

### Present:

Elliott Stephenson  
Sylvia MacDowell  
Carol Madden  
Jenny Hedges  
Samantha Conder  
Sarah Broughton  
Len Simkins  
Angela Price  
Sam Price  
Annette Pacey  
Edward Costello  
Martin Trinder

Aragon Housing Association/Grand Union Housing Group  
Money Advice at St Andrews  
Money Advice at St Andrews  
Citizens Advice Mid Bedfordshire  
Macmillan Welfare Rights - Central Bedfordshire Council  
Bedford Foodbank  
Autism Bedfordshire  
Bedford Citizens Housing Association  
Bedford Homeless Partnership  
BPHA  
DRC Beds  
CVS Beds

### Apologies

Georgia Bowers  
Tabitha Park  
Trevor Moisey  
Brian Cunningham  
Helen Turney  
Noor D'Agostino  
Jenny Harris

Bedford Borough Libraries  
Citizen Advice Leighton Linlade  
Three Rivers Church - West  
BRASS  
Bedford Citizens Housing Association  
Aldwyck Housing Group  
Carers in Bedfordshire

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### Action

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

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### 2 Minutes of last Forum meeting (2/11/17) 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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### 3. Themed Presentation and Group Discussion

Emilia Cozma from Citizens Advice Witness Service gave a presentation on the service. The key points were:

- The service is available in every court, matching witnesses with court-based volunteers. Over 280 support 2,800 volunteers
- Over 170,000 witnesses are supported each year.
- Witnesses can self-refer (0300 33 21 000) as well as both the prosecution and defence (0300 233 21 000)
- The outreach service is relatively new, but offers a more supportive service for some people.

Elliott thanked Emilia for the presentation.

A copy of the slides can be found at <http://www.cvsbeds.org.uk/baf-forum-meetings>

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#### 4 Information Exchange

**Sam Price - Bedford Homeless Partnership** – Sam has recently been appointed and provided an overview of her role. Sam also gave an overview of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the various new duties that public bodies have been given, and the event organised for 27<sup>th</sup> February.

<http://bedfordhomeless.org.uk/>

**Sarah - Foodbank** – Numbers using the service are increasing. 794 people were supported over the Christmas period. The Reuse Centre have set up a new project, concentrating on offering fresh food, which complements the Foodbank offer. The Foodbank now has 85 volunteers a week with a waiting list.

<https://bedford.foodbank.org.uk/>

**Angela - BCHA** – The extra care scheme is now full.

<http://www.bchal.org/services/extra-care-housing.aspx>

**Annette – BPHA** – Annette was welcomed back after a period of leave. The BPHA service continues.

<https://www.bpha.org.uk/support/money-benefits-advice/>

**Edward - DRC** - Edward has been in post since November, as Advice Services Team Leader.

<https://www.drcbeds.org.uk/>

**Carol – Money Advice at St Andrews** – The service has recently lost 3 advisors, and it is proving difficult to recruit replacements. The numbers seeking support remain steady.

<http://www.standrewsbedford.org/st-andrews-groups/money-advice/>

**Sam - Macmillan Welfare Rights** – Looking for volunteers to assist with admin in the office. Two new staff appointed and starting in April.

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/health-social-care/macmillan/contact.aspx>

**Jenny - Citizens Advice Mid-Bedfordshire** - The service has offices in Ampthill and Biggleswade, and satellite locations in Sandy and Stotfold. A busy period following Christmas.

<http://www.midbedscab.org.uk/>

**Elliott – Aragon** – Elliott highlighted that the Aragon branding will be gradually replaced by the Grand Union Housing Group as various organisational changes occur.

[https://www.aragon-housing.co.uk/help-advice/benefit\\_and\\_money\\_advice-services/](https://www.aragon-housing.co.uk/help-advice/benefit_and_money_advice-services/)

**Martin - CVS** - Martin highlighted a couple of forthcoming events that will be explained further in future CVS email updates:

- 8<sup>th</sup> March (EVE) GDPR briefing event
- 19<sup>th</sup> March (AM) Social Prescribing – potential provider meeting

<http://www.cvsbeds.org.uk/>

**Len - Autism Bedfordshire** – Len highlighted that an Independent Poverty Action Group has been started - Wendie Harvey at FACES is the main contact for the group -

[wendie@facesbedford.org](mailto:wendie@facesbedford.org)

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#### 6 Update on current BAF activities

- A written update was provided by Len – attached to these minutes.

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#### 7 Any other business

Elliott asked all members to consider whether they would be prepared to join the steering committee and become chair of BAF. Currently the steering group are rotating the chairing of meetings.

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#### 8 Dates of future Forum meetings (all 2pm)

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- 28<sup>th</sup> June 2018
  - 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018
  - 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019
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Documents discussed at this meeting can be found at [www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk](http://www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk)

# BAF PROJECTS - UPDATE REPORT

(for BAF meeting on 8/2/18)

## BAF training

BAF's 2017 training programme was very successful.

- 4 courses – 2 x Benefits Update and 2 x Universal Credit
- 44 attendees
- Very positive feedback - 100% of attendees on all 4 courses said that the course fulfilled their expectations, and that the trainers and course delivery was very good
- 3 agencies joined BAF when making bookings for the training.
- A surplus of £667.14 was made from the programme

It is planned to organise further training courses in 2018. The suggestions are:

- **Introduction to Benefits** – Early summer 2018
- **Universal Credit** – Autumn 2018
- **Disability benefits** – TBC

## Bedfordshire Benefits Network

These meetings continue to be well received and well attended.

The next meeting is on **14/3/18** 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 next meeting is on 22/3/18.

A successful **stakeholder workshop** was held on 15/1/18 (with 32 attendees) to review the Advice Strategy's Delivery Plan. This will now be updated for 2018/19.

You can see copies of the Advice Strategy and the Delivery Plan at:  
<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council/stronger-communities/advice.aspx>

BAF has been encouraging members (working in Central Bedfordshire) to update their entries on BAF's online Advice Directory, and to promote the Advice Strategy on their websites