

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Acting Director of Social Work Services

Corporate Services Committee: 26 April 2006

Subject: Review of Information and Advice Giving services

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To provide Members with a further update on proposals for remodelling of information and advice giving services within West Dunbartonshire

2. Background

- 2.1** At the meeting of the Corporate Services Committee on the 22nd February 2006 a decision was made in relation to funding and integration of advice and information services in West Dunbartonshire.

- 2.2** The Committee regretted the decision of the Clydebank CAB to cease operations on the 31st March, 2006 and instructed that Council and Community Planning Partnership Officers should examine the best way forward to deliver an advice giving service to the residents of West Dunbartonshire.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** A meeting took place on Tuesday 14th March, 2006 with Officers of the Council and the Board of Clydebank CAB. During this meeting the Board informed the officers that they no longer wished to take part in discussions and asked the officers to leave the meeting to allow them to discuss closure and the end date for accepting new clients. On the morning of Wednesday 15th March a telephone message was received from a member of the Board of CAB Clydebank informing the Council's Officer that, with immediate effect, no new clients would be accepted by Clydebank CAB.
- 3.2** These decisions prevented the seamless transfer of CAB Clydebank into alternative replacement services. As negotiations had not been concluded successfully between the two CABs in Dumbarton and Clydebank, it was decided that an interim service would be put in place, funded by the Community Planning Partnership and assisted by Welfare Rights.
- 3.3** Discussions took place with Clydebank CAB to acquire the lease once they had closed. Unfortunately these meetings were unsuccessful. The Board of CAB Clydebank indicated clearly that they had the right to remove equipment from the building and stated these resources could go outwith the Clydebank area. Advice was sought from the Head of Legal Services and a letter was sent to the Clydebank CAB Directors advising them that under the terms of

the service level agreement, nothing should be removed from the premises without the consent of the Council. They were further advised that they should contact a Council Officer to discuss the future use of any equipment and assets.

- 3.4** Staff from the Community Planning Partnership and the Council attended the final meeting on Thursday 23rd March 2006. Present at that meeting was a member of Citizens Advice Scotland, an insolvency practitioner and a lawyer representing the Board of Clydebank CAB, who gave the opinion that they had the right to remove material from the Clydebank area. Those present at the meeting were advised of the Council's view that the equipment should not be removed without consent from the Council. Although Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) apparently was of the same opinion as the Council's Legal Department, this view was never put to the Board. No further correspondence took place between Clydebank CAB, Community Planning Partnership or Officers of the Council.
- 3.5** Council Officers gained entry to the premises on Monday 2nd April 2006 to find that all equipment, and some fixtures and fittings had been removed. The office was completely bare. The Solicitor to the Council and the Head of Finance have been informed of the situation. This development was also reported to the Big Lottery who have been a substantial funder of Clydebank CAB. They expressed disappointment but advised they would welcome a funding application from the new authority-wide advice service to support the integration process.
- 3.6** An interim advice giving organisation has been set up funded by Community Planning Partnership and supported by the Council's Welfare Rights Service. Other voluntary organisations have indicated they would assist the interlinking supportive services to allow the people of Clydebank as full and as comprehensive a service as can be given under the circumstances. The services of an independent Solicitor have been retained for access to legal advice.
- 3.7** Within the next few months a full West Dunbartonshire wide CAB service will be set up and will resume a comprehensive service to the people of West Dunbartonshire. To allow this to happen discussions have taken place with CAS and other grant funding organisations to look at a package of support to allow this service to be of a higher standard, not just in Clydebank, but in the Vale of Leven and Dumbarton.
- 3.8** For the year 2006/2007 this review and improvement of service should have no further budgetary effect on council finances.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** There are no personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The Committee notes with concern the actions of the previous Board of Clydebank CAB and asks the Chief Executive to instruct that investigations be carried out to examine the management and disposal of the resources and assets granted to Clydebank CAB by the council and partners; and to take legal advice to consider if action should be taken to investigate the conduct of the Board of Clydebank CAB.

6.2 It recognises the support and assistance to council's anti-poverty policy by the Board of the Dumbarton/Vale of Leven CAB during this trying period and endorses the future developments of the combined partnership on advice and information throughout West Dunbartonshire.

William W Clark
Acting Director of Social Work Services
West Dunbartonshire Council

Wards Affected: All

Background Papers:

Person to contact: William W Clark, Garshake Road, Dumbarton, Tel:
01389 737599