

# Minutes of Forum Meeting

7<sup>th</sup> November 2019

## Bunyan Meeting - Bedford

### Present:

Elliott Stephenson  
Len Simkins  
Martin Trinder  
Brian Cunningham  
Samantha Condor  
Jenny Hedges  
Chera Gilbert

Grand Union Housing Group  
Autism Bedfordshire  
CVS Beds  
BRASS  
Macmillan Welfare Rights  
Citizen Advice Mid Bedfordshire  
Disability Resource Centre

### Apologies

Paulette Rennie  
Trevor Moisey  
Alex Franciszkow  
Gill Eden/ Sylvia McDowell

Bedford Community Support Project  
Three Rivers Church, Bedford  
PBIC  
Money Advice at St Andrews

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### Action

Elliott Stephenson chaired the meeting on behalf of BAF's Steering Group.

**2 Apologies for absence** were noted (listed above).

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### 3 Minutes of last Forum meeting (4<sup>th</sup> July 2019) and Matters Arising

The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed.

There were no matters arising that were not on the agenda.

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### 4 Presentation and discussion

Jenny Hedges gave a presentation on using Webchat to Provide Advice Services.

Jenny provided a breakdown of how the Citizen Advice Mid Bedfordshire have been trialling web chat services, as part of a national service. Members discussed the potential use by smaller organisations, the challenges of providing such a service, and having staff with the necessary IT skills.

A copy of the presentation can be found on the BAF website.

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### 5 Information Exchange

**Elliott - Grand Union Housing Group** – The group have now relocated to the MK office and outreach as required across Bedfordshire.

**Sam – Macmillan Welfare Rights** – The contract comes to an end in March, and discussions about the service beyond March are ongoing. A pre-treatment drop in is being held monthly at Kings Arms, with a number of organisations in attendance.

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**Chera – Disability Resource Centre** – Advice Central have produce new publicity material which will be distributed shortly.

**Jenny – Citizens Advice Mid Bedfordshire** – This is Jenny’s last meeting before retirement. Christina King has been appointed as her successor.

**Martin – CVS** – Martin highlighted that CVS have circulated guidance for charities during an election period, setting out what organisations can and can’t do.

**Brian – BRASS** - BRASS are currently recruiting for a new advisor (deadline 18<sup>th</sup> November). Planning for the BRASS Christmas party, to be held at Tavistock Community Centre, is well underway. Requests are out for donations of new and nearly new books, which will be distributed as presents to the children at the party.

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## 6 Future of BAF meetings

The meeting discussed the low number of attendees at the last few meetings, and the possible reasons behind it.

A draft survey was considered, amended and will be circulated to members to seek their views on the issue.

The Steering Group will then consider the feedback before making any further proposals.

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## 7 Update on BAF activities (including training)

Len provided an update (attached)

Two training courses have been organised and are proving popular.

Course	Date	Location	Trainers
<b>Introduction to Benefits</b> (Full day)	20/11/19	CVS, Bedford	Len Simkins and Elliott Stephenson
<b>Personal Independence Payment</b> (Full day)	11/12/19	CVS, Bedford	Len Simkins and Elliott Stephenson

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## 8 Any other business

Everyone wished Jenny a happy retirement!

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Future meeting dates – 2pm start:

- 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020 – Central Bedfordshire Venue.

# BAF PROJECTS - UPDATE REPORT

(for BAF meeting on 7/11/19)

## BAF training

BAF will be running 2 courses this autumn.

Course	Date	Location	Trainers
<b>Introduction to Benefits</b> (Full day)	20/11/19	CVS, Bedford	Len Simkins and Elliott Stephenson
<b>Personal Independence Payment</b> (Full day)	11/12/19	CVS, Bedford	Len Simkins and Elliott Stephenson

Costs for BAF members = £50 a course for paid staff. (£25 for volunteers).

## Bedfordshire Benefits Network

Our network meetings to discuss benefit issues continue to go well.

Representatives from CBC and BBC Housing Benefit Offices, and from the DWP attended the last meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> September. Total attendance was 26, with 11 apologies.

The next meeting is on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020 in Bedford.

## Advice Strategy – Central Bedfordshire

This project work is funded by **Central Bedfordshire Council**.

BAF is responsible for facilitating the **Advice Strategy Management Group** which oversees the Advice Strategy.

The Advice Strategy will be refreshed in 2020 and a new Delivery Plan is currently being developed.

A promotional flyer (“Everybody’s got a role in advice”) is currently being produced and will be distributed to all frontline staff in Central Bedfordshire.

## Advice Bedfordshire

The Company’s AGM was held on 4<sup>th</sup> July, and the Company’s Annual Report accounts for 2018/19 were approved.

Elliott Stephenson is currently the Company’s Acting Chair because of David Verney’s illness.

The Company ended 2018/19 with a balance of £200.58.

The current balance in the Company’s bank account is **£656.03**.

## **Bedford Independent Poverty Action Group**

IPAG is the new anti-poverty group in Bedford. I represent BAF at IPAG meetings

To build up strong links with IPAG, it has been agreed that BAF should:

- Circulate details of BAF's training programmes through IPAG
- Promote IPAG to BAF members (eg through the Information Exchange at BAF meetings)

## **Voluntaryworks Consortium**

BAF is a partner in the Voluntaryworks (VW) Consortium, which is the network for VCS infrastructure organisations and networks. I represent BAF at the VW Consortium meetings.

The next VW Consortium meeting is on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

Len Simkins (Project Consultant)

**Email:** [len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk](mailto:len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk)