

Present:

Elliott Stephenson	Grand Union Housing Group
Len Simkins	Autism Bedfordshire
Martin Trinder	CVS Beds
Amanda Ryan	BPHA Ltd (chair)
Sam Condor	Macmillan Welfare Rights Service
Brian Cunningham	BRASS
Amanda Thaxter	Carers in Bedfordshire
Susanna Fagg	Royal British Legion
Maureen Sheridan	Sight Concern Bedfordshire
Chera Gilbert	Disability Resource Centre
Yasmina Mahmood	Hospital Welfare Benefits Advisor, Bedford Borough Council
Paulette Rennie	Bedford Community Self Help Project
Rebecca Campbell Grieve	Project 229

Apologies

Georgia Bowers	Bedford Borough Libraries
Carol Weston	Money Advice at St Andrews
Trevor Moisey	Rutland Road Church

Action

- 2 Apologies for absence** were noted (listed above).
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3 Minutes of last Forum meeting (26th November) and Matters Arising

The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed. There were no matters arising that were not on the agenda.

4 Presentation – Royal British Legion Susanna Fagg, Advice and Information Officer – Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire

Susanna provided the forum with an overview of the service, with the following points:

Eligibility

- Have served in Army, Navy or the Air Force
- Regular or Reservist – includes National Service; Territorial Army
- Partner or ex-partner (not in a new relationship)
- Child up to age 18 years.

Services

- Case Officers for each county: mobility; funeral costs; housing; brown and white goods; Crisis; training courses; referrals to RFEA (employment)
- Advice and Information Officers for each county
- Benefits, Debt and Money Advice Team
- Independent Living Advice Team: DFG's
- Admirals Nurses
- Outreach Service: support to access services
- Partner Organisations: TogetherAll (previously Big White Wall); Ripple Pond; Combat Stress; etc
- 6 Care Homes

A leaflet on the service will be circulated with the minutes. The meeting thanked Susanna for her presentation.

5 Presentation - Hospital Social Work Team (HSWT)
Yasmina Mahmood, Hospital Welfare Benefits Advisor, Bedford Borough Council

Yasmina provided an overview of the service. The Bedford Borough Hospital Social Work Team is a team of Social Workers, Support Workers, Reablement Co-ordinator's and a Welfare Rights Advisor who are based at Bedford Hospital and provide services for patients who require help and support on discharge. Patients must reside in Bedford Borough.

The meeting thanked Yasmina for her presentation.

6 Information Exchange - including the impact on your services of the 2nd lockdown.

Amanda – BPHA staff continue to work from home, but are likely to partially return to the office from September onwards. Some teams may continue to work from home in the long term.

Elliott – GUHG are also planning a gradual return to the office, but there are likely to be more staff working from home going forward.

Chera – DRC are hoping to take new offices at the Mayfield Centre in Dunstable.

Sam – Macmillan Welfare Rights are still working from home, and are not able to access the hospital at present. Telephone support is being offered to clients.

Amanda – Carers in Beds have limited staff and volunteers in the office. Support groups remain online, whilst the walking groups will hopefully restart in the very near future. A new Wellbeing Practitioner has been appointed and is very busy supporting people that have found the past few months difficult.

Paulette – The self-help group has not been able to meet face-to-face, however members continue to be supported online.

Maureen – Sight Concern are currently in the process of securing new offices in Luton. Virtual support groups are continuing to meet, with the hope that face-to-face activities can return in the summer.

Beccy – Project 229 continue to deliver a range of services, and provide facilities for other key organisations, including Foodbank and support groups. A number of services are also continuing online.

Brian – BRASS are looking ahead to Refugee Week (from 14th June over two weeks) and a number of outdoor activities are being planned.

Len – Autism Beds are looking to return to the office in June. Numerous online services are continuing, and it is hoped that the holiday playschemes and other clubs can soon be delivered face-to-face again.

Martin - CVS are hoping to return to the office, at least in part after Easter.

7 Mutual Assistance

A number of partners have small amounts of office and meeting space to offer, especially if organisations are looking to change how they deliver their services.

8 Update on BAF's other services and activities, including training.

Len provided an update, which is attached to these minutes.

8 Any other business

None

Date of next meeting – Thursday 24th June 2021 – 10am. This will include the BAF AGM.

Update on BAF projects

BAF training

At the last BAF meeting we announced our plans to launch BAF's first online training programme, with the help of funding (£2,000) from the Harpur Trust (in Bedford).

The training programme, on **Universal Credit**, consisted of 4 online sessions, aimed at local advisers. This programme was held in January and was fully booked (with 20 bookings).

As we had a long reserve list, we then decided to run the programme again in February and we had 14 bookings.

Programme	Course dates	Bookings	Attendees	Tutors
Universal Credit (1)	January 12 th , 14 th , 19 th and 21 st	20	20	Elliott Stephenson Len Simkins
Universal Credit (2)	February 2 nd , 4 th , 9 th and 11 th	14	12	Elliott Stephenson Len Simkins
	Total	34	32	

Thanks should go to the tutors, and also to GUHG for their support (through Elliott's time) in helping with the development and delivery of the January programme.

There were some IT issues in some of the sessions but we managed to get through both programmes successfully. Feedback was generally very positive.

A full report on the programme will be produced shortly.

The latest news is that BAF has now been awarded another grant (£1,000) to plan and provide an "**Overview of UC**" session in the spring.

This will be aimed at frontline staff working in the community in Bedford Borough. We will be running a session in May for local schools and will then arrange another session for BAF members and other local agencies.

It is also proposed that we could support a pool of people from BAF agencies who want to train up to be able to present this "Overview of UC" session in the future – either in-house at their own agencies or externally on behalf of BAF.

Advice Strategy – Central Bedfordshire

This work is funded by Central Bedfordshire Council.

Because of the short-term changes/responses needed because of the Covid-19 crisis, the longer-term strategic work was put on hold in 2020. However, a meeting of the Advice Strategy Management Group was held in January to look at re-starting the work in April. The plans are to:

- Launch the **new Advice Strategy** (which was meant to happen last year)
- Agree a **new Delivery Plan** to support the Strategy
- Set-up a **Steering Group to support AdviceCentral**.

Bedfordshire Benefits Network

A successful online meeting of the BBN was held on 3rd March. 20 people attended.

The next meeting is planned for September.

Voluntaryworks Consortium

BAF is a partner in the Voluntaryworks (VW) Consortium, and I represent BAF at Consortium meetings.

The initial audit of VW Ltd's Building Better Opportunities Project (which was directly supported by BAF / Advice Bedfordshire) was completed in December. Some further evidence has been requested and plans are being made now with the Big Lottery to finalise the audit.

VW partners have now decided to move ahead and close down Voluntaryworks Ltd (the Consortium's trading arm) due to lack of contracts and activity.

Bedford Independent Poverty Action Group

I represent BAF at IPAG meetings. No meetings of the group have been held yet in 2021.

Update on Advice Bedfordshire

Advice Bedfordshire is BAF's trading company.

The current bank balance is **£2,484.37**.

The finances for BAF's training programmes and other activities will all be processed in March so that the accounts are reconciled for the end of the Company's financial year (31/3/21).

Len Simkins – BAF Project Consultant
18/3/21