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Inner West Area Committee

Date: 7th December 2006

Subject: Listening Ear Community Counselling Service provided by Womens Health Matters (WHM)

Electoral Wards Affected:
Armley
Bramley & Stanningley

Specific Implications For:

Ethnic minorities

Women

Disabled people

Narrowing the Gap

Council
Function

Delegated Executive
Function available
for Call In

Delegated Executive
Function not available for
Call In Details set out in the
report

Executive Summary

1. Despite funding uncertainty and the set back of losing the venue, Listening Ear has continued to provide a community counselling service for women in West Leeds over the last year. The service has now sourced a range of new venues in the community, taken on new counsellors and been able to take new referrals. The service has strong links with other agencies in the community and has evaluated its service via clients, counsellors and referrers. The funding for next year is not secure as yet but ongoing negotiations with PCT and other bodies is progressing. The service demonstrates a range of benefits to the community in West Leeds and there would be a significant impact on the community if the service were to close.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 To update the Area Committee on the work of Listening Ear over the last year.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Funding insecurities at the end of last year were followed by the sudden closure of Sandford Community Centre in April 2006. Despite these difficulties, Listening Ear continued to deliver counselling sessions to its existing clients. For a period of time we were unable to take on new clients. Following the appointment of our new Co-ordinator in early August, the service has focused on increasing the number of venues available for counselling, recruitment of new counsellors and raising the number of sessions available to clients. The benefits of having a variety of

community- based venues can only serve to increase service accessibility for women in West Leeds.

- 2.2 Current funding is provided by : PCT (£15,000), Inner West Area Committee (£20,000) and West Leeds Healthy Living Network (£5,000).
- 2.3 The West PCT Mental Health Project, led by Dave Rigby, submitted the recommendations of its research in a report to the Project Steering Group in September 2006. The report recommended Listening Ear and BARCA-Leeds to provide a counselling service for West Leeds. The Steering Group concluded that, if the PCT was to commission a counselling service, it would have to go out to tender. The research report was amended accordingly and submitted to the Mental Health Modernisation Team. We are currently awaiting decisions on tendering for counselling services, which we would be in a position to bid for depending on the timescale (ie we are currently funded to March 31st 2007).
- 2.4 We are following up other potential funding leads including talking to charitable trusts.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 New venues have been sourced this year. These include Hollybush Children's Centre (Mondays & Thursdays); New Wortley Community Centre (Mondays & Thursdays); Sure Start Bramley (Wednesdays) and The Manor, BARCA-Leeds (Tuesdays)
- 3.2 We are also in the preliminary stages of setting up a service within Highfield Medical Centre, Bramley with a view to offering sessions on Wednesdays and Fridays. The Friday slot will enable us to offer early evening appointments for those women who are working and have difficulty getting time off.
- 3.3 Since September we have recruited 3 new volunteer counsellors and have 3 more in the first stages of application. When fully recruited, this will bring the total of counsellors to our target of 10. We are also taking on 2 new 2nd year counselling Diploma students in the New Year.
- 3.4 Each of our counsellors brings individual skills, expertise and experience that enables us to offer a well-rounded, holistic approach. For example one of our new counsellors holds a second level British Sign Language (BSL) qualification. This offers women in West Leeds who use BSL greater access to a service in their area.
- 3.5 Since the difficulties in the first half of the year when we were unable to take on new referrals, the service has been able to increase its client base. We currently provide a service for 20 women and we are now receiving an average of 3 new referrals each week.
- 3.6 LE has strong and positive working relationships with many agencies across West Leeds. We work closely with Primary Care Mental Health Workers (PCMHW), GPs,

Bramley Surestart, local Children's Centres and BARCA-Leeds. These links are the source of most of our referrals. The service also has citywide links with both the statutory and voluntary sector including Volition, Alliance of Counselling Agencies, MIND, Mental Health Teams, Leeds Womens Aid etc. Establishing and maintaining positive working links both locally and city wide ensures that the women of West Leeds have greater access to services that can meet their individual needs and improve their lives.

- 3.7 LE has systems in place to allow ongoing evaluation. Methods of data collection have included user satisfaction surveys, documentary analysis and activity data analysis
- 3.8 Clients are asked to complete an evaluation of the service which includes how they were feeling and what issues they were bringing at the start of therapy, how they felt and any changes they have made at the end of therapy. They are also asked to comment on the pre-counselling process and also how they have experienced their counsellor. Client feedback has shown that 80% had felt that counselling helped a lot and that their circumstances had improved. In respect of the process of gaining access to Listening Ear 90% of clients had felt that this was clear, efficient and welcoming. The waiting period for initial assessment was generally no longer than 2 weeks and allocation of counsellor up to one month. Some clients had expressed a desire for out of working -hours appointments and as a direct result of this feedback we are currently in the process of setting this up.
- 3.9 Referrers are periodically requested to complete a questionnaire about the process of referring women to Listening Ear. PCMHWS report that response to referrals has been timely and appropriate. They also find the service useful because it is free and more importantly because it is provided locally in non -NHS establishments. Feedback from other counselling agencies has shown that LE is useful because it offers medium to long-term therapy.
- 3.9.1 Counsellors at LE all work on a voluntary basis and receive clinical supervision in accordance with guidelines set down by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) of which WHM is a member. Most of our counsellors commit to working between 3 and 6 hours per week. Feedback from counsellors is generally received through monthly supervision and team meetings. The counselling team reports that the venues they work in are of an appropriate standard – comfortable, welcoming and offer a reasonable standard of client confidentiality. Bramley Community Centre was evaluated as not being conducive to counselling and as a direct result of this feedback, which was echoed in client evaluations', this venue is now only used for initial assessments carried out by the LE coordinator.
- 3.9.2 Referrals April – November : GPs - 39.5%; PCMHWS - 16.5%; Sure Start – 16.5%; Other Counselling Agencies – 16.5%; Self - 11%
- 3.9.3 New clients April – November : Armley – 50%; Bramley – 28%; Outer West - 22%.
- 3.9.4 To consolidate current venues; Increase work with GPs and PCMHWS; development of Therapeutic Group Work in the community to compliment the counselling service; to

introduce the use of CORE (a tool for measuring clinical outcomes) in January 2007. (this involves using a global index of distress which may be compared with benchmark data collected for UK clinical and non-clinical populations).

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 The BACP recommends 1.5 counselling hours per week per 1000 practice population. The West PCT Mental Report suggests that 1 hour 1000 is a more achievable aspiration for West Leeds. With an adult population of 91,500 this proposes around 90 hours of counselling per week be set as a target for the area. Apart from LE, current provision of free to the client counselling in West Leeds consists of approx 11 sessions for parents of children under 4yrs per week via Sure Start, 2 sessions for Asian women per week via DOSTI and approx 5 sessions via Armley Counselling (excluding prison counselling).
- 4.1.1 The findings from this indicate a shortfall of approx 50 hours per week compared with the proposed target of 90 hours per week. If LE were to close then there would be next to nothing available for women in West Leeds.
- 4.1.2 Findings, also highlighted in the West Mental Health Project report, show an estimated 8,500 people with anxiety and/or depression in West Leeds.
- 4.1.3 Our own initial assessments show that approximately 70% of women have presented with issues of depression, anxiety or stress related problems.
- 4.1.4 Feedback from PCMHW has shown that if Listening Ear wasn't available they would refer to Surestart or Psychology, otherwise it would mean referring clients city wide.
- 4.1.5 Past research has shown that women in West Leeds do not access city centre services and therefore need local provision.
- 4.1.6 Feedback from client evaluation has highlighted the need for women only service especially for women who have experienced violence/oppression by men. Women have said that they would have not felt safe had the service been for men and women.
- 4.1.7 WHM has been working in West Leeds for many years and has sound local knowledge and good links with agencies in the West and also citywide. This level of trust is vital for community cohesion work.
- 4.1.8 WHM is flexible and adaptable to changing needs eg we were able to keep the counselling service going despite funding uncertainties and sudden loss of venue. This example also demonstrates the level of trust that the women have in us when they kept coming and continued to value the counselling they were receiving.
- 4.1.9 WHM is seen as the voice of women in the city via work with them on the ground.

5.0 **Recommendations**

Area Committee to note this report.