

ADVICE STRATEGY

Bedford Borough

Planning Group Meeting

Thursday 25th February 2010

Bunyan Meeting Free Church, Mill Street, Bedford

NOTES OF MEETING

Present

Gillian Abbott	Bedford Borough Council - Adult Services
Wendy Anderson-Welsh	Bedford Race Equality Council
Carl Davies	Disability Resource Centre, Dunstable
Lorraine Gunther	Bedford and District CAB
Jo Hawthorne	Bedford Borough Council - Adult Services
Agata Kosonowska	British Polish Integration Centre
Barnaby McConnell	Advocacy Alliance
Annette Pacey	Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association
Janet Ridge	Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
Anjila Sinha	Advice UK
Irene Tindall	Age Concern Bedfordshire
Len Simkins	Infotrain / BAF
Linda Wood	Infotrain / BAF

1. Apologies

Sue Audin	Bedford Borough Council - Benefits and Community Welfare
Alexandra Austin	Bedford Borough Council - Trading Standards
Karen Cook	Bedford Borough Council - Benefits and Community Welfare
Charnjeet Dhillon	Bedford Borough Council - Integrated Services 0-19
George Hunt	Bedford Borough Council - Adult Services
Liz Morgan	Disability Resource Centre
Dawn Parker	Bedford Borough Council - Housing Options
Gillie Sharp	Luton Law Centre

2. Update from last workshop (11th November 2009)

Len Simkins recapped on the issues discussed at the previous (county-wide) workshop, and developments since the meeting. See attached **update report**.

The Advice Strategy Proposal, agreed at the last meeting, was submitted to Social Inclusion, Community Cohesion and Culture Thematic Partnership on 30th November.

The Proposal then went onto the Bedford Borough Partnership Board where it was accepted on 9th December 2009. It is hoped that the Board will make some resources available for development work on the Strategy from April 2010.

Len and Anjila Sinah reported on the meeting held at AdviceUK in January to discuss advice strategies. The work undertaken in Bedfordshire is acknowledged as a model of good practice.

Len also reported that Voluntary Works had awarded some further funding to BAF to help with development work on the strategies until the end of March 2010.



Janet Ridge reported, for information, that the proposal for an Advice Strategy for Central Bedfordshire was recently discussed by the Central Beds LSP. Although the Proposal was accepted, this was only after some discussion at the LSP meeting. With funding being very restricted in Central Beds., there are unlikely to be any financial resources to help with the advice strategy work. Len will arrange a meeting to discuss the Central Beds. Advice Strategy in March.

3. Advice Strategy – first steps

Clarification of remit of strategy

Len reported that it had become apparent, in discussions with other groups since the submission of the Proposal to the Partnership Board, that there were different opinions on the definition of "advice" and what the Advice Strategy should cover. It had become clear that it was not only those groups involved in delivering civil legal advice (from BAF) that were interested in developing an Advice Strategy. The sectors now showing an interest included:

- **Advice sector (BAF members)** - providing advice and information services on civil legal issues such as welfare benefits, employment, debt, housing and relationship breakdown
- **Adult Social Care Sector** - under "Putting People First" all local authorities must produce a "Universal Information and Advice" Strategy (by April 2010) to ensure that the public are informed about care and support needs
- **Guidance / Learning and Skills sector** - providing information, advice and guidance (IAG) on helping people find employment and training and develop their careers
- **Various other sectors** - providing a range of information and advice services eg. Children's Centres (advice on childcare services, better parenting etc.); NHS (advice on giving up smoking, better diets etc), Police (advice on security issues); Fire Service (advice on smoke alarms)

Len facilitated a discussion that came up with a wide ranging list of examples of advice that is given in the community. However, it was agreed that an Advice Strategy should not cover all of these different types of advice. It will be important to clearly define "advice" in the Strategy.

Key definitions

During the discussions, and in the update report, key definitions (eg information, advice and advocacy) were clarified.

Universal Information and Advice Strategy

Jo Hawthorne, Head of Transformation of Adult Social Care at Bedford Borough Council presented to the meeting the work currently being undertaken in Adult Services to prepare a "Universal Information and Advice Strategy" - which all local authorities are need to produce by the end of March. Jo circulated copies of the draft strategy. She stressed that although the responsibility for producing the document rested with Adult Social Care Services, the aim of the "Universal" strategy was to cover the advice needs of all members of the community across their "life journey". She felt that there were considerable benefits to be gained by working in partnership with the Advice Strategy Planning Group to produce a single strategy for the Borough.

There was a wide-ranging discussion on how the Borough's proposed "Universal" strategy and the Partnership Board's strategy (initially proposed by the advice sector) might fit together. There were some concerns that the "Universal" strategy does not cover the needs of other sectors eg Children's Services. One suggested way forward was that there could be one overall strategy in the Borough with different chapters/sections for the different types of advice. However, some people felt that this would be unwieldy and that the ideal should be to have one strategy cross-cutting across all areas. There was also concern that the Borough's "Universal" strategy had different drivers (being a Department of Health statutory requirement on local authorities) to the original advice sector proposal that was driven by the need to deliver quality advice services to tackle social inequality in the local community.

Conclusions

After much debate, the following conclusions were reached:

1. The Advice Strategy Planning Group supported and applauded the work being done on the Adult Social Care ("Universal") Strategy.
2. Individual BAF members, especially those working in health and social care fields, should be encouraged to submit their own comments about the "Universal" strategy
3. In light of the tight time constraints on producing the "Universal" strategy, the first version of the strategy should concentrate on just health and social care issues. The advice sector should then continue working on its own strategy (focussing on civil legal issues) over the next few months.
4. Jo and Gillian should try to attend future Planning Group meetings. In the future the two strategies should be carefully cross-referenced so that they complement each other. In the longer-term it is possible that the two strategies could be amalgamated.
5. It was also agreed that "advocacy" should be added to the advice sector strategy. It will also be included in the "Universal" Strategy

Carl offered to work with Jo and Gillian, if required, on the "Universal" strategy.

It was agreed that the draft "Universal" strategy would be circulated with the minutes of this meeting. Any comments or suggestions should then be sent to:

Jo Hawthorne - Jo.Hawthorne@bedford.gov.uk

or to Gillian Abbott - Gillian.Abbott@bedford.gov.uk

4. Advice Strategy – next steps

Due to the time spent on the very useful discussion on the "Universal Information and Advice" strategy, it was clear that it would not be possible to cover all the planned agenda items.

It had been hoped to draft an **action plan** for work to be carried out on the Advice Strategy, but it was agreed that Len and Linda would look at this after the meeting.

Len and Linda will begin to draft an Advice Strategy using the **vision, principles and strategic aims** agreed at the last planning group meeting.

It was also agreed that Len and Linda would make a start on the **mapping of current advice provision** and an **assessment of needs**. Len and Linda would liaise with Jo and Gillian to share information on this – the Borough had statistical information which would be useful for the needs analysis and BAF could provide information to the Borough on the provision of services by independent advice agencies in the Borough.

Len and Linda will design a **template for the draft Advice Strategy** in March using ideas from the Borough's "Universal" Strategy, the ADP sample advice strategy (discussed at previous meetings), and advice strategies from other areas (discussed at previous meetings).

The initial sections of the draft Advice Strategy will be circulated to the Planning Group in April for discussion at another meeting in May. Plans could then be made to complete the other sections in the Advice Strategy.

5. Next meeting

To be held in May – date to be arranged.

NB All the documents relating to BAF's Advice Strategy work can be found on BAF's website at: www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk

Meeting facilitators - Len Simkins and Linda Wood (Infotrain)

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