

Equalities Panel Meeting

19th November 2012

Item 5: Mental Health Awareness

Purpose of the item

Members of the Panel have indicated in the past that they would welcome the opportunity to hear from external speakers on issues within the remit of the Panel. Jeannette Harding, an Independent Service User Trainer and User Researcher with long standing experience of using and working in local mental health services, has been invited to address the Panel about common mental health issues and the ways that the City Council can help combat stigma and discrimination of this group of people.

Informed by this presentation, the Panel is asked to help guide the development of a programme of work which aims to ensure that customers with mental health issues receive a standard of service from the City Council that is consistent with that received by all residents.

Background

The City Council's Single Equality Scheme for 2012-2015 includes an action to: 'work with partners to develop a better understanding of mental health and learning disability issues and identify any gaps in our services'.

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as: 'a state of well being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community'. This covers a very wide spectrum, including stress, depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobias, psychosis, schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder. People with brain injuries, as well as people with autism and aspergers, have some similar symptoms.

In July 2011, a sub-group of the Council's Joint Equalities Group (JEG) met to consider how we can ensure that the City Council is consistently providing a good service to people with mental health problems and people with learning disabilities. The Group identified the following key issues:

- The City Council does not currently carry out regular, dedicated consultation with residents with mental health issues.
- There is a need to ensure that Council officers are: adept at identifying whether an individual has a mental health problems; understand what needs they may have as a result; and are able to take this account when dealing with them. Anecdotal evidence suggests that awareness of mental health issues may be greater in services who regularly deal with the public than those which have less frequent contact with customers.

- The capacity of the voluntary sector to provide advocacy support for people with mental health issues who are experiencing barriers to accessing public services may be more limited now than it has been in the past.

A number of actions are being progressed to help address these issues:

1. Council officers are currently in discussions with Lifecraft, a self-help user-led organisation for adults with mental health difficulties, about organising a consultation event to explore any potential barriers that customers with mental health needs experience when accessing City Council services. We considered organising a dedicated event at a City Council venue, but were advised that customers with mental health issues were more likely to engage if the consultation takes place in a 'safe space'. It is likely that the consultation will take place at the offices of Lifecraft as a part of their forum meetings.
2. Jeannette Harding has been commissioned to deliver a series of four workshops for City Council staff on mental health issues. The training sessions covered: how to identify if someone has mental health problems; assessing their current and future needs; and information on other organisations that able to help. All staff were invited to an open session which took place on World Mental Health Day on 10 October at the Guildhall, and more targeted sessions are being arranged for staff in Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits, and at the Mill Road Depot.
3. Eddie Stadnik, Chief Officer of the Ethnic Forum, was invited to give a presentation to JEG on 7 November about the advocacy support available through the Cambridgeshire Human Rights and Equality Support Service (CHESS) to residents from all eight equality strands, including disabled residents.

JEG recognises that, having taken steps to improve our understanding of the needs of customers with mental health issues and raise staff awareness, it will be important to engage with other partner agencies that have a role to play. In particular, it will be important to ensure that City Council staff are aware which agencies they can refer customers with mental health issues to for support.

The County Council's Adults Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is currently looking at local arrangements for the delivery of mental health services. The Cambridge Local Health Partnership has agreed that it will follow up on any issues that this scrutiny exercise reveals.

NHS Cambridgeshire is currently commissioning Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust to deliver approximately 25 care pathways covering a range of mental health services from primary care to secondary care and a range of specialist services for people with severe or enduring mental health illness and more complex care problems. Following an extensive public consultation in the later half of 2011 it was decided to radically transform mental health services to try and give patients faster access to support at an early stage in their illness, more responsive care from community based mental health services and better care for patients who require admission. These changes were developed with the local GP Cluster Groups, who will begin to commission and establish Primary Care Mental Health Services.