

Social Affairs Select – Report of a Meeting held on 22nd January 2013

Members reviewed the Community Plan objectives relating to 'A Better Start for our Children' receiving two presentations from Carers First and Spring House.

The Chief Executive of Carers First, Pete Turner, explained that the charity existed to offer support and help to carers providing information, advocacy, short respite care and a forum for carers to meet. He also announced that they had just been awarded a significant contract by K.C.C. to provide services across the whole of Kent and Medway.

Members heard that the census in 2001 included, for the first time, a question asking people if they were carers. In the 2011 census the number of unpaid carers recorded showed a 10% increase. However this figure probably still represented the tip of an iceberg since many people do not perceive themselves to be carers or for various reasons are reluctant to be so classified. According to a report by the Princess Royal Trust carers save this country over £119 billion every year.

A significant number of carers are young people, many of whom give anything up to 50 hours of support each week; some are as young as five years old quite often having to cope with intimate care needs. This can have a serious effect on their schooling and robs them of a normal childhood. It is important that teachers understand their problems and know how to recognise a young carer as many do not identify themselves for fear of being bullied.

Carers First works closely with VAWK to provide support groups, activities and a befriending scheme for these youngsters. SDC can help Carers First by using its contacts to promote the needs of carers and to signpost them to the help that is available for them.

The Manager of Spring House Family Support Service, Hayley Bell, explained that since 2009 the charity had been delivering Sure Start, funded by K.C.C. As well as Spring House itself it provided a virtual centre 'Merry Go Round' covering rural and isolated areas of the District, offering parenting support and opportunities for play, particularly aimed at reaching those children who might not otherwise get a good start in life.

Early intervention in supporting vulnerable families was vital in ensuring that children were ready to start Primary School. Midwives and Health Visitors were valuable in helping to identify those families who often had multiple problems due to low income, unemployment, health inequalities, poor housing etc. Working to key National Indicators, 'getting in early, getting it right', they have a local target to reach 91% of all under 2 yr. olds. They also work with childminders to ensure positive early learning.

Sure Start also worked closely with Parish Councils and had provided a series of play sessions last summer. These had proved to be extremely popular but future funding for this operation was uncertain.

Mrs Bell, in answer to a question, said that members could support the work of the charity by joining the steering group to help inform its work.

Lesley Bowles then introduced the new Local Health Structure illustrating the various groups which currently cover health related issues. She explained that six Local Health and Wellbeing Boards were being established, the intention being to promote greater democracy and accountability in the commissioning of services.

The head of Community Development then commented on the new draft Community Plan and its longer term vision which is currently out for public consultation before being considered by the Committee at its March meeting.

Mumsnet had been running a thread on hospital care related to miscarriages in the Sevenoaks District. This had attracted a large number of responses mainly associated with Pembury Hospital. There were some common themes which emerged, namely lack of empathy, unacceptable waiting times and inadequate information. These observations will be shared with the two local hospitals and forwarded to K.C.C. for its Health and Overview and Scrutiny committee to consider.

Cllr. Alison Cook, Chairman