

Minutes of Forum meeting

**11th February 2016
CVS Offices, Bedford**

Present:

Elliott Stephenson	Aragon Housing Association
David Wood	Citizens Advice Leighton Linlade
Paulette Rennie	Bedford Community Self-Help Group
Hayley Lucas	Mind BLMK
Mark Sutcliffe	Citizens Advice Bedford Borough
Gemma Russell	Gateway Housing Support – Central Bedfordshire Council
Georgia Bowers	Bedford Borough Libraries
Jason Tsiricos	PBIC
Annette Pacey (Treasurer)	BPHA
Brian Cunningham (Vice-Chair)	BRASS
Fiona McLeod	Money Advice at St Andrew's
Len Simkins	Autism Bedfordshire
David Verney (Chair)	Advice Bedfordshire
Martin Trinder	Community Voluntary Service (CVS)

Apologies

Daniela Vuolo	Central Bedfordshire Libraries
Peter Rayner	BPHA
Chris Cooper	Learning Partnership
Noor D'Agostino	Aldwyck Housing

<i>Item</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Action</i>
2	Minutes of last Forum meeting (14th September 2015) and Matters Arising	<p>The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed.</p> <p>There were no matters arising that were not on the agenda.</p>	
3	Library Service Consultation (Bedford Borough)	<p>David explained that the Harpur Trust presentation has been postponed at the last minute due to staff sickness, but it will hopefully be rescheduled for the next meeting.</p> <p>In its place, members discussed the current Bedford Borough Libraries consultation. A number of issues and ideas were discussed, which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The challenge of operating a Library service with significantly less resources (not just being more effective). • The issue of using more volunteers whilst maintaining a consistent service – getting the balance right. • The use of Libraries as community signposts to advice agencies and other services, and the role they play in reducing social isolation • The increased use of computers and wifi within the Library setting, but still a strong demand for books. • Members discussed some of the other Library models, including community libraries run exclusively by volunteers, library points, co-location libraries, and the Cultural Trust model. • Members also discussed the potential for advice agencies sharing more space and working closer with the Library service. Citizens Advice Bedford Borough have put forward an initial idea of a separate legal vehicle running the Libraries, with 	

CA operating from a library. Members are welcome to discuss the concept with Mark.

Members were given a copy of the consultation form, and the closing date for responses is 4th April.

The BAF steering group will consider making a formal response to the consultation.

4 Information Exchange

Elliott (Aragon Housing) - The service continues, albeit with a much reduced service, and staff are gearing up for Universal Credit.

David (Citizen Advice Leighton Linlade) - Research undertaken by Citizen Advice in Central Bedfordshire indicates that over 99% of private sector rents are above the housing allowance. A copy of the report has been circulated to BAF members.

Universal Credit rolling out on 22nd February. Citizens Advice will offer some budgeting support (funded by DWP via the local authority).

A Barclays/BT initiative in Leighton Buzzard will see free Wi-Fi in Bossard House and support from Digital Eagles through one-to-one and group advice sessions.

Hayley (MIND) – The service is very much a conduit to other services. Local Well Being Centres are based across the county, including Woburn Road in Bedford.

Mark (Citizens Advice Bedford Borough) – A new website being developed and currently rolling out a Bedford Borough Telephone Service. CA has had 7,500 users for the 9 months to December 2015. A homelessness survey being prepared and an extensive volunteer recruitment campaign is underway.

Members expressed some concerns that the number of rough sleepers appears to have increased in recent months.

Georgia (Bedford Borough Libraries) – Reading Well is a scheme relating mental health well-being. The Library service is also looking for volunteers to help people with their tablets (the ICT type!).

Gemma (CBC) – Bromford Support staff have transferred over to Central Bedfordshire Council and now known as Gateway Housing Support, offering floating support across the CBC area.

Jason (PBIC) – The Job Club on a Tuesday will move to 11am-1pm from 16th March.

Annette (BPHA) – The money advice and welfare service continues.

Fiona (Money Advice at St Andrews) – Due to capacity issues, only a limited Thursday morning service is being offered.

Fiona is a local advocate for Act 345, which can provide small amounts of funding for individuals. Any requests for support have to go through Fiona. See <http://acts435.org.uk/> for how the service works.

Brian (BRASS) - Brian reported that there appears to have been a real change in perception of refugees and asylum seekers in past few months, possibly due to recent press coverage. The recent shoe box appeal was very successful and the number of tutors has doubled. The refugee family reunion project with the University is working well and seeing results. A Syrian Family Support Officer is now in post and the first Syrian family has arrived in Bedford. BRASS has also just received approval for a lottery bid worth approx. £300,000 for five year project.

Paulette (Bedford Community Self-Help Group) – The service continues, but funding still remains an issue.

5 Update on current BAF activities Len provided a written update (attached):

Members were reminded of the two information sessions on Universal Credit on the 4th March – Free to BAF members.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/universal-credit-in-central-bedfordshire-an-information-session-tickets-20972745045>

6 Any other business None

7 Date of next Forum meeting To be confirmed

Documents discussed at this meeting can be found at www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk