manchester Police and Crime Commissioner have not as yet informed the project if an innovation commission has been appointed to evaluate the funding bids for their innovation fund. Our £100,000 funding bid for Triage work in custody suites of police stations was due to start in April 2017 but that was frozen until the commission was appointed.

9.3 A series of meetings are scheduled with the Manchester office of Big Lottery to try and re submit the £485,000 Salford Prison Project bypassing stage 1, the first meeting on 9th January was successful, the second meeting was scheduled for this week.

9.4 Greater Manchester Prison Project

The proposed project now has the full backing of 15 MP's, Rebecca Long- Bailey MP for Salford & Eccles, Kate Green MP for Trafford, Graham Stringer MP for Blackley and Broughton, Angela Rayner MP for Ashton under Lyne, Debbie Abrahams MP for Oldham

East & Saddleworth, David Nuttall MP for Bury North, William Wragg MP for Hazel Grove, Jeff Smith MP for Withington, Mary Robinson MP for Cheadle, Andrew Gwynne MP for Denton & Reddish, Mike Kane MP for Wythenshawe & Sale East, Barbara Keeley MP for Worsley & Eccles South, Chris Green MP for Bolton West, Lucy Powell MP for Manchester Central and in particular Graham Brady MP. We also have the backing of a number of partnerships including B.D.B Training, Oldham M.D.C, HMP Manchester, Purple Futures, Spin, Shelter, and Bolton UK etc.

The problem now is we have not got the funding we require, £640,939 is too much for Lottery and most Charities. Greater Manchester P & CC are not able to fund either.

The home office have pushed us towards Purple Futures who have a 7 year contract with Shelter, however they have invited us to apply for £50,000 per year through their innovation fund.

The advice from Graham Brady MP is to invite the Secretary of State for Justice Liz Truss to the centre to see The Salford Prison Project at work, meet our service users and then ask for the full funding. Graham Brady MP is prepared to support and attend. The whole of the Salford Prison Project team have agreed to the invitation as has the Chair and Secretary.

We have now started work on an ESF (European Social Fund) Funding Bid for £1,000,000 for June 2017 to December 2018. A special advice seminar is taking place on Tuesday which I will attend to obtain some expert advice.

The work would be carried out over 20 months in the following areas: Salford, Bolton, Oldham, Trafford and Manchester.

The Deadline for first stage approval is 17th February.

Today the BBC reported that 119 offenders had committed suicide in HMP UK Prisons in the last 12 months. The level of violent assaults on prison officers is at an all-time high, with the whole prison service on the verge of collapse. Since 2010 6000 prison officers have left the service by redundancy and to-date only 2000 have been replaced.

The way forward to reduce reoffending is to recruit more prison officers and invest more money into rehabilitation of prisoners and ex-offenders; through better advice on housing, education, and living plus drug and alcohol addiction services.

Not one of Salford Prison Projects service users has taken their own life.

10. After a number of questions the report was endorsed by the MC.

Written by:
Alec McFadden

With input from Staff:
Barbara Bentham
John Howard
Stuart Green
Abdo Al-Malahi
Stefan Cholewka
Jane Preece
Rebecca Nazeri

And volunteers-

Kester Dean
Peter Cruickshank
Gordon Jones
Ian Wallace
Carol Laidlaw
Eddie Garner
Andrew Buckley
Wayne Massey

7.1.17. Date of the next meeting

The suggested date for the next Management Committee was agreed in principle as Thursday 23rd March 2017.