

Minutes of Forum Meeting

6th July 2017
CVS Offices, Bedford

Present:

Brian Cunningham
Jason Tsiricos
Elliott Stephenson
Samantha Conder
Sarah Broughton
Tabitha Paul
Jan Roberts
Wendy Bird
Len Simkins
Sylvia MacDowell
Sherone Phillips
Martin Trinder

BRASS
PBIC
Aragon Housing Association
Macmillan Welfare Rights – Central Bedfordshire Council
Bedford Foodbank
Citizen Advice Leighton Linlade
Citizen Advice Mid Bedfordshire
Bedfordshire Police
Autism Bedfordshire
Money Advice at St Andrews
Disability Resource Centre
CVS Beds

Apologies

Georgia Bowers
Trevor Moisey
Annette Pacey
Amanda Ryan

Bedford Borough Libraries
Rutland Road Church
BPHA
BPHA

Action

Len Simkins chaired the meeting on behalf of BAF's Steering Group.

2 Minutes of last Forum meeting (26/4/17) and Matters Arising

The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed.

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

3 Information Exchange

Brian - BRASS – Currently looking for more English Tutors, and the Immigration Case Worker is now in post and looking for referrals.

Jason – PBIC – The Queens Park outreach sessions have now stopped, but they will be starting a new service in Northampton from 1st August.

Elliott – Aragon Housing Association – Aragon has been part of Grand Union Housing Group (GUHG) for several years and recently has begun to use the Grand Union name rather than Aragon in communication with tenants. Aragon still exists as its own legal entity, but as many services are now provided 'group-wide', e.g. some contractors provide repairs and advice and support services are also organised 'group-wide'. Therefore Elliott advised the meeting that if anyone hears reference to Grand Union then that likely means Aragon in Bedfordshire.

Elliott also provided an update about what services GUHG provides for their customers, which are:

- Welfare Benefits Advice
 - Money Advice (which is to say, debt advice)
 - Tenancy Support
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- Digital Inclusion support (i.e. helping customers to learn how to use computers and helping them get on line)
 - Employability support
 - Support for young people, particularly those who are 'NEET' (not in employment, education or training) – this is offered to the wider community and has included apprenticeship schemes for example which have been delivered in conjunction with the Olympian Kriss Akabusi.

Sam - Macmillan Welfare Rights - The service has now been running for 10 years, offering a mixture of home visits and drop-in sessions.

Sarah - Bedford Foodbank - The service gives out over 5 tonnes of food and other items each month, and the warehouse is down to 7 tonnes, so more donations and donation points are welcome.

Tabitha – Citizens Advice Leighton Linlade - This is Tabitha's first meeting, since taking over from David Wood, who retired earlier in the year. The service is offering a five-day week service and an evening session.

Sherone – DRC – DRC are currently involved in an Integrated Personalised Commission (IPC) 'early adopter' piece of work in Luton.

Wendy – Beds Police - Wendy outlined her role as the Volunteer Unit Manager at Beds Police, responsible for the recruitment, training and retention of Special Constables, Police Cadets, Police Service Volunteers and Student Interns. They are keen to encourage staff in the larger companies to consider volunteering in the Criminal Justice System. More information will be circulated after the meeting.

Jan – Citizens Advice Mid Bedfordshire - Universal Credit claims remain complex and challenging, with some arguments about clients being able to revert back to 'legacy' benefits.

Sylvia - Money Advice at St Andrews - The service continues, with an increasing number of self-referrals.

Len - Autism Beds - Len reminded the group that the organisation works with both adults and children, and that organisations can make referrals.

4 Update on current BAF activities

Len provided an update on BAF projects – attached.

5 Any other business

None

7 Dates of future Forum meetings (all 2pm)

- 2nd November 2017
- 8th February 2018

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

BAF PROJECTS - UPDATE REPORT

(for BAF meeting on 6/7/17)

BAF training

BAF's Spring training programme was very successful. A summary is given below.

Course	Date	Course length	Trainer	Bookings	Attendees
Benefits Update	4/5/17	½ day	Elliot Stephenson Len Simkins	18 with 4 reserves	16
Universal Credit	11/5/17	Full day	Elliot Stephenson Len Simkins	12	11
Universal Credit	18/5/17	Full day	Annette Pacey Jason Tsiricos	11	10
Benefits Update	29/6/17	½ day	Elliot Stephenson Len Simkins	8	7
TOTAL				49	44

All the courses were held at **Bunyan Meeting** in Bedford.

Thanks should be given to Aragon Housing Association, bpha, and PBIC for providing **trainers for the courses**.

Feedback from all the courses was very positive. For example:

- 100% of attendees on all 4 courses said that the course fulfilled their expectations
- 98% of attendees across the 4 courses said that the course was at the right level for their needs
- 100% of attendees on all 4 courses said that the trainers and course delivery was very good

Additional bonuses from the programme were that:

- 3 agencies joined BAF when making bookings for the training.
- Some non-BAF members attended the courses and paid the higher training rate
- Following the training programme Bedford Borough Council (Financial Assessment Team) and YMCA have requested in-house courses for their staff.

A **financial report** will be produced when all the course fees have been received.

Bedfordshire Benefits Network

These meetings continue to be well received and well attended.

BAF's Steering Group has decided to use some of its reserve to ensure that Benefits Network can continue this year. It is planned to arrange 2 meetings of the Network in 2017/18. The next meeting is on **20th September 2017** in Bedford.

Advice Strategy – Central Bedfordshire

This project work is funded by **Central Bedfordshire Council** and further funding has been agreed for 2017/18.

BAF is responsible for facilitating the **Advice Strategy Management Group** which oversees the Advice Strategy. Key action in 2017/18 will be to:

- Hold 3 meetings of the ASMG. (The next meeting is on 14/9/17)
- Oversee implementation of the new Advice Strategy for Central Bedfordshire and performance of the Strategy's Delivery Plan
- Continue to develop a Toolkit to support the Delivery Plan

You can see copies of the Advice Strategy and the Delivery Plan at:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council/stronger-communities/advice.aspx>

To support the Delivery Plan it is proposed that BAF leads on:

- Updating and promoting the use of BAF's Advice Directory (in Central Bedfordshire)
- Encouraging BAF members (working in Central Bedfordshire) to promote the Advice Strategy on their websites
- Delivering and promoting network meetings (ie BAF meetings and BBN meetings) for local advice providers (in Central Bedfordshire).

I will be contacting BAF members (focussing on those working in Central Bedfordshire) asking them to make sure that their entries on the Advice Directory are fully up-to-date.

Len Simkins
Project Consultant