

# ADVICE MANAGEMENT GROUP

## Bedford Borough

**2.30 pm, Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2011**  
 Room 631, Borough Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford

**Present:**

Lorraine Gunther (Chair)	Bedford & District Citizens Advice Bureau (and BAF)
Wendy Anderson-Welsh	Bedfordshire Race and Equalities Council (and BAF)
David Brewer	Bedford Borough Council
Lee Phanco	Bedford Borough Council
Martin Westerby	NHS Bedfordshire
Nicky Dahl	Bpha
Lindsay Mitton (Guest)	Bedford Borough Council
Len Simkins (Facilitator)	Infotrain
Susannah Rastall (Minutes)	Infotrain

**Apologies:**

Jackie Golding	NHS Bedfordshire
Jo Hawthorne	Bedford Borough Council
Sharon Simpson	Bedford Borough Council

<i>Item</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Action</i>
<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome and Introductions</b>	<p>Lorraine Gunther welcomed everyone to the meeting including the new member to the AMG, Nicky Dahl, and the guest speaker, Lindsay Mitton.</p> <p>Martin Westerby confirmed he was attending the meeting on behalf of his colleague, Jackie Golding, who could not make the meeting.</p>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Minutes of last meeting (28/9/11) and matters arising</b>	<p><b>Amendment to last minutes</b> – Item 4.2 (Action 3, 7 and 10): the consultation on proposed budget changes from Bedford Borough Council ended on 21<sup>st</sup> November <i>not</i> 26<sup>th</sup> November.</p> <p><b>Matters arising</b> – Items 1 and 3.4 - Decisions as to who should report back to the BBPB on current AMG work will need to be made as and when appropriate. The AMG Chair could do this for major issues but would not need to attend every BBPB meeting.</p>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Advice Management Group</b>		
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Confirmation of AMG membership and terms of reference</b>	As recommended at the last meeting two new members were invited to join the AMG – Sharon Simpson (representing Children’s Services) and Nicky Dahl (representing bpha and the housing sector).	

The Terms of Reference had been amended following discussions at the last meeting. These amendments were agreed. It was also agreed to amend the bullet point on the reporting arrangements (under Role of the AMG) to reflect the decision made in Item 2 above.

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### **3.2 Role of Champion for Advice**

In the Strategy there was a recommendation (Action 2) to appoint a “Champion for Advice” to raise the profile of the advice sector. Len Simkins distributed details of what this role might entail.

As each member represents a different area of advice it would be difficult for any one member to promote equally all the different areas. After discussion it was agreed that all members of the AMG should be ambassadors for advice and it is therefore the duty of *all* members to be actively proactive in promoting the advice sector and the Advice Strategy. The role of champion for advice will therefore be a joint role for all members of the AMG.

Len will amend the 4<sup>th</sup> bullet point (under Role of the AMG) in the Terms of Reference to reflect this.

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## **4 Bedford Employment Hub**

### **4.1 Update**

Lindsay Mitton (Economic Development Manager – Regeneration) gave an update on the proposed new Jobs, Skills and Enterprise Hub. The aim of the Hub is to support and add value to existing provision on helping people into work. The Hub will open in June 2012

The project will deliver against the Partnership Board’s priority to increase economic participation and tackle inequality and poverty.

Lindsay distributed a paper giving a summary of the proposal and progress to date.

### **4.2 Potential links between the Hub and local advice sector**

At the last AMG meeting it had been agreed that IAG work (in terms of jobs and training advice) was not part of the AMG’s remit. But the Hub will link to the advice sector as there will probably be a need to refer people for advice on issues such as benefits, debt etc.

Lindsay explained there will be “self-help” information available at the Hub. The AMG felt it would be important to include information on where to go for advice. This could be done through the on-line Bedfordshire Advice Directory. The number of ‘hits’ on the Directory could also be monitored.

It was confirmed that appropriate mechanisms at the Hub need to be in place to enable people to obtain the right advice locally.

Wendy Anderson-Welsh also raised the issue that some people coming to the Hub may be interested in volunteering options in the advice sector which could later lead to job opportunities. BREC, for example, is in need of volunteers.

The role of the AMG will be to facilitate discussions with the Hub regarding the advice needs of Hub clients. Some of these needs could be met through referrals or others by providing basic information.

One possibility is that an on-line appointment system could be set up with advice agencies. BAF agencies could possibly offer available appointment times to be booked by potential Hub clients.

Another idea is to produce a checklist on what to do and who to inform when a person gets a job. For example, Housing Benefit claimants need to inform the Council that their circumstances have changed.

It was agreed that Lindsay should attend the next BAF meeting to meet different advice agencies to discuss the following issues:

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- Provision of self-help leaflets and other information
- Signposting and referring to BAF members
- An advice appointment system

Len informed Lindsay that BAF organises training courses such as “An Introduction to Benefits” which may be useful to future workers at the Hub.

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## **5 Advice needs and gaps in provision in Bedford Borough**

### **5.1 Report**

As agreed at the last meeting, Len had produced a report on priority needs and gaps in advice and information provision in Bedford Borough. The report linked together social welfare advice, health and social care advice, and advice for families and children.

### **5.2 The way forward**

Lorraine welcomed the report and enquired what the next steps should be. Len directed the group towards page 4 where possible future actions relating to the Advice Strategy are outlined.

One longer-term idea could be a centralised access point for advice. Len distributed details of the new HertsHelp intake/triage service. This single access route into different voluntary and community groups via one phone number could be a way forward in future. Lorraine confirmed that the CAB is moving towards the use of a centralised phone number for advice.

However, the Advice Strategy also emphasised that telephone helplines are not sufficient, as many people, especially vulnerable people or people with complex problems, also need in-depth, face-to-face advice.

To move forward it was agreed that more information is needed on the criteria and resources of different advice agencies in the Borough. This would help define the scope for more linked working between agencies.

David Brewer suggested developing a functional map showing the flow of clients between different agencies in the local advice network.

It was agreed that Len would produce a template for this mapping process at the next AMG meeting. This template would be key to delivering Actions 3 and 4 of the Strategy.

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Once the template has been agreed David suggested that a proposal be given to the Partnership Board in March for further funding to finalise the mapping.

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## 6 General Update

### 6.1 Bedford Borough budget proposals

Lee Phanco confirmed that the final decisions on the funding consultation will be announced on 2<sup>nd</sup> December. Although overall funding (for 3<sup>rd</sup> sector grants) will be reduced there is a commitment to protect the funding of existing grant holders. The council are also committed to finding a way to offer longer-term grants.

Len raised the point that one of the budget proposals concerned appointing another benefits adviser at the Council. It was agreed that in future the AMG should be included in any discussions on advice related issues in the statutory sector - as well as in voluntary sector.

### 6.2 HertsHelp

Already discussed under Item 5.2.

### 6.3 Welfare Reform

Len had distributed a Select Committee report on Welfare Reform. It was agreed to discuss the effects of welfare reform on local government and advice agencies in detail at a future meeting. Future AMG Action Plans will need to take account of the predicted changes.

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## 7 AOB

Len reported that BAF had agreed a Work Plan to take forward the parts of the Advice Strategy that were BAF's responsibility. Len will send David a report on the work done by BAF and the AMG for feedback to the BBPB.

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## 8 Next Meeting

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2012 at 2.00pm at Borough Hall.

**This AMG meeting has been:**

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