

Minutes of Forum meeting held on 9th June 2011 Salvation Army Hall, Commercial Road, Bedford (Forum meeting held after BAF AGM)

Present:

Lorraine Gunther (Chair)
Wendy Anderson-Welsh
Alexandra Austin
Georgia Bowers
Mags Brady
Brian Cunningham
Jenny Harris
Jenny Hedges
Fiona McLeod
Annette Pacey
Len Simkins
Irene Tindall
David Waggott
Ann Whitmore
David Wood
Susannah Rastall (Minutes)

Bedford CAB
BREC
Bedford Borough Council – Trading Standards
Bedford Borough Libraries
Polish British Integration Centre
BRASS
Sight Concern Bedfordshire
Amphill & Biggleswade CAB
Money Advice at St Andrew Church
bpha – Money Advice Team
Advice UK
Age Concern Bedfordshire
Amphill & Biggleswade CAB
Bedford Salvation Army - Debt Advice Service
Leighton Linlade CAB
Infotrain

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Action</i>
1 Apologies for Absence		
Nicola Avery Michele Collins Karen Cook Noor D'Agostino Carl Davies Debbie Hammond Bryden Keenan Rosie Kind Veronica Miskelly Trevor Moisey Kerry O'Neil Peter Rayner Cheryl Subocz	Central Bedfordshire Council – Library Service Aragon Housing – Money Advice Bedford Borough Council – Community Welfare Bedford Borough Council – Welfare Rights Disability Resource Centre Bedford Borough Council – Welfare Rights BRASS Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity Bedford Borough Council – Housing Options Rutland Road Church Bedford Borough Council – Library Service bpha – Employment Support Carers in Bedfordshire	
2 Minutes and matters arising		
2.1 Previous minutes	The minutes of the last BAF meeting on 17 th February 2011 were accepted as an accurate record.	
2.2 Matters arising	There were no matters arising.	
3 Update on BAF activities	Len distributed an update report.	
3.1 New Benefits Network	<p>The first meeting of the New Benefits Network took place in March and was attended by 23 people. This meeting provided an opportunity to challenge staff at the Job Centre Plus and Housing Benefit offices regarding benefits issues.</p> <p>There was strong support for the network amongst BAF members and the response from the first meeting indicates that this was well worth organising. BAF is committed to running the next meeting on 3rd October and will then review the situation regarding further meetings.</p>	

Jenny Harris confirmed to those present that she found the first meeting very useful.

Wendy Anderson-Welsh asked if there was any bulletin or update being circulated regarding benefit changes/issues. Len confirmed that there had been requests for BAF to do this. This will be discussed by the Steering Group.

BAF SG

The official name for the new network will be: the **Bedfordshire Benefits Network**.

3.2 BAF Training

Advising in the Economic Crisis

Feedback on all the recent courses had been excellent. A full evaluation report is available on the BAF website. The Welfare Reform training courses were particularly popular and an extra course was organised in early April to meet demand.

Participants on the Welfare Reform courses suggested future support from BAF would be useful on the following:

- Further training on benefit changes
- Information updates on the changes
- Further networking for benefit advisers and local agencies

Q-cas Training

Another programme of Q-cas training courses (organised by BREC) started on 8th June. These programmes have helped BAF gain some new members.

3.3 Bedfordshire Advice Directory

As part of the BAF membership renewal for 2011/12 Len will send out a short form for current members to update their information for the Directory. Any members not already included in the Directory will also be encouraged to have an entry.

LS

It was also agreed that more publicity for the Directory is needed – posters could go out direct to libraries.

3.4 BAF website

The website address is: www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk
Details on BAF meetings and projects are updated regularly. A new page has been added to the website for the Bedfordshire Benefits Network. Another page will be added shortly to cover the Advice Strategies.

3.5 Advice Bedfordshire

Advice Bedfordshire held its AGM today. The Company's annual report is available on the BAF website. In 2010/11 the Company had a turnover of over £16,000 and made a trading surplus of £21.85. The Company raised over £1,100 for BAF during the year.

3.6 VoluntaryWorks

BAF is still a member of VoluntaryWorks although there is no more funding available for BAF this year.

Voluntary Works will continue to meet and is providing some services. For example:

- Facilitation of 3rd Sector Assemblies – an Assembly was recently held in Central Bedfordshire
- Various training under its Big Lottery Fund project – the Q-cas training programmes are part of this
- IT project – free IT checks are available for voluntary organisations. A leaflet was distributed at the meeting. Copies will be posted to BAF members not present today

LS

3.7 Themes for future meetings

The Civil Service Benevolent Fund has asked to give a presentation at a BAF meeting. It was agreed to invite them to give a 15–20 minute presentation at the next meeting.

It was also decided that a talk regarding “Personalisation” may be useful to members following the recent implementation of personal health budget pilots. Irene Tindall confirmed that she had recently attended a training session from NHS Bedfordshire who may be able to give a presentation to BAF. The Disability Resource Centre may also have someone who could give a talk. It was agreed that the Steering Group would look into this.

BAF SG

Lorraine invited suggestions for other topics from members. It was suggested that new members could give short presentations on the work their organisation is involved in.

3.8 BAF membership

It was agreed at BAF’s AGM that membership fees for 2011/12 should be the same as in 2010/11. Membership renewals will be sent out shortly.

LS

There are currently 3 new members who wish to join in 2011/12. However, Anchor Staying Put, Central Bedfordshire Council (Welfare Rights Team) and Thai3 Counties have all recently closed and will therefore no longer be BAF members in 2011/12

4 BAF Work Plan 2011/12

Len presented a discussion document to help develop a **Work Plan for BAF** for 2011/12.

Key issues from the draft Work Plan were:

- As BAF will be directly responsible for some of the work in the Action Plans for the local Advice Strategies, the BAF Work Plan should be strongly linked to the recommended action in the Action Plan.
- Although the draft Work Plan has been based on the Bedford Borough Advice Strategy, the Work Plan should service both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.
- As part of the Work Plan, BAF will move forward on arranging a meeting with local solicitors. This links in with the recommended action to develop closer links between the not-for-profit advice sector and other advice providers.
- Many other recommended actions in the Advice Strategy, such as training for the advice sector, will also be part of BAF’s Work Plan.

Len reported that funding of £3,000 has been given by the Bedford Borough Partnership Board to help implement the Advice Strategy in Bedford Borough. This funding is to help BAF facilitate the **Advice Management Group** which will be responsible for implementing the Strategy. BAF will ask for expressions of interest from BAF members for this contract.

BAF SG

Once the AMG is up and running they will oversee other recommended actions from the Advice Strategy and will hopefully be in a better position to source extra funding for the advice sector and to ensure the continuation of BAF.

The Advice Strategy for Central Bedfordshire will be presented to the LSP in July. It was noted that there is funding available at Central Bedfordshire for advice work related to child poverty, which may be available to help move forward our Strategy.

After discussion it was agreed that the draft Work Plan should be re-structured to highlight BAF's key work activities. These could then be linked to the Advice Strategies in Bedford Borough and Central Beds. Links could also be shown to any other relevant strategies or local initiatives.

LS

5 Information exchange

5.1 Bedford Central Library

A new **Work Club** has been started at the library. This is to support people looking for work - for example, giving advice on writing CVs. A publicity flyer for the club was circulated.

5.2 Money Advice at St Andrews

Fiona informed the Forum that **Money Advice at St Andrews** opened last September. Although there were no clients in the first 5 weeks, since then there has been a steady stream of clients. They have had 20 referrals to date and many people return. They are now looking for new advisers and a new member for their management group.

5.2 BRASS

Refugee Week starts 20th June with various activities taking place in Bedford. Brian will send a leaflet with full details to Len for distribution to BAF members.

BC

5.3 Age Concern Bedfordshire

Irene confirmed that **Falls Awareness Week** will take place week starting 20th June. Irene will send a flyer to Len for distribution to BAF members. This information can also go in the BREC bulletin.

IT

5.4 Salvation Army - Debt Advice Service

Ann confirmed that **The Salvation Army** had recently purchased a nearby pub which will eventually be renovated and used for the community. This is an exciting development. Further details will be revealed over the coming months.

5.5 Polish British Integration Centre

PBIC is organising an **event for families** to celebrate Children's Day. The event will be on 26th June (12.00 – 4.00pm) at The Place, Bradgate Road, Bedford. There will be various activities, information points and interpreters.

5.6 BREC

Wendy confirmed that BREC had applied to become a member of the **Central Bedfordshire Local Strategic Partnership Board**. Wendy will inform BAF if successful.

WAW

6 Any Other Business

There will be a **Funding Fayre** on Wednesday 15th June at the Bedford Corn Exchange.

The next **Bedford Borough Assembly** meeting is taking place on 21st July. BAF has been invited to have a stand at the event to promote BAF, the advice sector and the Advice Strategy. Len will arrange this.

LS

7 Date of next forum meetings

The next meeting was provisionally set for the 20th October.

NB The date is has now been changed to **Tuesday 18th October** at 2pm. Venue to be the Salvation Army Hall.

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

BAF meetings

Organised by



Facilitated by

infotrain
Services Ltd