

# BEDFORDSHIRE ADVICE FORUM

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

## Minutes of Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2008 BPHA, Horne Lane, Bedford

### Present:

Len Simkins	Advice UK (Eastern Region)
Liz Morgan	Disability Resource Centre
David Wood	Leighton Linlade CAB
David Waggott	Mid Bedfordshire CAB
Carol Axten	Bedford CAB
Alexandra Austin	Bedfordshire County Council - Trading Standards
Amanda Ryan	BPHA
Heather Gilbert	Bedford Borough Council – Housing Advice
Karen Cook	Bedford Borough Council – Benefits and Community Welfare
Irene Tindall	Age Concern Bedfordshire
Tanya Richardson	Create/Finance ReDirect
Mark Smith	CVS Mid & North Beds
Susannah Rastall	Infotrain (Minutes)

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

Everybody introduced themselves to the group. Len acted as 'Chair' for the meeting as Wendy was unable to attend. Susannah Rastall will be helping to facilitate BAF now that Sue Walmsley has left Infotrain.

### 2. Apologies

Annette Pacey	BPHA
Trevor Moisey	Rutland Road Church
Balbir Dutt	Luton Law Centre
Prithpal Chander	Anchor Staying Put
Wendy Anderson-Welsh	BREC
Bryden Keenan	BRASS

### Action

### 3. Minutes and Matters Arising

3.1 The following corrections to the minutes of the AGM and Forum meetings (26<sup>th</sup> June) were made:

- David Verney was present at the meetings as a representative of Beds CPAG and not Age Concern.
- The AGM minutes were recorded as Bedford Advice Forum – this should have been Bedfordshire Advice Forum.

#### Matters Arising

Wendy Anderson-Welsh has been seconded onto the BAF Steering Group and appointed as Chair of BAF. David Verney has now joined Beds. MIND and has resigned from the Steering Group. There is now a vacancy on the Steering Group. If a member would like to join, please contact Len (BAF Secretary).

## 4. Advice services in South Bedfordshire

- 4.1 **Disability Resource Centre** - Liz Morgan gave a presentation on the services provided by the Disability Resource Centre. This presentation can be viewed on the BAF website: [www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk](http://www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk)

The following question was asked:

**Q Are cross referrals made between the Good Neighbour/Village Care Schemes?**

**A** Yes, the information handbooks are updated regularly and cross referrals are made.

- 4.2 **CAB Services** – David Wood gave a presentation on the CAB services in South Bedfordshire at Dunstable and Leighton Linlade. This presentation can also be viewed on the BAF website.

A question was asked about the email service for enquiries used at Leighton Linlade CAB:

**Q How well is the advice by email project progressing?**

**A** Marketing has been very cautious – this is offered as an option on the CAB answering service, or offered via a link on the website which can be found via a search engine. Volume is therefore small with 20 – 25 requests for advice via email per week but this is steadily increasing. A response is promised in 1–3 days; however responses have been given within 24 hours to date. 30% of enquiries result in an actual visit to the bureau.

## 5. BAF membership Scheme

An update report was distributed giving details of the BAF Membership Scheme agreed at the AGM.

30 positive responses have been received, 6 agencies have cancelled their membership and 29 have not yet responded. The target was to raise a minimum of £1000 - and £915 has been raised so far.

Len will send out a reminder by email to those organisations that have not yet responded. If a membership fee is not received by an organisation that wishes to attend a training programme, higher non-membership fees will apply.

**Infotrain**

In future BAF will have 2 mailing lists – one for members and one for non-members that wish to continue to receive information on BAF activities.

## 6. BAF Website

David Wood launched the new website : [www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk](http://www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk) to the forum.

The website is very much 'a work in progress' and will grow to meet the needs of BAF. The site has been uploaded using off the shelf tools and is web based and hosted by a low cost international hosting service. Amendments can be made by anyone with an appropriate id/password.

David demonstrated the new site and members were asked for their input. Feedback was very positive.

It was agreed that an eye catching logo needs to be created for BAF. Amanda will look into the design of a logo by Hastingsbury School - they have created logos for BPHA previously as part of a marketing project.

It was suggested that the heading for Bedfordshire Advice Forum be amended on the site to reflect how this has been shown on stationary i.e. **Bedfordshire Advice Forum**

Len suggested the following could also be uploaded onto the website in the future:

- on-line booking forms for the training courses
- BAF Directory
- a noticeboard for up and coming events
- vacancies for jobs within the advice sector

A search facility would also be useful. David confirmed this should be possible in future.

Len thanked David for his hard work on developing the site which has been done voluntarily.

**Infotrain**

Len will inform all members that the website is now functioning and the minutes of the forum meetings will be posted on the site.

## **7. Update on other BAF Activities**

**7.1 BAF Autumn 2008 Training programme** – the first course, Introduction to Money Advice, was very successful - an evaluation report is available. It was suggested that a more advanced Money Advice programme be made available next year.

Local Housing Allowance – 1 more person is required for this programme to be viable. Irene Tindall from Age Concern confirmed that she had one more person for this course.

Employment and Support Allowance – a date change from 4<sup>th</sup> November to 6<sup>th</sup> November was confirmed. Susannah to send out an email informing those already booked of the date change.

**Infotrain**

**7.2 Financial Capability Training** – David Waggott confirmed that the following free training sessions for advisors were available as part of a joint CAB/DWP project:

18<sup>th</sup> November - 10.00–2.00 - Mid Beds District Council Offices

4<sup>th</sup> December - 10.00–12.00 - Mid Beds District Council Offices

The course is open to the voluntary and statutory sector – an email has been sent to BAF agencies informing them of this training.

**7.3 Advice Bedfordshire** is now organising BAF's activities including all meetings and the BAF training programme. As it is a limited company this takes any direct responsibility away from individual forum members. As a Community Interest Company, any surplus funds will be kept in the company for use by BAF. Advice Bedfordshire will also apply for funds on BAF's behalf.

**7.4 Voluntary Works** – BAF has now joined Voluntary Works (the local voluntary sector infrastructure consortium) and Len will attend Consortium meetings on behalf of BAF.

At the last Forum meeting it was agreed that BAF should try to hold a special meeting relating to Local Government Reorganisation and invite representatives from the 2 new unitary authorities to discuss future funding of advice agencies. It may be possible to obtain funding from Voluntary Works to organise this meeting as they have funding relating to Local Government Reorganisation.

Infotrain

Mark Smith reported that Central Bedfordshire had agreed to roll over funding for voluntary sector agencies for at least one year and for Mid Beds CAB for 18 months.

- 7.5 BAF Advice Directory** - £350 has been raised to update the Directory; however there may be more funding available. The plan is to have an online version on the BAF website which can be updated regularly, possibly with a Search facility.

An on-line Directory would need to be planned carefully – a working group of those actively involved in updating a Directory may need to be established. Len to look into the funding available.

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## 8. Information Exchange

- 8.1 Advice for All Campaign** – Karen Cook confirmed that the Advice Fair was very successful with 510 people coming through the door. This is the last activity under the present campaign.

- 8.2 Bedford Borough Council - Housing Advice** – Heather Gilbert confirmed Housing Advice is now known as Housing Options.

- 8.3 Bedford CAB** – Carol Axten reported that the CAB was now back on a stable financial footing. The LSC contract for debt advice has been re-instated and a new Debt case worker has been appointed; however there are no specialist advisors on Welfare Benefits. The CAB still cannot provide help with benefit appeals and is short of volunteers who can help with form filling.

The situation at the CAB is now more positive and it is hoped a new Manager will be appointed shortly. A temporary manager is in place for 2 days a week.

- 8.4 Age Concern** – Irene Tindall is the new Information, Advice and Link manager for Age Concern and is responsible for the merging of the information and link services and the expansion of these services into Mid and South Beds.

**Link** is a one-stop help for older people, 50+, giving advice on all enquiries except medical issues. More volunteers are needed to help with form filling.

- 8.5 CVS Mid and North Beds** – Mark Smith pointed out that the Volunteer Centre at the CVS may be able to help with volunteer placements. Training publicity can also be put in BEDS-SPREAD which is distributed every 6 weeks.

**Quiz night** – Mark informed everyone of the Charities In Bedford Association (CIBA) quiz night on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> October at the White Horse, Bedford. This is a fun night to raise funds and increase the profile of this new fundraising partnership. Every one is welcome to register and join in.

- 8.6 Bedford Credit Union** – Mark reported the new development worker for Mid Beds, Anne Slade, has just started her new role in developing the new credit union service in Mid Beds. There are already new members that have joined from the Mid Beds area.
- 8.7 Luton Law Centre** – Len distributed posters on the Equalities Advice Project being run by the Law Centre. The advice line number for enquiries on discrimination issues is: 01582 480745.
- 8.8 BREC** – Len reported on The Acorn Project, funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which is being organised by BREC. Free training in self development is being offered to: people from BME communities, young people, people with disabilities and women. The training will help develop skills and capacity for individuals to engage in public and civil life.

## 9. Any Other Business

- 9.1 Child Poverty Event** – Launch of countywide child poverty network on 7<sup>th</sup> November.
- 9.2 Survey of voluntary sector organisations** – Voluntary Works will be distributing a questionnaire shortly. Len will pass this on to BAF members.

## 10. Date of next meeting

- 10.1** The next **Forum** meeting will be held on **Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2009** at 2.00pm. Venue to be confirmed. **Infotrain**
- 10.2** The next **Steering Group** meeting will be held in **January 2008** – details will be arranged by email. **Infotrain**

BAF meetings are organised by



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All documents discussed in these minutes are available from Infotrain:

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