

Bedfordshire Advice Forum

Promoting and supporting advice and information services in Bedfordshire

Annual Report 2024-25

Bedfordshire Advice Forum is the network of social welfare information and advice providers in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.

All members of BAF are not-for-profit organisations from the voluntary and public sectors that provide advice or information on civil legal matters.

BAF aims to:

- Promote and support the provision of social welfare advice and information services in Bedfordshire.
- Provide a forum for exchanging information on the provision, gaps and resource requirements of advice and information services in Bedfordshire.
- Deliver and support training, in collaboration with BAF member agencies.
- Seek funding for projects to develop advice services relevant to local needs.

Our activities this year

BAF's meetings are an opportunity for BAF members to network and discuss the issues affecting their services. The Forum meetings remain popular, with on average 15 representatives coming together three times during the year. The BAF AGM in June 2024 was held at FACES, and they gave a presentation about their wide ranging services helping families in need. At the busy November BAF meeting we had presentations about Bedford Borough's Place Team, pensioner poverty issues, and BAF's proposal to try to set-up an anti-poverty network in Bedford. At the February BAF meeting we gave an update on the proposal to develop a local anti-poverty network, and this was backed up by a good discussion amongst BAF members on their support work for local people in poverty.

In 2024/25 BAF organised a **comprehensive training programme** of 9 varied courses spread out over the year. These courses were attended by 76 participants in total. The training covered: Overview of Universal Credit; Introduction to Housing Status (run in collaboration with Shelter); Universal Credit – Managed Migration; a 3-course Advice Skills programme; Introduction to Benefits; Personal Independence Payment; and Universal Credit.

The Bedfordshire Benefits Network (BBN) brings together benefit advisers from BAF members, the DWP, and the Housing Benefit offices from Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council, to discuss benefits issues, such as Universal Credit and disability benefits, and to give an update on any benefit changes. The meetings are very popular, with approximately 20 representatives coming together twice a year.

Following on from the various discussions about setting up an **anti-poverty network**, a small BAF sub-group met in autumn 2024 to discuss the next steps forward. It was recommended that a wider planning group should be set-up to plan an event in Bedford to encourage local stakeholders to join a new anti-poverty network. The planning group has now met 4 times and has organised an event, in partnership with Bedford's Community Network, on Poverty in Bedford on 8th July.

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Financial Summary 2024-25

Opening Balance (01/04/24): £1,819

Income

BAF Membership Fees 902

Total Income £902

Expenditure

BAF Facilitation Fee 1,000

BBN Facilitation Fee 750

Other Costs 58

Total Expenditure £1,808

Profit/loss (for 24-25): £-906

Closing Balance (31/03/25): £ 913

BAF Members (19) 2024-25

Age UK Bedfordshire
Amplius
Bedford Borough Council - Hospital Welfare Rights Service
Bedford Community Self Help Group
Bedford Foodbank
Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
BRASS
Carers in Bedfordshire
Central Bedfordshire Council - Macmillan Welfare Rights Team
Citizens Advice Bedford
Citizens Advice Dunstable
Citizens Advice Mid Bedfordshire
Community Voluntary Service Bedfordshire (CVS)
FACES Bedford
Lidlington Church
MIND BLMK
Queens Park Community Organisation
Sight Concern Bedfordshire
The Salvation Army Debt Advice Service

Advice Bedfordshire

Advice Bedfordshire is BAF's trading company. The company, which is a community interest company, oversees all of BAF's projects and trading activities, and protects BAF's financial liability. In 2024/25 the Company organised a comprehensive training programme for BAF, and facilitated the successful Bedfordshire Benefits Network.



CVS Bedfordshire

CVS provides secretarial support to BAF, and holds funds on its behalf.



BAF Steering Group

Elected at the AGM, the steering group meet and liaise throughout the year to oversee the work of BAF:

Fran Marriot (Chair)

Citizens Advice Bedford

Sarah Broughton

Bedford Foodbank

Brian Cunningham

BRASS

Paulette Rennie

Bedford Community Self Help Group

Elliott Stephenson

Amplius

Martin Trinder

CVS/ BAF Secretariat

Documents from BAF's meetings, training courses and projects can all be found at:

www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk

Email: baf@cvsbeds.org.uk