

Advice Services and Children's Centres

**Research into the current and potential links between
children's centres and advice agencies in Bedfordshire -
covering Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire**

BEDFORDSHIRE **A**DVICE **F**ORUM

January 2010

This report has been produced by **Infotrain**
for **Bedfordshire Advice Forum**

BEDFORDSHIRE ADVICE FORUM

Promoting and supporting the provision of advice and information services in Bedfordshire

The research was **funded** by the Local Area Boards
for Children's Centres (in Bedford, Mid Beds and South Beds),
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- to support advice services in Bedfordshire

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CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
<u>SECTION</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1. INTRODUCTION	10
1.1 Background to the research	
1.2 Aims of the research	
1.3 Methodology	
1.4 Project management	
1.5 Acknowledgments	
2. CHILD POVERTY AND ADVICE WORK	12
2.1 Child poverty	
2.2 Advice work - a tool in tackling child poverty	
2.3 Current good practice in other areas	
3. CHILDREN'S CENTRES IN BEDFORDSHIRE	18
3.1 History of Children's Centres in Bedfordshire	
3.2 Services provided by Children's Centres	
3.3 Children's Centres in Bedford Borough	
3.4 Children's Centres in Central Bedfordshire	
4. ADVICE PROVISION IN BEDFORDSHIRE	22
4.1 History of advice provision in Bedfordshire	
4.2 Bedfordshire Advice Forum	
4.3 Advice services in Bedford Borough	
4.4 Advice services in Central Bedfordshire	
5. CURRENT LINKS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND THE ADVICE SECTOR IN BEDFORD BOROUGH	26
5.1 Introduction	
5.2 Current advice services	
5.3 Other current links and related services	
5.4 Current issues and problems	
6. POTENTIAL FUTURE LINKS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND THE ADVICE SECTOR IN BEDFORD BOROUGH	31
6.1 Introduction	
6.2 Potential future advice related services	
6.3 Other potential links	
6.4 Potential issues and opportunities	

7.	CURRENT LINKS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND THE ADVICE SECTOR IN CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE	35
	7.1 Introduction	
	7.2 Current advice services	
	7.3 Other current links and related services	
	7.4 Current issues and problems	
8.	POTENTIAL FUTURE LINKS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND THE ADVICE SECTOR IN CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE	40
	8.1 Introduction	
	8.2 Potential future advice related services	
	8.3 Other potential links	
	8.4 Potential issues and opportunities	
9.	CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS	44
	9.1 Introduction	
	9.2 Recommendations	
	9.3 Next steps	

<u>APPENDIX</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	48
2. BEDFORDSHIRE ADVICE FORUM MEMBERS	50
2. QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO CHILDREN'S CENTRES	51
3. QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO BAF MEMBERS	55

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This research was undertaken by Infotrain on behalf of Bedfordshire Advice Forum (BAF) in 2009. Funding for the work was provided by the Local Area Boards for Children's Centres in Bedford, Mid Beds and South Beds. (shortly before Local Government Reorganisation in April 2009).

The aims of the research were to:

- (a) Identify the current links between Children's Centres and advice providers in Bedfordshire (now **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**)
- (b) Identify good practice in other areas of the country
- (c) Determine the needs of local Children's Centres in terms of advice provision, and the ability of local advice agencies to deliver services to meet those needs
- (d) Identify potential future links and partnership opportunities between local Children's Centres and advice agencies

The research work was divided into three main elements:

- Research into child poverty and the role of advice work in helping to tackle poverty
- Research into existing good practice from other areas
- Research into the current links, and potential future links, between Children's Centres and advice agencies in **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**

Research findings

Key findings from the research can be grouped under the following headings:

Child poverty and advice work

- There are 2.9 million children living in poverty in the UK
- There are several pockets of high deprivation in the East of England - including in Bedfordshire.
- NI 116 (Proportion of children living in poverty) has been adopted as an indicator in the Local Area Agreements for both **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**
- In **Bedford Borough**, 19% of children (over 6,500 children) live in workless families and 39% of children (over 13,600) live in low income families

- In **Central Bedfordshire**, 12% of children (over 6,600 children) live in workless families, and 27% of children (over 14,900 children) live in low income families
- The provision of a variety of support services through Children's Centres is seen as a key tool in supporting families to tackle child poverty.
- Access to impartial, confidential advice, practical assistance and representation on a wide range of civil legal matters (such as benefits, debt, housing, employment) can play an essential role in tackling poverty and inequalities and improving quality of life.
- The benefits of providing advice, and associated support services, through Children's Centres and well acknowledged
- There are a variety of examples of good practice from around the country showing how advice services can be provided through Children's Centres

Children's Centre in Bedfordshire - general information

- In recent years Children's Centres have been set up across the country to try to give children the best possible start in life by providing integrated services and information for children under 5 and their families.
- There are currently 11 Children's Centres in **Bedford Borough**, mainly within the urban areas of Bedford and Kempston. Plans are in place to open four new Children's Centres in rural areas in the Borough.
- There are currently 14 Children's Centres in **Central Bedfordshire**. Plans are in place to develop another eight new Children's Centres serving rural areas in Central Bedfordshire.
- Children's Centres provide a wide range of services to support families and children, especially in areas of deprivation - and the Centres are seen as a key tool in helping to tackle child poverty

Advice provision in Bedfordshire - general information

- The development of civil legal advice services in Bedfordshire has been very ad hoc and has not been planned in any way - with advice agencies opening and closing over at different times over the last few decades.
- Bedfordshire Advice Forum (BAF) is the network for advice and information providers from the not-for-profit sector in Bedfordshire. It currently has 42 members which provide a wide variety of advice services to different client groups.
- In **Bedford Borough**, seven BAF members have confirmed that they would be interested in developing closer links with local Children's Centres to provide a variety of advice services to families.
- In **Central Bedfordshire**, seven BAF members have confirmed that they would be interested in developing closer links with local Children's Centres to provide a variety of advice services to families.

Current links between Children's Centres and advice agencies in Bedfordshire

- There are a number of examples of existing partnership working between Children's Centres and local advice agencies
- In **Bedford Borough** specific advice related projects include outreach advice surgeries and financial capability training in various Children's Centres in Bedford and Kempston.
- In **Central Bedfordshire** specific advice related projects include outreach advice surgeries in Children's Centres in Houghton Regis, Dunstable, and Shefford,
- Some Children's Centres also:
 - Actively signpost users to advice agencies when needed
 - Display a variety of leaflets on advice agencies and advice issues
 - Have internet kiosks where users can access selected advice and information websites
- There are, however, a number of issues and problems with current projects in both **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**. These include::
 - **Location** - Children's Centres are not always located in the best place to attract users
 - **Attracting users** - Users at Children's Centres normally attend a Centre for a specific service or event and are therefore unlikely to use an occasional advice surgery (unless it has become very well established at the Centre)
 - **Premises** - Some of the Children's Centres do not have dedicated premises and it is therefore difficult to arrange advice surgeries

Potential future links between Children's Centres and advice agencies in Bedfordshire

- The following advice related services were identified as potential future services in both **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**
 - More drop-in advice sessions at Children's Centres
 - Home visiting service
 - Development of referral systems
 - Provision of leaflets detailing services of BAF members.
 - Provision of information leaflets on specific advice topics such as benefits and debt.
 - Provision of specific advice related training for Children's Centre staff.
 - Access to BAF training programmes for Children's Centre staff
 - Visits / talks by staff or volunteers from BAF member agencies.
 - Shadowing / visits by Children's Centre staff to advice agencies
 - Opportunities for Centre users to volunteer at an advice centre
 - Internet kiosks at the Centres to be linked to advice related websites

- There were, however, some problems, issues and opportunities that were identified relating to possible future links in both **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**:
 - **Funding** - Some funding would be needed for some of the extra services identified. Clarification was also needed, for some Centres, on what services they were able to commission. There were also opportunities for partnership working that would need to be explored.
 - **Facilities / premises** - Not all the Centres would be able to provide confidential rooms for advice surgeries and some lack space for displays of leaflets and publicity material
 - **Main problems / advice issues** - The most pressing issues for Children's Centre users seemed to be: debt and money management; practical issues surrounding relationship breakdown; and access to, or challenging of, health or community care services.

NB Full details of the research findings for **Bedford Borough** are in **Sections 2, 3, 5 and 6** of this report. Full details of the research findings for **Central Bedfordshire** are in **Sections 2, 3, 7 and 8** of this report.

Conclusion

A summary of the conclusions from the research are that:

- There are high levels of child poverty in the UK - including in a number of wards in **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**
- There is now general acknowledgement locally that child poverty is a serious issue in **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire** - and that tackling child poverty should be high on the political agenda in both the unitary authorities
- There is a general acceptance (from the Government, Children's Centres and advice agencies) that advice services can help in tackling poverty - and that they should be part of the range of services provided by Children's Centres
- There are a number of examples of good practice, in the provision of advice services at Children's Centres, in different parts of the country - including at some Children's Centres in **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**
- The feedback obtained during this research, from local Children's Centres and from local advice agencies (in responses to the research questionnaires and in subsequent discussions), has shown that:
 - There is strong support for, and a willingness to, develop further links between the Children's Centres and advice agencies through partnership working.
 - Different Children's Centres have different needs and different facilities, so a "one size fits all" approach to providing advice services would not be appropriate. Advice services would therefore need to be tailored to meet the needs of individual Centres.

- There are a number of potential ways in which links between the Children's Centres and local advice agencies could be developed. The most popular suggestions included:
 - Arranging drop-in advice sessions at Children's Centres - provided by one (or more) BAF members
 - Arranging home visits to Centre users by advisers, when needed
 - Developing better systems for distributing advice related leaflets to Children's Centres - including leaflets on services of BAF members, and information leaflets on specific advice topics
 - Providing advice related training for Children's Centre staff
 - Allocating places for Children's Centre staff on BAF training courses
 - Organising talks, and other promotional events, at Children's Centres (for staff and users) run by BAF members

NB Further details of the research conclusions are in **Section 9.1**

Recommendations

This research has helped to successfully raise greater awareness of the current links between Children's Centres and local advice agencies, and has opened the debate on ways to strengthen and enhance these links.

A number of **recommendations** can be made following the research. These are listed below under the following headings:

- Communication and networking
- Training
- General funding recommendations
- Specific recommended project
- Strategic planning

Communication and networking

1. BAF should publicise the new online Advice Directory widely with Children's Centres
2. BAF should compile a register of advice agencies that are willing and able to offer outreach services to Children's Centres
3. All Children's Centres should be offered the opportunity to go on BAF's mailing list in order to receive copies of newsletters, information about BAF training courses and other useful communications
4. Children's Centres that currently actively provide information or advice on civil legal issues should consider joining Bedfordshire Advice Forum

5. Children's Centres should consider inviting relevant BAF members to talk about their work at Centre team meetings
6. BAF members should invite Children's Centre staff to attend team meetings at their agencies to talk about their work and develop stronger cross-referral procedures
7. BAF members should explore the possibility of running recruitment days at Children's Centres to encourage Centre users to get involved in volunteering at advice agencies
8. Inform 0-19 should liaise with BAF regarding the forthcoming programme of training on use of the internet kiosks - to develop links via the kiosks to the online Advice Directory, BAF member websites and other advice related websites

Training

9. BAF should offer spare places on its training courses to Children's Centre staff (at the usual BAF member rate for courses)
10. Children's Centre area managers should consider commissioning BAF members to provide group training for staff (from a number of Children's Centres) on relevant advice related issues

General funding recommendations

11. Children's Centre area managers should encourage Children's Centres to consider commissioning more direct advice services from BAF members
12. Relevant BAF members should be encouraged to consider securing further funding (either individually or through joint bids) to provide outreach services to Children's Centres. If possible this funding should be for 2-3 years to allow Centre users to become familiar with the service - as shorter term initiatives are likely to be unsuccessful.
13. **Bedford Borough Council** and **Central Bedfordshire Council** should encourage partnership working (between Children's Centres and BAF members), and joint funding bids in their areas, to provide advice services across the whole of their authority areas - rather than in individual Children's Centres

Specific suggested project

14. Consideration should be given to applying for funding for an area based advice worker (or team of workers) who could support a number of Children's Centres in an area. The worker(s) could provide a variety of services – telephone advice (to users and centre staff), regular outreach advice sessions (and appointments), home visits, training and other advice related support for Centre staff. The dedicated worker(s), who could be hosted by a BAF member, would then build up specialist skills and relationships in working with Centre users and staff in their areas.

Strategic planning

15. In order for the above recommendations to be taken forward, an overall recommendation is that a strategic plan be developed to look at the advice needs and priorities for all of the Children's Centres (in **Bedford Borough** and in **Central Bedfordshire**). This plan should link in with the Child Poverty Strategy and the Advice Strategy that are currently being drafted in both **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**. It is recommended that the new Children's Trusts should lead on the development of this strategic plan using, initially, the findings of this research report.

NB Further details of the recommendations are in **Section 9.2**

Next steps

This report on the research will be distributed to all local Children's Centres and to BAF members. It is then proposed that discussions should be held in **Bedford Borough** and in **Central Bedfordshire** (perhaps at the network meetings for Children's Centre managers and then at Children's Trust meetings) to develop a strategic plan based on the recommendations.

It is hoped that this research will then lead to greater links between Children's Centres and advice agencies in both areas, and that these links, and the resulting enhanced advice services, will help in the overall objectives of reducing local child poverty in **Bedford Borough** and in **Central Bedfordshire**.

It is also hoped that the recent launch of the online Bedfordshire Advice Directory, which was funded in conjunction with this research, should be a catalyst to improving communication and developing stronger links between the local Children's Centres and advice agencies.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the research

In February 2009, Bedfordshire Advice Forum was commissioned by the Local Area Boards responsible for Children's Centres across the then Bedfordshire County Council area to conduct research into the development of closer links between the Centres and members of the Forum. The resultant report was to be used to help the Boards plan their future strategy in terms of developing partnerships with local agencies for the delivery of civil legal advice within the Children's Centres.

Following the division of the county into two administrative areas (Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire) in April 2009 this report has been produced as one common document but with separate sections detailing the specific results from the Children's Centres within each new unitary authority.

This report contains

- An exploration of the importance of advice work in tackling child poverty
- The background and history of Children's Centres in the local area
- The history, and current provision, of advice services in Bedfordshire
- An analysis of the current links between local Children's Centres and advice agencies
- An exploration of potential future links between local Children's Centres and advice agencies
- A conclusion and recommendations

The grant awarded to BAF for this research work also included an element to develop an **online Advice Directory** which would give full details of all the advice agencies in the local area. This new Directory, which will be launched at the same time as this research report, will be a very useful tool for Children's Centres staff and users.

1.2 Aims of the research

The aims of the research were to:

- (a) Identify the current links between Children's Centres and advice providers in Bedfordshire (now Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire)
- (b) Identify good practice in other areas of the country
- (c) Determine the needs of local Children's Centres in terms of advice provision, and the ability of local advice agencies to deliver services to meet those needs
- (d) Identify potential future links and partnership opportunities between local Children's Centres and advice agencies

1.3 Methodology

The research work was divided into three main elements:

(a) Child poverty and the benefits of advice work

This work involved:

- Collation of research into child poverty and its local effects
- Research into the role of advice work provision in tackling child poverty

(b) Existing good practice from other areas

This work involved:

- Desk top research into examples of good practice in developing links between advice providers and Children's Centres in other areas

(c) Local research into current links and potential future links

This work involved:

- Making a presentation to team meetings of Children's Centre managers to explain the background to, and purpose of, the research
- Designing and circulating questionnaires to all local Children's Centres and to members of Bedfordshire Advice Forum (see **Appendices 3 and 4**)
- Analysing the results from returned questionnaires
- Follow-up discussions with selected Children's Centres and advice agencies

1.4 Project Management

Infotrain's work on the research was overseen by the Steering Group of Bedfordshire Advice Forum.

An **action plan for the research** was prepared at the beginning of the project by Infotrain and presented to Bedfordshire Advice Forum and the Heads of Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention for Central Bedfordshire (Sue Tyler) and Bedford Borough (Anne Cheveralls).

During the project, meetings were arranged with the Sue and Anne to update them on the research, and this **final report** has been completed after consultation with them.

1.5 Acknowledgements

Thanks need to be given to a number of people and organisations that have been involved in this research.

A list of **acknowledgements** can be found in **Appendix 1** of this report.

2. CHILD POVERTY AND ADVICE WORK

2.1 Child Poverty

The UK has one of the worst records of child poverty in the European Union, with 2.9 million children living in poverty. In 1999 the Government pledged to halve child poverty by 2010 and to eradicate it by 2020.

While the East of England has the lowest average rate of child poverty in the UK, there are several pockets of high deprivation in the region - including in Bedfordshire.

In the local area, NI 116 (Proportion of children living in poverty) was adopted as one of the indicators in Bedfordshire's Local Area Agreement in 2008. This indicator was then transferred into the new LAAs adopted in the two new unitary areas (Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire) after Local Government Re-organisation in April 2009.

It is recognised, nationally and now locally, that it is essential to tackle child poverty, as the effects of poverty in childhood are far-reaching and can be long lasting – including under achievement at school, low aspirations, poor health and lower life expectancy. It is also accepted that there can also be serious detrimental effects on the whole community if child poverty is left unchecked.

As part of the management of NI 116 for the LAAs (which are the agreements between the main public sector agencies in the area and central government) some research was commissioned earlier this year into local child poverty. This research showed the levels of child poverty in the two new unitary authority areas.

Bedford Borough

- **9 Local Super Output Areas in Bedford are ranked in the top 10% in England for child poverty**
These LSOAs are in the wards of Castle, Harpur, Kingsbrook, Goldington, Queens Park, Cauldwell and Kempston North
- **19% of children (over 6,500 children) live in workless families**
In the wards of Kingsbrook, Queens Park, Cauldwell and Goldington this figure rises to over 30%
- **39% of children (over 13,600) live in low income families**
In the wards of Queens Park, Cauldwell, Kingsbrook and Goldington this figure rises to over 50%

NB Low-income families include workless families and working families in receipt of Working Tax Credit.

Central Bedfordshire

- **The Local Super Output Areas with the highest child poverty in Central Bedfordshire are in the old South Bedfordshire area**
The wards of Manshead, Tithe Farm and Houghton Hall have LSOAs ranked in the top 20 LSOAs for child poverty in Bedfordshire
- **12% of children (over 6,600 children) live in workless families**
In the wards of Tithe Farm, Manshead and Parkside this figure rises to over 25%
- **27% of children (over 14,900 children) live in low income families**
In the wards of Tithe Farm, Parkside, Manshead and Northfields this figure rises to 40% or over

NB Low-income families include workless families and working families in receipt of Working Tax Credit.
- **In Central Bedfordshire there are a number of pockets of hidden deprivation in the rural areas**

A full copy of the research report (*Child Poverty in Bedfordshire*), which was published in May 2009, is available on the child poverty page on the Bedfordshire Tackling Poverty Together Group website: www.tacklingpoverty-beds.org.uk

The strategic work on tackling child poverty in Bedfordshire (and now in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire) has emphasised that child poverty is not just about children themselves – it is about families. For example, in the UK, lone parent families are particularly vulnerable to poverty and teenage mothers are three times as likely to suffer poverty compared with older mothers.

To try to reduce child poverty, and improve the outcomes and life chances for children, it is therefore important to look at ways of supporting parents and families. The provision of a variety of support services through Children's Centres is seen as a key tool in supporting families to tackle child poverty. This approach is confirmed in the research report, *Outreach to Children and Families*, published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2009.

Our local research looks at whether providing advice services through Children's Centres is something that should be promoted and extended as part of the range of services provided by local Children's Centres.

2.2 Advice work - a tool in tackling child poverty

Access to impartial, confidential advice, practical assistance and representation on a wide range of civil legal matters can play an essential role in tackling poverty and inequalities and improving quality of life.

Civil legal advice covers areas such as debt, unemployment, access to benefits, relationship breakdown, immigration, and consumer problems.

Advice on dealing with **debt** has been found to result not only in reduced levels of debt but improvements in reported health and well-being and reduced anxiety - with these improvements being linked to the debt advice received.

Benefits and tax credits play a vital role in boosting the incomes of families facing poverty, both in and out of work. Yet many families miss out on the benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled either because they do not claim or are unable to challenge poor decision making and administration relating to their claims. Welfare benefits advice should therefore be an important tool in any strategy to end child poverty.

Trained advice workers can often identify **additional sources of income** for individual clients. Advice agencies can also organise benefits take-up campaigns to target hard-to-reach groups and communities. Increased take-up of benefits and tax credits could have a huge impact on many families because £5-£9 billion of means-tested benefits goes unclaimed each year in the UK. For example, a lone parent with two children working 30 hours a week earning the minimum wage, could almost double their income by being advised to claim child and working tax credits.

In the current economic climate, advice agencies are seeing increasing numbers of clients who are in work but facing short-time working, pay freezes, pay cuts and in some cases redundancy. Advice about **employment rights** can help prevent job loss, resolve employment disputes, and sometimes help people obtain compensation through tribunal claims.

Debt and job loss are two of the major causes of **relationship breakdown**, which in turn is a major cause of poverty. Help to deal with the problems at the outset can sometimes prevent relationship breakdown and, even where it is inevitable, accurate and timely advice can play an important role in reducing the stress for the adults involved and minimizing the impact on children.

The need for advice services (especially regarding advice on benefits and tax credits) to be used in strategies to tackle child poverty has been highlighted by the Government's Child Poverty Unit in its report **Take Up the Challenge**, published in 2009. The strong recommendation in this report is for local authorities and partners to develop strategies to promote the take-up of benefits and tax credits and the report identified eight principles of effective ways to do this. One of the good practice case studies given in the report related to the advice services being provided in Children's Centres in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. (See **Section 2.3** in this report).

The research report, ***Outreach to Children and Families***, published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2009 also confirms the benefits of providing advice and associated support services through Children's Centres. Some quotes from this research are given below.

"Some well-established Children's Centres, which have grown out of Sure Start Local Programmes, have developed services which include helping families with debt, housing, or benefit problems..."

"Results show time and time again that it is difficult for stressed families to benefit from parenting programmes when they face multiple disadvantages and thus policies that reduce everyday stresses in the lives of families (including poverty, unemployment, poor health, housing and education) will support parents in caring for their children."

"Inferior housing has been linked to lower educational attainment and health problems and outreach support for families with children living in temporary accommodation is highly relevant to improving outcomes for those children."

As part of the above research, a selection of parents at Children's Centres was asked about the types of support which would be helpful to them. Interestingly 58% of the parents interviewed said that advice and information was a preference for them.

2.3 Current good practice in other areas

There are a number of projects and schemes already in operation across the country where Children's Centres and advice services are working in partnership. There is much that can be learnt from these examples of good practice.

Halton, Cheshire

In Halton the Borough's Children's Centres are working with Citizens Advice to manage parents' debts and ensure they claim all the benefits to which they are entitled.

Citizens Advice provides a fast-track service of home visits to parents of under-fives. This scheme raised almost £300,000 in extra benefits and managed just under £400,000 of debt for the 479 families it helped in 2008.

Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire

Children's Centre outreach services are run by the local CAB providing advice on debt, law, housing, benefits and unemployment.

Another local advice agency, Hope Debt Advice Service, also provides support services.

Loughborough, Leicestershire

In the Loughborough area, advice on housing related rights and options is now being provided for families at five local Children's Centres.

As part of the service families can be advised on things like homelessness, finding accommodation, waiting lists & transfer lists issues, harassment & anti-social behaviour matters, unlawful eviction, disrepair problems, rent and mortgage arrears, notices & possession proceedings, and housing benefit issues.

The service is being provided by The Bridge, a local advice agency which specialises in housing advice.

Solihull and Birmingham

A 2007 project in Solihull and Birmingham aimed to deliver Advice, Information and Guidance within all the area Children's Centres.

Local organisations were invited to bid to provide the services within each Centre wishing to take part in the project. Bidding organisations were asked who would be providing the service – staff member or partner organisation – and whether the staff delivering the service had any qualification eg NVQ level 3 Advice and Guidance.

Some organisations who were unable to bid for the contracts but wished to be involved - BID Services for deaf people, RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) and Birmingham Disability Resources Centre – agreed to take referrals from the Children's Centres

Bath and North East Somerset

Free advice about debt, financial issues and benefits is available to families using the Children's Centres in Odd Down and Tiverton.

The Council has commissioned the local Citizens Advice Bureau to run free drop-in and appointment sessions at the two Children's Centres. These sessions are open to any family, including those who live in other areas of Bath or North East Somerset.

Barking and Dagenham, London

In this London Borough a holistic package of support is delivered through Children's Centres as part of the Borough's child poverty agenda. All residents can easily access a seamless range of support services including welfare benefits advice, Housing Benefit outreach services, and support from Jobcentre Plus.

Services will be expanded in the future to include debt management support, training for frontline staff and direct support from HMRC on tax credits

Child Poverty Action Group

CPAG, the national campaigning charity, has obtained funding from the Department for Children, Schools and Families to provide a programme of welfare training courses to Children's Centre staff aimed at enabling them to help families achieve economic wellbeing.

The training, which will start in 2010, will be provided in three pilot areas - in the North East, the West Midlands and London.

In conducting this research we have also discovered various examples of existing good practice in Bedfordshire (now Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire). (See **Sections 5 and 7** in this report for details).

3. CHILDREN'S CENTRES IN BEDFORDSHIRE

3.1 History of Children's Centres in Bedfordshire

Children's Centres aim to give children the best possible start in life by providing integrated services and information for children under 5 and their families. They have developed out of the Government's Sure Start initiative of 1997, which was launched in recognition of the fact that deprivation was blighting the lives of too many children and families in disadvantaged areas. The current estimate is that by 2010 there will be 3,500 Children's Centres across the country – one for every community.

Although Children's Centres tend to have local authority ward-based catchment areas, anyone can attend any centre in the country. Many make no charge for the activities on offer.

In Bedfordshire Children's Centres have been developed in three phases.

The **Phase 1 Children's Centres** were opened in the period 2004 - 2006. These initial Children's Services were "bolted on" to existing service provision including Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence centres, and were set up in the areas of highest deprivation.

The **Phase 2 Children's Centres** were developed in the period 2006 - 2008 after consultations with local councillors, professionals and families to evaluate existing services, find potential new venues, and identify potential joint working.

For the last phase of the development (2008 - 2010), **Phase 3 Children's Centres** are being set up in rural areas. Following LGR in April 2009, overall responsibility for local Children's Centres (including completion of the Phase 3 developments) has passed from Bedfordshire County Council to the new unitary authorities in **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**.

3.2 Services provided by Children's Centres

Different services have been built up over time through the different development phases.

The Children's Centres in areas with high deprivation provide a full range of services including:

- Integrated childcare and early learning
- Child and family health services including ant-natal care
- Outreach and family support services
- Links with Jobcentre Plus for training and employment advice
- Childminder Network
- Support for children with special educational needs

Other services also provided at some Children's Centres include:

- Information and advice on early years, childcare, and child and family health
- Links to local childminders
- Provision of group activities / drop-ins for families

At one local Children's Centre we found the following list of activities, which seems to be a fairly typical variety of activities:

- Basic computer course for parents
- Health visitor drop-in
- Family counselling - provided by Relate
- Basic first aid sessions for new mums and dads
- Appointments and advice sessions - provided by Lone Parent Advisor (JobCentre Plus)
- Training on basic money skills - provided by CAB
- FREEDOM – support group for women experiencing domestic abuse
- Police surgeries
- Saturday morning session for dads and children

3.3 Children's Centres in Bedford Borough

There are currently 11 Children's Centres in Bedford Borough, mainly within Bedford town. The Centres are listed below:

Phase	Name	Ward(s) served
Phase 1	Eastcotts Children's Centre	Eastcotts
	Kingsbrook Children's Centre	Kingsbrook
	Goldington Children's Centre	Goldington
	Queens Park Neighbourhood Centre	Queens Park
	Peter Pan Children's Centre	Cauldwell
Phase 2	Bedford Central Children's Centre	Castle, Newnham
	Clapham Children's Centre	Clapham
	Daisy Hill Children's Centre	Kempston North, Kempston East (part)
	Pear Tree Children's Centre	Kempston South, Kempston East (part)
	Pine Cones Children's Centre	Harpur, De Parys, Brickhill
	Putnoe Children's Centre	Putnoe

Contracts have recently been awarded for four new **Phase 3** Children's Centres serving the rural areas of the Borough. These Phase 3 Centres will cover a large geographical area and will be based on an outreach model for service delivery, operating from a variety of community venues.

Phase	Base	Ward(s) served
Phase 3	Bromham Lower School	Bromham, Oakley, Carlton
	Great Barford Lower School	Great Barford, Roxton, Renhold
	Sharnbrook Upper School – attached to the nursery building	Sharnbrook, Harrold, Riseley
	Wilstead Lower School	Wilstead

By the time the Phase 3 Children's Centres are opened it is estimated that a total of 8,384 children (aged under 5) will have access to local Children's Centre services in Bedford Borough.

Although Bedford Borough Council has overall responsibility for Children's Centre provision, the individual Centres are managed by a variety of different organisations including Sure Start Cauldwell, Spurgeons and Christian Family Care.

3.4 Children's Centres in Central Bedfordshire

There are currently 14 Children's Centres in Central Bedfordshire.

Two Centres below were part of the **Phase 1** development.

Phase	Name	Ward(s) served
Phase 1	The Lawns Children's Centre	Biggleswade Holme, Biggleswade Ivel, Biggleswade Stratton
	Tithe Farm Neighbourhood Centre	Tithe Farm

A further 12 Centres were opened in **Phase 2** - see overleaf.

Phase	Name	Ward(s) served
Phase 2	Arlesey Children's Centre	Arlesey
	Beehive Children's Centre	Northfields, Dunstable Central, Chiltern
	Chestnut Children's Centre	Potton and Wensley
	Downside Neighbourhood Centre	Manshead
	Flitwick Children's Centre	Flitwick East, Flitwick West
	Leighton Buzzard Children's Centre	Plantation, Planets, All Saints, Linslade
	Marston Vale Children's Centre	Marston, Wootton
	Orchard Children's Centre	Southill and Old Warden, Shefford, Campton and Gravenhurst
	Parkside Neighbourhood Centre	Parkside, Houghton Hall
	Sandy Community Centre	Sandy Ivel, Sandy Pinnacle
	South Beds Rural 1 Children's Centre	Toddington, Stanbridge, Streatley
	South Beds Rural 2 Children's Centre	Caddington, Hyde and Slip End, Kensworth and Tottenhamhoe, Eaton Bray

Contracts have recently been awarded for eight new **Phase 3** Children's Centres serving rural areas in Central Bedfordshire. These Phase 3 Centres will cover a large geographical area and will be based on an outreach model for service delivery, operating from a variety of community venues. The Centres will cover the wards of:

- Ampthill
- Barton
- Cranfield
- Dunstable Icknield
- Henlow and area (in Stondon)
- Linslade
- Silsoe
- Stotfold

By the time the Phase 3 Children's Centres are opened it is estimated that a total of over 17,000 children (aged under 5) will have access to local Children's Centre services in Central Bedfordshire.

Although Central Bedfordshire Council has overall responsibility for Children's Centre provision in the area, the individual Centres are managed by a variety of different organisations including Spurgeons and Christian Family Care.

4. ADVICE PROVISION IN BEDFORDSHIRE

4.1 History of advice provision in Bedfordshire

Advice services are provided by a variety of organisations in the local area including private solicitors, in-house Council services, and a wide range of organisations from the voluntary and community sector.

In this report, we are concentrating on advice services provided by the not-for-profit sector, and are referring to advice on civil legal issues such as debt, benefits, employment and housing.

The development of civil legal advice services in Bedfordshire has been very ad hoc and has not been planned in any way - in marked contrast to the development of the local Children's Centres.

The first recognised advice agency in the area was probably Bedford Citizens Advice Bureau which opened in February 1940 which was part of the network of CABx that were opened to help the public during World War 2. Since then other CABx have opened in Dunstable (1959), Leighton Linlade (1975), and Mid Bedfordshire (1979).

The 1960s and 1970s also saw a large growth in advice work across the country. For example, in the local area, Bedford Race Equality Council opened in 1966 and the Housing Action Group was formed in 1969. (The HAG later became Bedfordshire Housing Aid Centre in 1983).

The 1980s saw the development of in-house advice services at the County Council with the Welfare Rights Unit being formed in 1988.

Other agencies have started providing an advice service more recently. For example, BPHA added a welfare rights officer to its staff in 1998 and then in 2007 expanded the team and its remit to also include money advice for its tenants.

Changes in the national and local environment have also brought about the need for new services. A good example is the development of Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support (BRASS) which opened in 1999 to provide services for the growing number of refugees and asylum seekers coming to the local area. Also Bedford Race Equality Council (BREC) added advice on race discrimination to its range of services in 2001 and then, in 2007, extended this service to cover advice on all the equality strands.

It is important to remember that the history of the local advice sector is not all about expansion and new advice agencies opening - there have also been closures of centres. In fact in recent times Bedfordshire Housing Aid Centre was forced to close due to cuts in funding in 2007, and just this year Bedford Community Rights Centre had to close after over 25 years of providing advice for the local community.

4.2 Bedfordshire Advice Forum

Bedfordshire Advice Forum (BAF) is the network for advice and information providers from the not-for-profit sector in Bedfordshire.

The Forum was originally established in 1997 as Bedford Advice Forum but has expanded over the years to incorporate agencies across the old Mid and South Bedfordshire (now Central Bedfordshire) areas.

The aims of BAF are to:

- Promote and support the provision of advice and information services in Bedfordshire
- Provide a forum for exchanging information on the provision, gaps and resource requirements of advice and information services in Bedfordshire
- Deliver and support training in collaboration with BAF member agencies
- Seek funding for projects to develop advice services relevant to local needs

The Forum currently has 42 members which include: public advice agencies; Council advice services; in-house services providing advice to an organisation's own clients or users; and other organisations where advice is just part of a wider service. A full list of BAF members is attached at **Appendix 2**.

BAF provides a wide range of infrastructure support services for its members including:

- Arranging regular forum meetings for members
- Organising training courses on advice subjects and skills
- Keeping a website for BAF members
- Representing BAF members at relevant strategic meetings and in relevant local partnerships
- Developing and maintaining an online Advice Directory
- Conducting research on advice related issues
- Encouraging the development of advice strategies in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire

BAF is a member of Voluntary Works, the Consortium of infrastructure organisations for the voluntary and community sector in Bedfordshire and Luton

BAF also represents the advice sector in various networks and partnership meetings including:

- Bedford Assembly
- Social Inclusion, Community Cohesion and Culture Thematic Partnership (Bedford Borough)
- Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership (Central Bedfordshire)
- Child Poverty Strategy Group (Central Bedfordshire)

4.3 Advice services in Bedford Borough

The following 29 BAF members provide advice services in Bedford Borough.

- Advocacy Alliance
- Age Concern Bedfordshire
- Anchor 'Staying Put' Bedford
- Bedford & District CAB
- Bedford Borough Council - Benefits and Community Welfare Service
- Bedford Borough Council - Housing Options
- Bedford Borough Council - Inform 0-19 Service
- Bedford Borough Council - Trading Standards Service
- Bedford Borough Council - Welfare Rights Team
- Bedford College - Student Services
- Bedford Housing Link
- Bedford Credit Union
- Bedford Race Equality Council (BREC)
- Bedford YMCA
- Bedfordshire Police - Welfare Department
- BPHA – Community Development Team
- Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support (BRASS)
- United Sustainable Energy Agency
- Home-Start (North & Mid Beds)
- Kings Arms Project
- Langley House Trust
- Mayday Trust
- Polish-British Integration Centre
- Rutland Road Church - Debt Advice Service
- Sight Concern Bedfordshire
- Surestart Cauldwell
- Thai3Counties
- The Disability Resource Centre
- The Salvation Army - Debt Advice Service

However, not all of the above agencies provide advice to families with children.

During this research we asked BAF members whether they would be interested in developing closer links with local Children's Centres in Bedford Borough to provide a variety of advice services to families. The following seven agencies all responded positively. (See **Section 5** for further details).

- Bedford & District CAB
- Bedford Borough Council - Housing Options
- Bedford Race Equality Council (BREC)
- Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support (BRASS)
- Polish-British Integration Centre
- Surestart Cauldwell
- The Disability Resource Centre

4.4 Advice services in Central Bedfordshire

The following 24 BAF members provide advice services in Central Bedfordshire.

- Advocacy Alliance
- Age Concern Bedfordshire
- Aragon Housing Association – Housing Department
- Bedford Credit Union
- Bedford Race Equality Council
- Central Bedfordshire Council - Inform 0-19 Service
- Central Bedfordshire Council - Trading Standards Service
- Central Bedfordshire Council - Welfare Rights Service
- Bedfordshire Police - Welfare Department
- Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support (BRASS)
- Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
- United Sustainable Energy Agency
- Dunstable Citizens Advice Bureau
- Home-Start (North & Mid Beds)
- Hospice at Home Volunteers – Leighton Buzzard
- Leighton Linslade CAB
- Luton Irish Forum
- Luton Law Centre
- Luton Rights
- Mid Bedfordshire CAB
- Polish-British Integration Centre
- Sight Concern Bedfordshire
- Thai3Counties
- The Disability Resource Centre

However, not all of the above agencies provide advice to families with children.

During this research we asked BAF members whether they would be interested in developing closer links with local Children's Centres in Central Bedfordshire to provide a variety of advice services to families. The following seven agencies all responded positively. (See **Section 7** for further details).

- Bedford Race Equality Council
- Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support (BRASS)
- Dunstable Citizens Advice Bureau
- Leighton Linslade CAB
- Mid Bedfordshire CAB
- Polish-British Integration Centre
- The Disability Resource Centre

5. CURRENT LINKS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND THE ADVICE SECTOR IN BEDFORD BOROUGH

5.1 Introduction

As part of this research, the following work was undertaken to identify the current links between Children's Centres and the advice sector in Bedford Borough.

- A **presentation** was made, on 23rd July, at a Network meeting of Children's Centre Managers in Bedford Borough to explain the background to, and purpose of, the research
- A **questionnaire** was designed and circulated to all of the local Children's Centres in August. The questionnaire asked about the advice services that were currently being provided within the Centres. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3.
- The **results** from returned questionnaires were analysed in September 2009

A total of 12 completed questionnaires were returned, 5 of which were from Centres in Bedford Borough - a return rate of 45% for Children's Centres in the Borough.

Following return of the questionnaires, a number of **consultation meetings** were arranged at Children's Centres as follows:

- Peter Pan Children's Centre (for a team meeting of the local Spurgeons Children's Centres) - 3rd August
- Pine Cones Children's Centre – 10th September
- Queens Park Neighbourhood Centre – 2nd October

During the research, questionnaires were also sent to all members of **Bedfordshire Advice Forum** asking about any advice services which they were currently providing within the Children's Centres.

In total 10 questionnaires were returned by BAF members - 7 of which work in Bedford Borough. (See **Section 4.3** for a list of BAF members that replied).

Following receipt of the questionnaires, discussions were had with following BAF members to obtain further information:

- Bedford CAB
- Bedford Race Equality Council
- The Disability Resource Centre

Details of the evidence collected from the returned questionnaires, meetings and discussions are given in **Sections 5.2 and 5.3**.

5.2 Current advice services

There are a number of examples of existing partnership working between Children's Centres and local advice agencies, with many services providing families with access to advice on dealing with debt and benefit maximisation – which are vital in the fight against child poverty. Local existing projects include:

Benefits advice service - Sure Start Cauldwell

Sure Start Cauldwell employ two advisers, who provide a welfare rights service to service directly to users via drop-in sessions, appointments, telephone and email.

The service operates from a number of Children's Centres: Peter Pan (Cauldwell), Kingsbrook, Daisy Hill, and Pear Tree, and at Southway Nursery.

Outreach advice sessions - Bedford CAB

In Bedford, the Citizens Advice Bureau is working with two Children's Centres, Goldington and Putnoe, to deliver regular advice sessions.

The sessions run weekly each Thursday – for one hour at Putnoe Children's Centre and two hours at Goldington.

The advice is provided by a trained generalist adviser, recruited from within the Bureau's team of volunteer advisers.

The sessions are funded, initially for one year, directly by the Children's Centres.

Support for disabled people

The Disability Resource Centre in Dunstable has links with the Queens Park Neighbourhood Centre in Bedford Borough, and can provide talks and outreach services and networking with Children's Centre staff.

They can also provide information on a variety of subjects from their information database – the most popular are "Families with Disabled Children" and "Information for Carers".

Financial Capability Training (1)

Also in Bedford, the CAB is working with a number of Children's Centres to plan the delivery of some one-day sessions on Financial Capability.

These courses will be delivered by the Bureau's Financial Capability Development Worker, and will target groups and front-line workers at the Centres.

There will be no charge to the Centres for the training, other than that the Centres will be providing the premises free of charge, as the sessions are being funded by an EEDA and ESF project.

At present, 3 sessions are planned at Pine Cones and Pear Tree Children's Centres and it is hoped that they can also be run at other centres in the future.

Financial Capability Training (2)

Mid Bedfordshire CAB are running two Financial Capability Training sessions at Queens Park Neighbourhood Centre

5.3 Other current links and related services

Signposting

In addition to the initiatives described in Section 5.2, the Children's Centres currently regularly signpost users to a variety of different agencies, including Bedford CAB, BPHA, the Salvation Army Debt Advice Service, Job Centre Plus and various local solicitors.

Leaflets

All the Children's Centres that responded to the questionnaire display leaflets from local advice agencies, including Bedford CAB, the Salvation Army Debt Advice Service, BPHA, Bedford Credit Union, and Job Centre Plus.

They also all display some information leaflets such as the Borough Council's housing advice leaflet, various guides for parents, and information on local drug and alcohol services.

Internet Kiosks

A number of the Children's Centres have touch screen kiosks on their premises. Kiosks can currently be found in the following Centres in Bedford Borough:

- Bedford Central
- Cherry Trees
- Daisy Hill
- Eastcotts
- Goldington and Putnoe
- Kingsbrook
- Pear Tree
- Peter Pan
- Pinecones
- Queens Park Neighbourhood Centre

The kiosks offer parents, who are visiting a Children's Centre, free internet access to a wide range of websites. Relevant organisations have been grouped under various categories to help parents navigate. The websites highlighted cover a wide range of information and advice relevant to parents of young children.

Each kiosk has an integrated printer and telephone enabling parents to print off any relevant information and to telephone INFORM 0-19 for any further information and advice. Each Children's Centre can also add information, on the front screen of the kiosk, regarding local information and events happening at the Centre.

The kiosks are a very useful and beneficial resource for Children's Centres, however usage could be better. In the early 2010, the INFORM 0-19 team will be going into all the Children's Centre to discuss any issues regarding the kiosks, to provide refresher training for frontline staff, and to monitor usage of the kiosks on a monthly basis.

5.4 Current issues and problems

There are a number of issues that have been identified, or have arisen, from the projects currently delivering advice services in Children's Centres in Bedford Borough.

Location

There is a problem with the location of some of the Children's Centres, particularly where previously redundant premises have been used to house Children's Centres. These premises are not always situated, within a ward, where those families who are most in need live. Although the plan is that all parents will be in walking distance of a Children's Centre, this is not the reality when a Centre is located on the edge of a ward.

Attracting users

Attracting new users to the Centres can also be a problem. Parents tend to come into a Children's Centre for specific events and activities and sometimes remain unaware of other services on offer. Centres work hard at trying to attract more people to use their services through, for example, involvement and attendance at neighbourhood events and handing out activity programmes at the school gates. Centres have recently begun to receive data on all the new births in their area so are now able to send a welcome card to all new parents, which can then be followed up by a call or visit from a family worker.

Timing

Issues of location, and the fact that many users attend centres only for specific activities, are probably the major causes of low take-up of the advice services currently on offer. Another reason for low take up may be seasonal – many of the parents who would use Children's Centre advice services have school age children and are less likely to visit the Centres during school holidays.

Premises

Many users are currently accessing Children's Centre services in community venues. Mobile vans are in use across the county where Centres do not have dedicated premises. There was a suggestion by some of the advice agencies that it might be possible to utilise the vans for delivery of an advice service. However, the nature of the current vans means this would not be possible. The vans are small and all space is fully utilised by the equipment they carry – consisting of a wide range from play equipment and materials, tables and chairs, and even a small gazebo for outside activities. Where Centres do not have dedicated premises the contents of the vans have to be unloaded after every outreach session and the equipment stored in a shed in some circumstances. Where services are operating on an outreach basis it is also more difficult to publicise the timing and location of advice surgeries.

6. POTENTIAL FUTURE LINKS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND THE ADVICE SECTOR IN BEDFORD BOROUGH

6.1 Introduction

The questionnaires that were sent to the local Children's Centres and to the members of Bedfordshire Advice Forum (see **Section 5.1**) also asked about the type of future provision and links which Centres and the advice organisations felt would be particularly useful.

The responses were analysed together with comments from follow-up discussions and telephone interviews (see **Section 5.1** for details) and the results are given below.

6.2 Potential future advice related services

The potential future advice services that were identified in the course of the research are listed below. However, not all of these will be appropriate for all Children's Centres in Bedford Borough.

- **Drop-in advice sessions at Children's Centres**

There was unanimous support from the Children's Centres for this type of session, if funding could be obtained. It was generally felt that such sessions would need to be on a regular basis, rather than one-off sessions, as it would take time for the momentum to build and for service users to become aware of the sessions. Funding would need to be for a long enough period to allow the service users to gain confidence to use the service.

The practicalities of providing direct advice services would, of course, vary from Centre to Centre. For those without dedicated premises there are the added difficulties of providing a venue in which to offer sessions. Even where Centres have their own premises the size and layout varies considerably. This has an important bearing on the services that could be offered.

- **Home visiting service**

This type of provision also had support from all of the Children's Centres that returned the questionnaire. However, it was felt that such provision would need to be funded as part of another service, such as advice surgeries, as home visits can be costly due to health and safety considerations and the need to send two advisers to do each visit. There was also a suggestion that family workers at Children's Centres could accompany advice workers on home visits.

- **Development of referral systems**

There was little support for the idea of a formal referral system whereby Centre staff could make appointments for users at advice agency premises

- **Provision of leaflets detailing services of BAF members**

All the Centres expressed an interest in holding information leaflets about local advice agencies – both to assist Centre staff in making referrals and to give to Centre users.

- **Provision of information leaflets on specific advice topics such as benefits and debt**

Despite the limited space in some Centres, all those that replied said that they had leaflet racks in public areas. The type of leaflets currently held was mostly determined by the visiting organisations and professionals involved with the Centres – midwives, health visitors, JobCentre Plus staff. However, Centre staff would also welcome leaflets on a targeted range of advice issues such as debt, employment and benefits. Most Centres were unaware of the range of printable facts sheets available on the Citizens Advice website www.adviceguide.org.uk

- **Provision of specific training for Children's Centre staff**

There was a range of different attitudes among Centre Managers on "giving advice" to Centre users, and who should do this. As a result, while the majority of managers expressed an interest in advice related training courses for their workers, there was one who felt strongly that this was an inappropriate use of their resources.

One manager wanted to see their family workers making appropriate and timely referrals to specialist agencies rather than trying to tackle problems for Centre users. This manager also felt that their training budgets should be spent on essential training for key workers and that specialist advice agencies should be used to deliver advice services.

The type of training that Centres would like to see included courses on:

- Benefits (including updates on rates and allowances, maternity benefits and 'back to work' benefits)
- Housing
- What to do in the event of relationship breakdown
- Immigration issues

- **Access to BAF training programmes for Children's Centre staff**

There was general support for the idea of Children's Centres taking up spare places on the training programmes run for BAF members – with the same reservations as noted in the bullet point above. It was felt that the most helpful type of courses would be the basic introductory courses, which give an overview of, for example, the benefits system or how to manage debt.

- **Visits / talks by staff or volunteers from BAF member agencies**

All the Centres that responded to the questionnaire were interested in hearing more about the work of local advice agencies at team meetings. All Centres were keen that their staff members were aware of specialist agencies to which they could refer Centre users. There was particular interest in finding out more about the services offered by the local CAB and other organisations that give benefits or debt advice

- **Shadowing / visits by Children's Centre staff to advice agencies**

There was not as much interest in this suggestion as in some of the other ideas. Pressure of work and the time commitment were the main reasons for the reticence although some Centres felt it could be particularly appropriate for some of their family workers to spend a few hours in, for example, a CAB to see what help their families might expect from this organisation.

- **Opportunities for Centre users to volunteer at an advice centre**

This was something of an unknown quantity for most of the Centres. Some felt that it would be worthwhile for agencies to provide information about volunteering opportunities at any occasion where they were providing a service in the Centre.

6.3 Other potential links

Internet kiosks

It was suggested that existing kiosks (see **Section 5.3**) could be used to provide direct links to BAF member agencies, to the new BAF advice directory, and to specialist sites such as Citizens Advice's "Adviceguide".

The Inform 0-19 team will be arranging a programme early in 2010 to train Children's Centre staff on usage of the kiosks. It would be useful at this time for BAF to have some input into this programme to highlight the advice sites which could be loaded onto the kiosks.

Links to advice agency websites, Adviceguide, and the BAF directory could also be added to the administrative staff computers in Children's Centres.

6.4 Potential issues and opportunities

Some issues would need to be taken into account before developing further advice related services at Children's Centres in Bedford Borough. There are also some opportunities that may be available.

Funding

A number of issues regarding funding were identified:

- There was some concern on the part of some of the Bedford Borough Children's Centres about the policy on buying in services from other organisations – some felt that this was frowned upon.
- Some of the Children's Centres do currently have small under spends from the start up phase of their Centres and might be interested in using some of this to buy in advice services
- Centres and advice agencies may be able to look at partnership bids to run specific services
- Citizens Advice (the national association of CABx) makes grants available for certain community initiatives and each of the CABx can look at accessing this funding.
- There may be local organisations, for example The Bedford Charity, which will support specific initiatives

Facilities / premises

Centres were asked about facilities at their premises, such as private rooms for interviews, display areas and training rooms. Four out of five Centres that responded had rooms which could be used for confidential interviews and three out of five had a room which potentially would be suitable for training sessions. None of the Centres felt they had room for a permanent advice display stand, but some could make space available on a temporary basis for an event such as a benefit take-up campaign.

Main problems / advice issues

Centres were asked about a range of advice work issues on which their service users might seek advice. The majority of those who responded felt that the most pressing issues for their service users were:

- Debts and money management
- Practical issues surrounding relationship breakdown
- Access to or challenging of health or community care services.

7. CURRENT LINKS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND THE ADVICE SECTOR IN CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

7.1 Introduction

As part of this research, the following work was undertaken to identify the current links between Children's Centres and the advice sector in Central Bedfordshire.

- A **presentation** was made, on 29th July, at a Network meeting of Children's Centre Managers from Central Bedfordshire to explain the background to, and purpose of, the research
- A **questionnaire** was designed and circulated to all of the local Children's Centres in August. The questionnaire asked about the advice services that were currently being provided within the Centres. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3.
- The **results** from returned questionnaires were analysed in September 2009

A total of 12 completed questionnaires were returned, 7 of which were from Centres in Central Bedfordshire - a return rate of 50% for Children's Centres in the area.

Following return of the questionnaires, discussions were held with:

- Manager at Sandy Community Children's Centre - meeting on 10th September
- Manager at Flitwick and Marston Vale Children's Centres – telephone conversation in September

During the research, questionnaires were also sent to all members of **Bedfordshire Advice Forum** asking about any advice services which they were currently providing within the Children's Centres.

In total 10 questionnaires were returned by BAF members - 7 of which work in Central Bedfordshire. (See **Section 4.4** for a list of BAF members that replied).

Following receipt of the questionnaires, telephone calls were made to following BAF members to obtain further information:

- Dunstable CAB
- Mid Bedfordshire CAB
- The Disability Resource Centre

Details of the evidence collected from the returned questionnaires, meetings and discussions are given in **Sections 7.2 and 7.3**.

7.2 Current advice services

There are a number of examples of existing partnership working between Children's Centres and local advice agencies, with many services providing families with access to advice on dealing with debt and benefit maximisation – which are vital in the fight against child poverty. Local existing projects include:

Outreach advice sessions - Dunstable CAB

Dunstable CAB operates fortnightly advice sessions at the Tithe Farm and Parkside Neighbourhood Children's Centres in Houghton Regis. These sessions have been operating successfully for three years and are well attended.

The sessions are on Fridays 9.15am - 12.30pm by appointment,

Some funding for the sessions has been provided by Houghton Regis Town Council.

The sessions are staffed by the Bureau Manager and by volunteers.

Outreach advice sessions - Mid Bedfordshire CAB

Mid-Bedfordshire Citizens Advice Bureau operates a weekly advice session, every Thursday morning, at Orchard Children's Centre in Shefford.

The service is delivered by a qualified adviser, with support from a trainee adviser, who has access via a laptop to the full Citizens Advice information system. A private room is available for interviews.

The session is funded by Citizens Advice (the national association of CABx) until March 2010.

Take-up of the service has been initially slow but it is hoped that the number of enquirers will pick up in 2010.

Advice surgery - Downside Neighbourhood Centre

A local firm of solicitors runs a monthly family law advice surgery at Downside Neighbourhood Centre.

A surgery also used to be provided by Luton Rights giving advice on debt and benefits but this was withdrawn due to lack of uptake of the service.

Support for disabled people

The Disability Resource Centre in Dunstable has close links with a number of Children's Centres in Central Bedfordshire (including Downside Neighbourhood Centre, Tithe Farm Neighbourhood Centre, and The Lawns), and can provide talks and outreach services and networking with Children's Centre staff.

They can also provide information on a variety of subjects from their information database – the most popular are "Families with Disabled Children" and "Information for Carers".

7.3 Other current links and related services

Signposting

In addition to the initiatives described in **Section 7.2**, the Children's Centres currently regularly signpost users to a variety of different agencies, including the three local CABx, Luton Rights, Job Centre Plus, Home Start, the Shaw Trust and various local solicitors.

Leaflets

All the Children's Centres, with dedicated premises, that responded to the questionnaire display leaflets from local advice agencies, including the local CABx, solicitors, Luton Rights, the Financial Services Authority and Job Centre Plus.

They also all display some information leaflets such as the FSA's Parents Guide to Money

Flitwick and Marston Vale Children's Centres do not currently have the facility to display leaflets and other information although construction of premises for the Flitwick Centre is currently under way.

Internet Kiosks

A number of the Children's Centres have touch screen kiosks on their premises. Kiosks can currently be found in the following Centres in Central Bedfordshire:

- Parkside Children's Centre
- The Lawns Children's Centre
- Tithe Farm Neighbourhood Centre

The kiosks offer parents, who are visiting a Children's Centre, free internet access to a wide range of websites. Relevant organisations have been grouped under various categories to help parents navigate. The websites highlighted cover a wide range of information and advice relevant to parents of young children.

Each kiosk has an integrated printer and telephone enabling parents to print off any relevant information and to telephone INFORM 0-19 for any further information and advice. Each Children's Centre can also add information, on the front screen of the kiosk, regarding local information and events happening at the Centre.

The kiosks are a very useful and beneficial resource for Children's Centres, however usage could be better. In the early 2010, the INFORM 0-19 team will be going into all the Children's Centre to discuss any issues regarding the kiosks, to provide refresher training for frontline staff, and to monitor usage of the kiosks on a monthly basis.

7.4 Current issues and problems

There are a number of issues that have been identified, or have arisen, from the projects currently delivering advice services in Children's Centres in Central Bedfordshire.

Location

There is a problem with the location of some of the Children's Centres, particularly where previously redundant premises have been used to house Children's Centres. These premises are not always situated, within a ward, where those families who are most in need live. Although the plan is that all parents will be in walking distance of a Children's Centre, this is not the reality when a Centre is located on the edge of a ward.

Attracting users

Attracting new users to the Centres can also be a problem. Parents tend to come into a Children's Centre for specific events and activities and sometimes remain unaware of other services on offer. Centres work hard at trying to attract more people to use their services through, for example, involvement and attendance at neighbourhood events and handing out activity programmes at the school gates. Centres have recently begun to receive data on all the new births in their area so are now able to send a welcome card to all new parents, which can then be followed up by a call or visit from a family worker.

Timing

Issues of location, and the fact that many users attend centres only for specific activities, are probably the major causes of low take-up of the advice services currently on offer. Another reason for low take up may be seasonal – many of the parents who would use Children's Centre advice services have school age children and are less likely to visit the Centres during school holidays.

Premises

Many users are currently accessing Children's Centre services in community venues. Mobile vans are in use across the county where Centres do not have dedicated premises. There was a suggestion by some of the advice agencies that it might be possible to utilise the vans for delivery of an advice service. However, the nature of the current vans means this would not be possible. The vans are small and all space is fully utilised for by the equipment they carry – consisting of a wide range from play equipment and materials, tables and chairs, and even a small gazebo for outside activities. Where Centres do not have dedicated premises the contents of the vans have to be unloaded after every outreach session and the equipment stored in a shed in some circumstances. Where services are operating on an outreach basis it is also more difficult to publicise the timing and location of advice surgeries.

8. POTENTIAL FUTURE LINKS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND THE ADVICE SECTOR IN CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

8.1 Introduction

The questionnaires that were sent to the local Children's Centres and to the members of Bedfordshire Advice Forum (see **Section 7.1**) also asked about the type of future provision and links which Centres and the advice organisations felt would be particularly useful.

The responses were analysed together with comments from follow-up discussions and telephone interviews (see **Section 7.1** for details) and the results are given below.

8.2 Potential future advice related services

The potential future advice services that were identified in the course of the research are listed below. However, not all of these will be appropriate for all Children's Centres in Central Bedfordshire

- **Drop-in advice sessions at Children's Centres**

There was strong support for this type of advice session if funding could be obtained - even from Downside Neighbourhood Centre which had previously offered a drop-in run by Luton Rights which had closed due to lack of take up.

It was generally felt by Centres that any sessions would need to be on a regular basis, rather than one-off sessions, as it would take time for the momentum to build and for service users to become aware of the session. Funding would need to be for a long enough period (for example, two to three years) to allow Centre users to gain confidence to use the service.

This was backed up by the two CABx that currently provide advice sessions at Children's Centres - both said that it takes a long time for an advice surgery to be recognized, trusted and well used. However, there were different opinions on whether the drop-in interviews should be "open" or "by appointment"

One of the Central Bedfordshire Children's Centres, however, was not so supportive of drop-in sessions and felt that home visits were really the only way to deliver advice services to their client group.

The practicalities of providing direct advice services would, of course, vary from Centre to Centre. For those without dedicated premises there are the added difficulties of providing a venue in which to offer sessions. Even where Centres have their own premises the size and layout varies considerably. This has an important bearing on the services that could be offered.

- **Home visiting service**

This type of provision had support from a large majority of the Children's Centres that returned the questionnaire. However, it was felt that such provision would need to be funded as part of another service, such as advice surgeries, as home visits can be costly due to health and safety considerations and the need to send two advisers to do each visit. There was also a suggestion that family workers at Children's Centres could accompany advice workers on home visits.

- **Development of referral systems**

There was little support for the idea of a formal referral system whereby Centre staff could make appointments for users at advice agency premises

- **Provision of leaflets detailing services of BAF members**

All the Centres expressed an interest in holding information leaflets about local advice agencies – both to assist Centre staff in making referrals and to give to Centre users.

- **Provision of information leaflets on specific advice topics such as benefits and debt**

Despite the limited space in some Centres, all those who replied said that they had leaflet racks in public areas. The type of leaflets currently held was mostly determined by the visiting organisations and professionals involved with the centres – midwives, health visitors, JobCentre Plus staff. However, Centre staff would also welcome leaflets on a targeted range of advice issues such as debt, employment and benefits. Most Centres were unaware of the range of printable facts sheets available on the Citizens Advice website www.adviceguide.org.uk

- **Provision of specific training for Children's Centre staff**

There was a range of different attitudes among Centre Managers on "giving advice" to Centre users, and who should do this. As a result, while the majority of managers expressed an interest in advice related training courses for their workers, there was one who felt strongly that this was an inappropriate use of their resources.

One manager wanted to see their family workers making appropriate and timely referrals to specialist agencies rather than trying to tackle problems for Centre users. This manager also felt that their training budgets should be spent on essential training for key workers and that specialist advice agencies should be used to deliver advice services.

The type of training that Centres would like to see included courses on:

- Benefits (including updates on rates and allowances, maternity benefits and 'back to work' benefits)
- Housing
- What to do in the event of relationship breakdown
- Immigration issues

- **Access to BAF training programmes for Children's Centre staff**

There was general support for the idea of Children's Centres taking up spare places on the training programmes run for BAF members – with the same reservations as noted in the bullet point above. It was felt that the most helpful type of courses would be the basic introductory courses which give an overview of, for example, the benefits system or how to manage debt.

- **Visits / talks by staff or volunteers from BAF member agencies**

All the Centres that responded to the questionnaire were interested in hearing more about the work of local advice agencies at team meetings. All Centres were keen that their staff members were aware of specialist agencies to which they could refer Centre users. There was particular interest in finding out more about the services offered by the local CABx and other organisations that give benefits or debt advice

- **Shadowing / visits by Children's Centre staff to advice agencies**

There was not as much interest in this suggestion as in some of the other ideas. Pressure of work and the time commitment were the main reasons for the reticence although some Centres felt it could be particularly appropriate for some of their family workers to spend a few hours in, for example, a CAB to see what help their families might expect from this organisation.

- **Opportunities for Centre users to volunteer at an advice centre**

This was something of an unknown quantity for most of the Centres. Some felt that it would be worthwhile for agencies to provide information about volunteering opportunities at any occasion where they were providing a service in the Centre.

8.3 Other potential links

Internet kiosks

It was suggested that existing kiosks (see **Section 7.3**) could be used to provide direct links to BAF member agencies, to the new BAF advice directory, and to specialist sites such as Citizens Advice's "Adviceguide".

The Inform 0-19 team will be arranging a programme early in 2010 to train Children's Centre staff on usage of the kiosks. It would be useful at this time for BAF to have some input into this programme to highlight the advice sites which could be loaded onto the kiosks.

Links to advice agency websites, Adviceguide, and the BAF directory could also be added to the administrative staff computers in Children's Centres.

8.4 Potential issues and opportunities

Some issues would need to be taken into account before developing further advice related services at with Children's Centres in Central Bedfordshire. There are also some opportunities that may be available.

Funding

A number of issues regarding funding were identified:

- In Central Bedfordshire it appears that Centres are actively encouraged to use their budgets to commission a variety of services from other providers. It would therefore seem that any underspend on the provision of core Children's Centre services could be used to purchase additional services eg advice services
- Centres and advice agencies may be able to look at partnership bids to run specific services
- Citizens Advice (the national association of CABx) makes grants available for certain community initiatives and each of the CABx can look at accessing this funding.
- There may be local organisations, or charitable trusts, which will support specific initiatives.
- Central Bedfordshire Council may have specific funding for local projects which support their strategic aims eg to strengthen the local community

Facilities / premises

Centres were asked about facilities at their premises, such as private rooms for interviews, display areas and training rooms. With the exceptions of Flitwick and Marston Vale, those that responded had rooms that could be used for confidential interviews and two Centres had a room, which potentially would be suitable for training sessions. None of the Centres felt they had room for a permanent advice display stand, but some could make space available on a temporary basis for an event such as a benefit take-up campaign

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Conclusion

During this research a variety of information has been gathered - including general information about child poverty, Children's Centres and advice work, and more specific information on the current and potential links between Children's Centres and advice agencies in **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**.

From this information the following **conclusions** can be drawn. (**NB** Although the situations are slightly different in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire, the conclusions apply equally to each area).

- There are high levels of child poverty in the UK - including in a number of wards in **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**
- There is now general acknowledgement locally that child poverty is a serious issue in **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire** - and that tackling child poverty should be high on the political agenda in both the unitary authorities
- There is a general acceptance (from the Government, Children's Centres and advice agencies) that advice services can help in tackling poverty - and that they should be part of the range of services provided by Children's Centres
- There are a number of examples of good practice, in the provision of advice services at Children's Centres, in different parts of the country - including at some Children's Centres in **Bedford Borough** and **Central Bedfordshire**
- The feedback obtained during this research, from local Children's Centres and from local advice agencies (in responses to the research questionnaires and in subsequent discussions), has shown that:
 - There is strong support for, and a willingness to, develop further links between the Children's Centres and advice agencies through partnership working.
 - Different Children's Centres have different needs and different facilities, so a "one size fits all" approach to providing advice services would not be appropriate. Advice services would therefore need to be tailored to meet the needs of individual Centres.
 - There are a number of potential ways in which links between the Children's Centres and local advice agencies could be developed. The most popular suggestions included:
 - Arranging more drop-in advice sessions at Children's Centres - provided by one (or more) BAF members
 - Arranging home visits to Centre users by advisers, when required
 - Developing better systems for distributing advice related leaflets to Children's Centres - including leaflets on services of BAF members, and information leaflets on specific advice topics
 - Providing advice related training for Children's Centre staff
 - Allocating places for Children's Centre staff on BAF training courses
 - Organising talks, and other promotional events, at Children's Centres (for staff and users) run by BAF members

9.2 Recommendations

This research has helped to successfully raise greater awareness of the current links between Children's Centres and local advice agencies, and has opened the debate on ways to strengthen and enhance these links.

A number of **recommendations** can be made following the research. These are listed below under the following headings:

- Communication and networking
- Training
- General funding recommendations
- Specific recommended project
- Strategic planning

Communication and networking

1. BAF should publicise the new online Advice Directory widely with Children's Centres
2. BAF should compile a register of advice agencies that are willing and able to offer outreach services to Children's Centres
3. All Children's Centres should be offered the opportunity to go on BAF's mailing list in order to receive copies of newsletters, information about BAF training courses and other useful communications
4. Children's Centres that currently actively provide information or advice on civil legal issues should consider joining Bedfordshire Advice Forum
5. BAF members should invite Children's Centre staff to attend team meetings at their agencies to talk about their work and develop stronger cross-referral procedures
6. BAF members should explore the possibility of running recruitment days at Children's Centres to encourage Centre users to get involved in volunteering at advice agencies
7. Inform 0-19 should liaise with BAF regarding the forthcoming programme of training on use of the internet kiosks - to develop links via the kiosks to the online Advice Directory, BAF member websites and other advice related websites

Training

8. BAF should offer spare places on its training courses to Children's Centre staff (at the usual BAF member rate for courses)
9. Children's Centre area managers should consider commissioning BAF members to provide group training for staff (from a number of Children's Centres) on relevant advice related issues

General funding recommendations

10. Children's Centre area managers should encourage Children's Centres to consider commissioning more direct advice services from BAF members
11. Relevant BAF members should be encouraged to consider securing further funding (either individually or through joint bids) to provide outreach services to Children's Centres. If possible this funding should be for 2-3 years to allow Centre users to become familiar with the service - as shorter term initiatives are likely to be unsuccessful.
12. Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council should encourage partnership working (between Children's Centres and BAF members), and joint funding bids in their areas, to provide advice services across the whole of their authority areas - rather than in individual Children's Centres

Specific suggested project

13. Consideration should be given to applying for funding for an area based advice worker (or team of workers) who could support a number of Children's Centres in an area. The worker(s) could provide a variety of services – telephone advice (to users and centre staff), regular outreach advice sessions (and appointments), home visits, training and other advice related support for Centre staff. The dedicated worker(s), who could be hosted by a BAF member, would then build up specialist skills and relationships in working with Centre users and staff in their areas.

Strategic planning

14. In order for the above recommendations to be taken forward, an overall recommendation is that a strategic plan be developed to look at the advice needs and priorities for all of the Children's Centres (in Bedford Borough and in Central Bedfordshire). This plan should link in with the Child Poverty Strategy and the Advice Strategy that are currently being drafted in both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire. It is recommended that the new Children's Trusts should lead on the development of this strategic plan using, initially, the findings of this research report.

9.3 Next steps

This report on the research will be distributed to all local Children's Centres and to BAF members. It is then proposed that discussions should be held in Bedford Borough and in Central Bedfordshire (perhaps at the network meetings for Children's Centre managers and then at Children's Trust meetings) to develop a strategic plan based on the recommendations.

It is hoped that this research will then lead to greater links between Children's Centres and advice agencies in both areas, and that these links, and enhanced advice services, will help in the overall objectives of reducing local child poverty in Bedford Borough and in Central Bedfordshire.

It is also hoped that the recent launch of the online Bedfordshire Advice Directory, which was funded in conjunction with this research, should be a catalyst to improving communication and developing stronger links between the local Children's Centres and advice agencies.

APPENDIX 1

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers on this project at Infotrain (**Len Simkins** and **Linda Wood**) would like to thank a number of people who provided invaluable support and help in this project. Thanks go to:

- The following **Children's Centres** (12) for returning completed questionnaires:
 - Beehive Sure Start Children's Centre
 - Clapham Children's Centre
 - Daisy Hill Children's Centre
 - Downside Neighbourhood Centre
 - Flitwick Children's Centre
 - Kingsbrook Children's Centre
 - Marston Vale Children's Centre
 - Parkside Neighbourhood Centre
 - Pear Tree Children's Centre
 - Pine Cones Children's Centre
 - Sandy Community Children's Centre
 - Tithe Farm Neighbourhood Centre

- The following **Children's Centre staff** for specific meetings and visits:
 - **Jo Burnett** – Manager, Queens Park Neighbourhood Centre
 - **Anne Cheveralls** - Head of Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention, Bedford Borough Council
 - **Mary Jurance** – Programme Manager, Christian Family Care Children's Centres
 - **Lynne Summerfield** – Programme Manager, Spurgeons Children's Centres
 - **Sue Tyler** - Head of Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention, Central Bedfordshire Council

- The following **BAF members** (10) for returning completed questionnaires:
 - Bedford and District Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Bedford Race Equality Council
 - Bedford Refugee and Asylum Seekers Support
 - The Disability Resource Centre
 - Dunstable and District Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Housing Options, Bedford Borough Council
 - Mid Bedfordshire Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Leighton-Linslade Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Polish British Integration Centre
 - Surestart Cauldwell

- **The following people for extra information and assistance:**
 - **Charnjeet Dhillon** (0-19 Service, Bedford Borough Council) – for information on internet kiosks
 - **Jenny Hedges** (Mid Bedfordshire) CAB - for information on outreach services at Orchard's Children's Centre
 - **Becky Kirby** (Dunstable CAB) - for information on outreach services at Parkside and Tithe Farm Children's Centres
 - **Lisa Morris** (The Bridge, Loughborough) - for information on housing advice in outreach services in Leicestershire
 - **David Simmons** (Child Poverty Action Group) - for information on CPAG's project "Delivering economic wellbeing through Children's Centres"
 - **Sue Tyler** (Central Bedfordshire Council) - for background information on Children's Centres in Central Bedfordshire
 - **Katie Williams** (Bedford Borough Council) - for background information on Children's Centres in Bedford Borough
 - **Caroline Woolston** (Flitwick and Marston Vale Children's Centres) - for information on virtual centres and mobile provision of services
 - **Various contacts at BAF member agencies** - for information on the history of advice services in Bedfordshire

- **Bedford Borough Council** for hosting the presentation and consultation meeting on 23rd July

- **Central Bedfordshire Council** for hosting the presentation and consultation meeting on 29th July

- The **Local Area Boards for Children's Centres** in Bedford, Mid Beds and South Beds for funding the research

APPENDIX 2

BEDFORDSHIRE ADVICE FORUM MEMBERS

There are 43 members of BAF.

- Advice UK (Eastern Region)
- Advocacy Alliance
- Age Concern Bedfordshire
- Anchor 'Staying Put' Bedford
- Aragon Housing Association – Housing Department
- Bedford & District CAB
- Bedford Borough Council - Benefits and Community Welfare Service
- Bedford Borough Council - Housing Options
- Bedford College - Student Services
- Bedford Community Rights Centre
- Bedford Housing Link
- Bedford Credit Union
- Bedford Race Equality Council
- Bedford YMCA
- Bedfordshire Child Poverty Action Group
- Bedfordshire County Council - Inform 0-19 Service
- Bedfordshire County Council - Trading Standards Service
- Bedfordshire County Council - Welfare Rights Service
- Bedfordshire Police - Welfare Department
- BPHA – Community Development
- Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support (BRASS)
- Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
- Create / Finance ReDirect Ltd
- United Sustainable Energy Agency
- Dunstable Citizens Advice Bureau
- Home-Start (North & Mid Beds)
- Hospice at Home Volunteers – Leighton Buzzard
- Kings Arms Project
- Langley House Trust
- Leighton Linslade CAB
- Luton Irish Forum
- Luton Law Centre
- Luton Rights
- Mayday Trust
- Mid Bedfordshire CAB
- Polish-British Integration Centre
- Rutland Road Church - Debt Advice Service
- Sight Concern Bedfordshire
- SureStart Cauldwell
- Thai3Counties
- The Bedford Charity
- The Disability Resource Centre
- The Salvation Army - Debt Advice Service

APPENDIX 3

QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO CHILDREN'S CENTRES

BEDFORDSHIRE ADVICE FORUM

Promoting and supporting the provision of advice and information services in Bedfordshire

LINKS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND LOCAL ADVICE AGENCIES

Bedfordshire Advice Forum (BAF) has been awarded funding to look into developing partnerships between its members and Children's Centres in Bedfordshire.

The provision of appropriate and timely advice to parents on issues such as benefits, debt and housing has a significant role to play in tackling child poverty. We are therefore looking at ways of increasing the provision of advice services within Children's Centres and would like to find out more about your Centre's needs and requirements.

It would therefore be very helpful if you could take some time to answer the following questions.

Section 1 – Organisational details

Name of Children's Centre	
Address	
Council area	

Contact person	
Job role	
Telephone number	
Email address	

Section 2 – Existing advice provision

- (a) Does your Centre currently provide any advice / information services for users on issues such as benefits, debt, housing rights etc?

Yes No

If "Yes", who provides this service?

- (b) Does your Centre display any leaflets or posters about local advice providers (eg your local CAB)?

Yes No

If "Yes", please state which advice service leaflets you display.

- (c) Does your Centre display any leaflets about particular advice related subjects or issues (eg benefits, tax credits, debt, housing rights etc)?

Yes No

If "Yes", please state which type of leaflets you display.

- (d) Does your Centre have any other specific links with any local advice providers (eg agreed referral arrangements)?

Yes No

If "Yes", please give details

Section 3 – Future advice provision

(a) What are the main problems / issues that users at your Centre need advice on?

(Please tick the 5 most common subject categories, if you can)

Benefits and tax credits	<input type="checkbox"/>
Debt and money management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment (eg redundancy or discrimination)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practical issues surrounding relationship breakdown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consumer issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Immigration issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessing or challenging health or community care services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other issues (please give details below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

(b) If funding could be arranged, what direct advice services might your Centre be interested in?

(Please tick any of the following services that you might be interested in)

Drop-in advice sessions (Regular sessions at your Centre - with no appointments necessary)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advice interviews for individual users (Appointments made by referral and interviews held at your Centre)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advice interviews for individual users (Appointments made by referral and interviews held at a local advice centre)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home visits for individual users (Appointments made by referral and interviews held at a user's home)	<input type="checkbox"/>

(c) If funding could be arranged, would you be interested in BAF arranging training courses on advice work issues for your Centre's staff?

Yes No

If "Yes", what training issues would be the main priorities?

- (d) If arrangements could be made, what other advice related services might your Centre be interested in?**
 (Please tick any of the following services that you might be interested in)

Talks on local advice services at network and team meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talks on advice work subjects / issues for Centre staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talks on advice work subjects / issues for Centre users	<input type="checkbox"/>
Places for Centre staff on BAF training courses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leaflets or posters about local advice services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leaflets about advice issues (eg benefits, debt, employment)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities for Centre staff to work shadow at an advice centre	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities for Centre users to volunteer at an advice centre	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your Centre being a partner in benefit take-up campaigns	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 4 – More information about your Centre

- (a) What facilities at your Centre could be used to help provide advice services?**
 (Please tick all the facilities that could be available)

Public area for an advice stand (The area needs to be big enough for a table, chairs and display material)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Private room(s) for confidential interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leaflet rack(s) in a public area	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training room(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>

- (b) Please give any other relevant details about your Centre, and its facilities, which might affect the range of advice services that could be provided**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form

*Please return your form by **Friday 28 August 2009**, to:*

Infotrain 28 Bushmead Avenue, Bedford, MK40 3QN
Tel.: 01234 360607 Fax: 01234 328707 Email: len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk

This research is being conducted on behalf of BAF by **infotrain**

APPENDIX 4

QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO BAF MEMBERS

BEDFORDSHIRE ADVICE FORUM

Promoting and supporting the provision of advice and information services in Bedfordshire

LINKS BETWEEN CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND LOCAL ADVICE AGENCIES

Bedfordshire Advice Forum (BAF) has been awarded funding to look into developing partnerships between its members and Children's Centres in Bedfordshire.

The provision of appropriate and timely advice to parents on issues such as benefits, debt and housing has a significant role to play in tackling child poverty. We are therefore looking at ways of increasing the provision of advice services within Children's Centres and would like to find out more about how your agency could work more effectively with local Children's Centres

It would therefore be very helpful if you could take some time to answer the following questions.

Section 1 – Agency details

Name of Advice Agency		
Location of agency No need to enter full address - just the town or area		
Which Council area does your agency work in? Please tick relevant area(s)	Bedford Borough	
	Central Bedfordshire	
Contact person		
Job role		
Telephone number		
Email address		

Section 2 – Existing links with Children's Centres

(b) Does your agency currently provide any advice / information services for local Children's Centres (eg outreach advice sessions)?

Yes No

If "Yes", please give details of the service and the Children's Centre(s) you work with

If "Yes", what are the main enquiry areas from users at Children's Centres?

(Please tick the 5 most common subject areas, if you have these records)

Benefits and tax credits	<input type="checkbox"/>
Debt and money management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment (eg redundancy or discrimination)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practical issues surrounding relationship breakdown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consumer issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Immigration issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessing or challenging health or community care services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other issues (please give details below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

(b) Does your agency have any other specific links with local Children's Centres (eg agreed referral arrangements)?

Yes No

If "Yes", please give details and the Children's Centres(s) you work with

Section 3 – Future links with Children's Centres

- (a) **If appropriate funding could be arranged, what direct advice services might your agency be interested in providing to Children's Centres?**
(Please tick any of the following services that you might be interested in providing)

Drop-in advice sessions

(Regular sessions at a Children's Centre - with no appointments necessary)

Advice interviews for individual users

(Appointments made by referral and interviews held at a Children's Centre)

Advice interviews for individual users

(Appointments made by referral and interviews held at your agency)

Home visits for individual users

(Appointments made by referral and interviews held at a user's home)

- (b) **If appropriate funding could be arranged, would your agency be interested in providing training courses on advice work issues for Children's Centre staff?**

Yes

No

If "Yes", what training course might you be able to provide?

--

- (c) **If arrangements could be made, what other advice related services might your agency be able to provide for Children's Centres?**
(Please tick any of the following services that you might be interested in providing)

Talks on your advice service at Children's Centre meetings

Talks on advice work subjects / issues for Children's Centre staff

Talks on advice work subjects / issues for Children's Centre users

Leaflets or posters about your advice service

Leaflets about advice issues (eg benefits, debt, employment)

Opportunities for Children's Centre staff to shadow advisers at your agency

Opportunities for Children's Centre users to volunteer at your agency

Section 4 – More information about your agency

- (a) **What leaflets and other information material could your agency provide for Children's Centres?**
(Please tick all the material that could be made available)

Leaflets about your advice services

Posters about your advice services

Leaflets or information sheets that you produce on advice work subjects / issues **(please give details below)**

- (b) **Please give any other relevant information about your agency, and its services, which might affect the links you could have with Children's Centres**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form

*Please return your form by **Friday 28 August 2009**, to:*

Infotrain 28 Bushmead Avenue, Bedford, MK40 3QN

Tel.: 01234 360607 Fax: 01234 328707 Email: len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk

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