

Minutes of Forum Meeting

26th April 2017

Bunyan Meeting, Mill Street, Bedford

Present:

Annette Pacey
Brian Cunningham
Carole Madden
Elliott Stephenson
Fiona McLeod
Helen Turney
James Turner
Karen Lister
Len Simkins
Lianne Martindale
Martin Trinder
Paul Sharpe
Rev Kelvin Woolmer
Samantha Conder
Sarah Broughton
Sarah Dove
Tim Papworth
Trevor Moisey

BPHA
BRASS
Money Advice at St Andrews
Aragon Housing Association
Money Advice at St Andrews
Beds Citizen Housing Association
YMCA
Salvation Army
Autism Bedfordshire
BPHA
CVS Beds
Central Bedfordshire Council
St Peters Church, Bedford
Macmillan Welfare Rights – Central Bedfordshire Council
Bedford Foodbank
Central Bedfordshire Council
Money Advice at St Andrews
Rutland Road Church

Apologies

Jason Tsiricos
Jenny Hedges
David Wood
Sylvia MacDowell

PBIC
Citizen Advice Mid Bedfordshire
Citizen Advice Leighton Linlade
Money Advice at St Andrews

Action

Len Simkins chaired the meeting on behalf of BAF's Steering Group.

2 Minutes of last Forum meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed.

There were no matters arising that were not on the agenda.

3 Homelessness and Housing

Lianne Martindale from BPHA gave a presentation, which covered a number of issues, including the impact of Universal Credit, the removal of the spare room subsidy, and the removal of the benefit cap on tenants. A copy of the slides can be found on the BAF website.

James Turner from YMCA provided the meeting with an overview of the changing environment that the charity is operating in.

The wider group then discussed some of the issues and challenges service users are facing, especially with the full roll-out of Universal Credit from the Bedford Job Centre.

Although the benefit changes are already having some effects, the full impact of Welfare Reform will only be felt in the longer-term.

3 Information Exchange

James - YMCA - New accommodation has been opened in Luton, and the charity has recently taken over the operating of some Women's Refuges in Central Beds. New hosts for their Supported Lodging scheme are particular in demand.

Annette - BPHA - BPHA will be hosting a welfare reform event on 28th April, and then a Universal Credit event on 6th May.

Brian - BRASS - The service is very busy, with very high demand for welfare advice, and the Life in the UK courses are popular.

Fiona/Tim/Carole – Money Advice at St Andrews - The service continues, but new advisors always welcome. Their annual meeting is on 9th May (3pm), with a speaker from Emmaus. Fiona will be stepping down at the AGM. The meeting thanked Fiona for her support to BAF over the years.

Karen - Salvation Army - Currently there is a particular emphasis on working with clients on budgeting skills.

Kelvin - St Peters Church - Kelvin has recently moved to the locality and is building up his local knowledge and contacts. Kelvin can be contacted on Kelvin.fwoolmer@gmail.com

Sam - Macmillan Welfare Rights - The service now has a full team of 4 advisors, with a waiting list of clients. Drop in sessions are being held at various locations.

Paul - CBC - The 'independent' living team is current being restructured.

Trevor - Rutland Road Church - BBC Look East has been out with the Street Angels recently, so they are hoping for some good news coverage in the next few evenings.

Helen – BCHA - Oak Way House is the new 42 flat unit, with 8 vacancies remaining. A Royal visit will mark the formal opening of the building.

Sarah - Bedford Foodbank - 500-600 families a month are being supported by the service. Some organisations are also being supported where industrial packs are donated.

Elliott – Aragon Housing Association - An advert for a new welfare benefits advisor is out now.

Martin – CVS Beds – A new online volunteering recruitment system has been launched. Organisations who want to promote their opportunities should get in touch with Paul at the Volunteer Centre (paul@cvsbeds.org.uk).

Len - Autism Beds - Len reminded the group that the organisation works with both adults and children, and that organisations can make referrals.

5 Update on current BAF activities

Len provided an update on BAF projects – attached.

Training – The Benefits Update workshop has proved to be very popular, with spaces still available on the Universal Credit courses.

The next meeting of the Benefits Network meeting is 20th September.

Advice Strategy (Central Bedfordshire) – Len updated the meeting on the progress of the strategy and the activities that BAF will be undertaking to support it. BAF members will shortly be asked to check and advise if their online Advice Directory entry is up-to-date.

6 Any other business

2017 will be the 20th Anniversary of BAF. Any ideas for celebrating this are welcome.

7 Dates of future Forum meetings (all 2pm)

- 6th July 2017 (AGM) – CVS Offices, Bedford
 - 2nd November 2017
 - 8th February 2018
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Documents discussed at this meeting can be found at www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk

BAF PROJECTS - UPDATE REPORT

(for BAF meeting on 26/4/17)

BAF training

An update on bookings for BAF's spring training programme is given below.

All the courses will be held at Bunyan Meeting in Bedford.

Thanks should be given to Aragon Housing Association, bpha, and PBIC for providing trainers for the courses.

| Course | Date | Course length | Trainer | Bookings |
|------------------|---------|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Benefits Update | 4/4/17 | ½ day | Elliot Stephenson Len Simkins | 18 with 4 reserves |
| Universal Credit | 11/4/17 | Full day | Elliot Stephenson Len Simkins | 7 |
| Universal Credit | 18/4/17 | Full day | Annette Pacey Jason Tsiricos | 10 |
| TOTAL | | | | 35 |

Surprisingly we still have places available on the Universal Credit courses.

2 agencies (Bedford College – Student Services, and Penrose) have joined BAF when making bookings for the training).

Bedford Borough Council has requested an in-house course for their financial assessment team.

Bedfordshire Benefits Network

These meetings continue to be well received and well attended.

At the last meeting (on 1/3/17), 23 people attended and we had a presentation on the launch of the Full Digital Service of Universal Credit in May at Bedford Jobcentre Plus, an update on other Welfare Reform issues, and updates from both the local Housing Benefit offices.

It is hoped to arrange 2 meeting of the Benefits Network in 2017/18. The next meeting is proposed for **20th September 2017** in Bedford.

BAF's Steering Group will be considering the future arrangements and funding of the Benefits Network for 2017/18.

Advice Strategy – Central Bedfordshire

This project work is funded by **Central Bedfordshire Council** and further funding has been agreed for 2017/18.

BAF is responsible for facilitating the **Advice Strategy Management Group** which oversees the Advice Strategy. Key action in 2017/18 will be to:

- Held 3 meetings of the ASMG. (The 1st meeting is on 17/5/17)
- Oversee implementation of the new Advice Strategy for Central Bedfordshire and performance of the Strategy's Delivery Plan
- Continue to develop a Toolkit to support the Delivery Plan

You can see copies of the Advice Strategy and the Delivery Plan at:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council/stronger-communities/advice.aspx>

To support the Delivery Plan it is proposed that BAF leads on:

- Updating and promoting the use of BAF's Advice Directory (in Central Bedfordshire)
- Encouraging BAF members (working in Central Bedfordshire) to promote the Advice Strategy on their websites
- Delivering and promoting network meetings (ie BAF meetings and BBN meetings) for local advice providers (in Central Bedfordshire).

I will shortly be contacting BAF members (focussing on those working in Central Bedfordshire) asking them to make sure that their entries on the Advice Directory are fully up-to-date.

Len Simkins
Project Consultant