

Minutes of Forum Meeting

1st December 2016

Aragon Housing, Ampthill

Present:

Annette Pacey (Treasurer)
Elliott Stephenson
Fiona McLeod
Sylvia MacDowell
Martin Trinder
Karen Lister
Jenny Harris
Christina King
Helen Turney
Sam Conder

BPHA
Aragon Housing
Money Advice at St Andrew's
Money Advice at St Andrew's
CVS
Bedford Salvation Army - Debt Advice Service
Carers in Bedfordshire
Disability Resource Centre (Advice Central)
Beds Citizen Housing Association
Macmillan Welfare – Central Bedfordshire Council

Apologies

Sarah Broughton
Sarah Dove
Brian Cunningham (Vice-Chair)
Len Simkins
Jason Tsiricos
David Verney
Hayley Lucas
Jenny Hedges
Trevor Moisey
Wendy Walters
Jayne Hall
Noor D'Agostino
Anne O'Regan
David Wood

Bedford Foodbank
Gateway Housing Support
BRASS
Autism Bedfordshire
PBIC
Advice Bedfordshire
MIND
Citizen Advice Mid Bedfordshire
Rutland Road Church
St Marks Church
Reuse Centre
Aldwyk Housing
Aldwyk Housing
Citizen Advice Leighton Linlade

<i>Item</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Action</i>
2	Minutes of last Forum meeting (30 June 2016) and Matters Arising	The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed. There were no matters arising that were not on the agenda.	
3	Social Media and the Advice Sector	The group discussed the use of social media amongst advice agencies, particularly the use of Facebook and Twitter. It was agreed that BAF should consider running some simple sessions to assist members to use social media more.	Steering Group to consider
3	Information Exchange	Sam (Macmillan) – Sam gave an outline of the service which includes home visits, grants and drop in services at the local hospitals. Karen (Salvation Army) – The Debt Advice Service would welcome more referrals to its service. Fiona (Money Advice at St Andrews) – The service has a new leaflet. Fiona is a local	

advocate for Act 345, which can provide small amounts of funding for individuals. Any requests for support can go through Fiona. See <http://acts435.org.uk/> for how the service works.

Christina (DRC/Advice Central) – Christina gave an overview of the service, which dealt with over 2,500 clients. There was a noticeable spike in enquiries in November.

Martin (CVS) – Voluntaryworks Ltd are leading a Financial Inclusion project, entitled ‘Support to Understand your Money’ or SUM for short. The project is available to workless adults across the South East Midlands area, providing free training, support, mentoring and guidance relating to budgeting, benefits, CVs, interview skills, application forms and job search, etc. Martin will circulate more information as it becomes available.

Jenny (Carers in Beds) – Some very small grants are available for carers, with around a 2-week decision for grants up to £130.

Annette (BPHA) – 2 new staff are joining the team after a staffing restructure.

Universal Credit – There was discussion regarding how the UC system does not cope with a client with a change in circumstances.

Elliott (AHA) – AHA now have a Tenancy Support service for their tenants. This service is already fully subscribed and operating a waiting list, but is nevertheless a potential alternative to Gateway for AHA tenants.

5	Update on current BAF activities	Len provided an update on BAF projects – attached.
6	Any other business	Website – the BAF website will be relocated to the CVS website by the end of the year, as the existing platform will no longer support it. 2017 will be the 20 th Anniversary of BAF.
7	Date of next Forum meeting	To be confirmed

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

BAF PROJECTS - UPDATE REPORT

(for BAF meeting on 1/12/16)

BAF training

An update on BAF's recent training programme is given below.

Course	Date	Course length	Trainer	Bookings	Attendees
Introduction to Benefits	13/9/16	Full day	Len Simkins	16	14
Benefits update / Welfare Reform	20/9/16	½ day	Annette Pacey Elliot Stephenson	16	14
Benefits and EEA Nationals	1/11/16	½ day	Jason Tsiricos	13	13
TOTAL				45	41

All the courses were held at the CVS in Bedford.

The training programme was very successful.

- Bookings for the courses were very good and two courses were fully booked
- 41 people attended the training
- Feedback from all 3 courses was generally very positive
- The training programme made a surplus of £844.50 for BAF
- The training programme also attracted some organisations to become members of BAF

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

Welfare Reform work

We are still using some funding for this work from **Bedford Borough Partnership Board**.

Bedfordshire Benefits Network

These meetings continue to be well attended.

At the last meeting (on 28/9/16) we had a presentation on the new Benefit Cap rules and had an update on the other benefits changes (Welfare Reform).

The next BBN meeting is at 10.00am on **1st March 2017** in Bedford.

Advice Strategy – Central Bedfordshire

This project work is funded by **Central Bedfordshire Council**.

BAF is responsible for facilitating the **Advice Strategy Management Group** which oversees the Advice Strategy. (The AMSG has replaced the previous Advice Planning Board). Key action this year has been:

- Held 2 meetings of the ASMG in 2016/17. (3rd meeting is on 19/1/17)
- Finalised report on the review of advice needs and provision in Central Bedfordshire
- Launched the new Advice Strategy for Central Bedfordshire (in April)
- Arranged a workshop (on 11/4/16) to consult on the development of a Delivery Plan for implementing the Advice Strategy
- Drafted the Delivery Plan for the Strategy
- Launched the Delivery Plan (November)
- Started designing a Toolkit to supplement 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
- Defining and delivering appropriate training modules for local advisers (in Central Bedfordshire)
- Promoting training material on how to collect and monitor customer feedback
- Delivering and promoting network meetings (ie BAF meetings) for local advice providers (in Central Bedfordshire)

BAF's Steering Group will be discussing how to take forward these action points at its next meeting.

Building Better Opportunities (Financial Inclusion) Project

BAF is a partner in this project which is being run by Voluntaryworks. I am still representing BAF at the VW planning meetings for the project.

The project was launched in October.

A workshop was recently held to brief trainers involved in the project on the new benefits training module (3 sessions) that has been designed for the project.

Len Simkins
Project Consultant