

Advice and information in Bedford Borough – priority needs and gaps

	Types of information and advice		
Current provision	Social welfare / civil legal	Adult health and social care	Children, young people and families
<p>Current provision</p>	<p>Most social welfare advice providers in the Borough are members of Bedfordshire Advice Forum (BAF). They give advice on civil legal issues such as benefits, debt, employment law, housing law, consumer law and immigration.</p> <p>Full details of BAF members can be found on the online Bedfordshire Advice Directory www.bedsadvisedirectory.org.uk</p> <p>There are 25 voluntary and community sector BAF members that deliver social welfare information and advice services in Bedford Borough. These agencies provide a very wide range of information and advice services in terms of categories of advice, levels of advice, and client groups served. Some are information providers, some provide generalist advice, and some provide specialist advice services.</p> <p>Bedford Borough Council has 5 in-house teams providing social welfare information and advice services and there are also various other Council staff and in-house services that provide information (and sometimes basic advice) on social welfare issues as part of their wider work. Some staff in other statutory agencies also give information (and sometimes basic advice) on social welfare issues.</p> <p>There are also some other information and advice providers in the Borough that are not currently members of BAF – especially a number of small community groups.</p> <p>There are also 17 solicitors in the Borough providing civil legal advice, mainly in the area of family law.</p>	<p>In the Borough there is a wealth of health and social care information and advice that is provided by a wide range of organisations. In fact the majority of agencies in this sector have information and advice as one part of a wider support remit.</p> <p>Various information is also provided by the Borough Council including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Leaflets – 37 specific Adult Social Care leaflets • Directory of Information (Adults) – This gives details of services for adults. • Bedford Borough Council Website – From the designated section on Adult Social Care, users can access the online Directory of Information (Adults), and use links to various other information sources. • Social Services online self-assessments -People accessing Adult Social Services can now complete a request for further information and advice along with completing a self-assessment, which includes a carers self-assessment. • Media campaigns - Information on special events and national days (eg World Mental Health Day, Carers Week and the Borough's Older People's Celebration Day) is provided through a range of access points in the area in the voluntary and statutory sectors. <p>The NHS itself provides various information such as: Lifestyle Directory (with information on resources to support healthy lifestyles eg stop smoking, take exercise); Health Champions (providing health information, signposting and referrals for vulnerable people); Health Trainers (with Horizon Health, providing one-to-one support in for vulnerable communities on healthy lifestyle/behavioural change). A wide range of public health information resources (eg posters, DVDs games, books) is also available at www.bedshiro.nhs.uk</p> <p>In terms of advocacy for vulnerable people, the Borough Council (with Central Beds Council and NHS Bedfordshire) have recently awarded a single advocacy contract to POhWER.</p>	<p>Various information and advice is provided to children and families in the Borough through a wide range of agencies mainly in the voluntary sector.</p> <p>There are also 15 Children's Centres (including 4 in rural areas) which provide a range of support services to families including information and advice.</p> <p>Routine health information is provided by community services, sometimes in partnership with health services. For example, advice is given to new mothers by the 0-5 Team, health visitors, midwives, and through specialist project eg on breastfeeding.</p>
	<p>Information taken from <i>Developing an Advice Strategy</i>, Bedfordshire Advice Forum, March 2011, and from the <i>Advice Strategy 2011-2014</i>, Bedford Borough Partnership, June 2011.</p>	<p>Information taken from <i>Information, Advice and Advocacy Strategy 2010-2013</i>, Adult Social Care Services, November 2010, and provided by NHS Bedfordshire.</p>	

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Priority needs	<p>The general demand for social welfare advice services will increase over the next 10 years due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase in the Borough's population by 8%, to over 171,000, by 2021 • The ageing population • Increases in the population in rural areas • Increases in the BME population <p>Demand for advice is especially high in deprived areas. Three areas (in parts of Castle, Harpur and Cauldwell wards) are among the 10% most deprived areas in England and a further 6 areas are among the 20% most deprived nationally. There are also pockets of deprivation in some rural areas.</p> <p>There are 7 LSOAs in the 10% most deprived in England in terms of income deprivation affecting pensioners, and these 7 areas all have over 40% of pensioners living in income deprived households.</p> <p>There are 9 LSOAs in the top 10% most deprived nationally in terms of income deprivation affecting children. In 4 of these LSOAs (in parts of Castle, Harpur and Kingsbrook) over 60% of children are living in income deprived households.</p> <p>There is also high demand for advice from certain priority groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed people - especially NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training). • Disabled people • Carers • Homeless households • New migrants • Gypsies and Travellers • Short-term prisoners 	<p>Information, advice and advocacy is key to the Government's aims in "Putting People First", and the need to provide universal information and advice is now a statutory duty and obligation for Adult Social Care Services.</p> <p>Key issues affecting the need for advice are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General population increases • The ageing population with the 75-84 population forecast to rise by 31% and the 85+ population by 61% from 2008 – 2021. • BME communities are estimated to make up 22% of total population • Health inequalities in deprived areas of the Borough – for example, there is a gap of 11 years in life expectancy for men between the most affluent and poorest parts of Bedford, and a gap of 5 years for women. <p>The priorities for improving the health and wellbeing of adults include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing healthy life expectancy and reducing inequality. • Improving the health and wellbeing of residents • Creating a stronger and safer community • Improving the economic wellbeing of residents 	<p>A major issue for children and families is child poverty.</p> <p>In the Borough there are 6,800 children living in poverty which is almost 20% of all children. Four of the Borough's wards (Kingsbrook, Queens Park, Cauldwell and Goldington) have child poverty rates of over 30%.</p> <p>Nearly half the children living in poverty (47%) are living in families with three or more children. The majority of children living in poverty (67%) are living in a lone parent family.</p> <p>In terms of the health and wellbeing of children and young people, the priority needs are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure children have a healthy start to life • Ensure children and young people are able to make responsible decisions in relation to drugs, alcohol and sexual health • Promote, protect and treat the mental and emotional health of children and young people • Support children and young people to lead healthy lifestyles • Transform services for children with disabilities <p>The NHS provide specific support to Looked after Children, providing information both in relation to current circumstances (how to be healthier) but also in relation to making the transition to life beyond care.</p>
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Gaps and problem issues	<p>There is a lack of advice services for the general public – there is only one agency (Bedford CAB) that provides general advice to the wider public. The others serve special groups in the community.</p> <p>There are gaps and access issues in rural areas – all of the main advice providers are based in the urban area of Bedford and Kempston with few outreach services provided in the rural areas of the Borough. People living in the rural wards either have to use limited telephone services for advice or have to travel into Bedford.</p> <p>There is a lack of immigration advice providers - only one agency in the Borough (BRASS) can legally provide immigration advice above the very basic Level 1 service.</p> <p>Other gaps in services identified by BAF members (in a survey in 2010) included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • housing advice • benefits advice • debt advice and debt education/preventative work • home visiting service • general form filling service – especially for younger people • more joined up services for clients through innovative and partnership working • telephone advice • other methods of accessing advice • advice for parents and carers of young people under 18 • representation at tribunals • representation in County Court • physical space for confidential interviews 	<p>Problem issues identified in terms of social care advice include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about available services – there are lots of services being delivered but information about these is not always available • Having the information stored in the appropriate place - as part of personalisation process, there are approved providers. A big challenge is knowing where this information should sit so it can be accessible to all and kept up-to-date. • Availability in accessible formats - providing information in appropriate formats eg hard copies, electronic copies, large print, Braille, Easy read, different languages • Advice and support on benefits and debt - availability of this advice needs to be enhanced <p>One particular group where a lack of information and support has been specifically identified, by NHS Bedfordshire, is with veterans. Veterans (ie anyone who has experienced military service, or who is ex-military personnel) reported a lack of knowledge about where to access information and support, in relation to a number of key health, social care and welfare needs.</p> <p>The NHS also provides support to people from other specific vulnerable groups who face barriers accessing information and advice such as Gypsies and Travellers, homeless people, and migrant workers (where English is not a first language).</p>	<p>There are pockets of severe child poverty in the Borough, with 8 LSOAs having child poverty of over 40%. Of particular note is LSOA 537 in Queens Park ward where one in two children are living in poverty.</p> <p>A particular issue is the relatively low take-up of free school meals in the Borough.</p> <p>Children from certain groups are particularly at risk of living in child poverty. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in large families • Children from new emerging communities • Children from Gypsy, Traveller and Roma families • Young carers • Children with disabilities <p>It is acknowledged that joined up advice and support can make a real difference and enable people living in poverty to navigate their way through the maze of official information that is provided for benefit entitlement, health and other matters.</p>
	<p>Information taken from <i>Developing an Advice Strategy</i>, Bedfordshire Advice Forum, March 2011, and from the <i>Advice Strategy 2011-2014</i>, Bedford Borough Partnership, June 2011</p>	<p>Information taken from <i>Information, Advice and Advocacy Strategy 2010-2013</i>, Adult Social Care Services, November 2010, and from the <i>Veterans' Health Needs Assessment 2010</i>, NHS Bedfordshire, 2010.</p>	<p>Information taken from <i>Child Poverty Needs Assessment</i>, Bedford Borough Poverty Task Group, July 2011.</p>

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Possible future action	<p>The Borough's Advice Strategy recommends 23 action points within the 5 strategic aims of the Strategy.</p> <p>Many of the action points will strengthen the strategic approach to the planning, funding and provision of local advice services. The Strategy will also help the Borough respond effectively to changing needs for advice, enhance collaboration between agencies in the local advice sector, and ensure the quality of advice across the Borough.</p> <p>An Advice Management Group has been set up to oversee the Advice Strategy.</p> <p>In terms of the longer-term shape of the advice sector, issues that need to be considered are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring there is a good mix of “face-to-face” information and advice services at different levels in the Borough • Promoting the need for advice services in both urban and rural areas in the Borough • The feasibility of developing a central access point for telephone advice in the Borough • Improving access to written information on social welfare issues 	<p>Advice and information is one part of a fundamental transformation programme to change how Adult Social Care is planned and delivered. Various projects will bring about these changes including:</p> <p>Adult Integrated System (AIS) Project – which will develop updated ICT systems to deliver infrastructure to provide online support, information and advice.</p> <p>Workforce Development Strategy for the Council and provider agencies – which will identify the skills and knowledge needed by staff to deliver high quality advice and information services to the public.</p> <p>Market Shaping Strategy – which will scope and develop the market to increase the choice of support and care organisations within Bedford</p> <p>Advice and information is a key part of the whole “customer journey” which includes “First Contact”, assessment, support planning, brokerage and review. It is important that information sources are able to help the public and social care workers at every stage of the process and that advice is seen as a possible solution to an individual's needs. This is all addressed in the Borough's Universal Information, Advice and Advocacy Strategy.</p> <p>In terms of veterans, NHS Bedfordshire should support veterans in partnership with other key organisations. The support could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a directory of services, for use by veterans' agencies. • The use of a single/central point of contact for information, both for health and wider information needs of veterans. • Effective and accessible advocacy services for veterans and the families of veterans. • Veterans' peer support services 	<p>Following publication of the Borough's Child Poverty Needs Assessment, the Poverty Task Group has agreed a series of Child Poverty Pledges to help tackle local child poverty.</p> <p>One of the Child Poverty Pledges in the Borough is to provide joined-up advice and information as proposed in the Borough's Advice Strategy.</p> <p>Another Pledge is to improve the take-up of free school meals by developing a better understanding of free school meal uptake by school, tier of schooling and catering supplier.</p>
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