

Present:

Martin Trinder	CVS Beds (minutes)
Len Simkins	Advice Bedfordshire
Elliott Stephenson	Grand Union Housing Group (Deputy Chair)
Beccy Campbell-Grieve	Project 229
Karen Jones	Christians Against Poverty (CAP)
Jenny Harris	Carers in Bedfordshire
Charmaine Neita	Amicus Trust
Sam Conder	Macmillan Welfare Rights Service – Central Bedfordshire Council
Simon Kerr	Citizens Advice Bedford
Francesca Marritt	Citizens Advice Bedford
Gill Eden	Debt Advice Service – Salvation Army Bedford
Debra Brewster	Mind BLMK
Brian Cunningham	BRASS
Sarah Broughton	Bedford Foodbank

Apologies:

Amanda Ryan	BPHA (chair)
Paulette Rennie	Bedford Community Support Group
Rawshana Noor	Disability Resource Centre
Jo Hansen-Cole	Citizens Advice Mid Bedfordshire
Noor D'Agostino	Peabody Trust (formerly Catalyst)
Yasmina Mahmood	Hospital Social Work Team - Bedford Borough Council
Wendy Jephcote	Autism Bedfordshire
Melanie Gomez	Hightown Housing Association
Steven Kunes	Hightown Housing Association
Kash Karimzandi	Citizens Advice Leighton-Linslade
Karen Lister	Debt Advice Service – Salvation Army Bedford
Jo Rising	AgeUK Bedfordshire
Georgia Bowers	Bedford Libraries - Bedford Borough Council
Chiara MacCall	Queens Park Community Organisation

2. Minutes of last Forum meeting (2nd June 2023) and matters arising

The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed.

3. Information Exchange

BRASS - Brian

- Drop-in and advice sessions, English lessons, and social activities all continued to be offered.
- BRASS recently celebrated its 25th anniversary with a picnic.
- The Refugees Week football tournament was very successful.
- A local support group has formed to support the asylum 'hotel' near Sharnbrook.

Citizens Advice Bedford - Fran

- The service has been expanding its outreach into all urban wards, and is about to trial the use of the library bus service to reach into the rural areas of the Borough.
- Two new money advisors and two energy advisors will soon be in place.

Amicus - Charmaine

- Charmaine provided a brief overview of the service
- The Stepping Stones project is providing employability skills for clients.

Bedford Foodbank - Sarah

- The service has seen a 36% increase in demand, with 2,000 people a month being supported.
- Warehouse space at the office is now a major issue.

Mind (BLMK) - Debra

- Debra provided a brief overview of the service - more details at - <https://www.mind-blmk.org.uk/how-we-can-help/>

Salvation Army - Gill

- Gill has now been in post for a few weeks as a debt advisor.
- The debt advice service is now looking for new referrals

Macmillan - Sam

- Currently a lot of early referrals, with a waiting list of 4-6 weeks.
- Should be recruiting for a full-time member of staff soon.

Carers in Bedfordshire - Jenny

- Jenny provided a brief overview of the service - more details at <https://carersinbeds.org.uk/>
- The Bedford Support Hub is now open.

GUHG - Elliott

- Elliott provided a brief overview of the service - more details at - https://www.guhg.co.uk/help-advice/benefit_and_money_advice-services/

CVS Beds - Martin

- Currently undertaking a survey on training needs across the sector
- Increased focus on trustees over the next few months – both supporting existing, and recruiting new trustees.

4. Mutual Assistance

All members were reminded that if they have any requests for, or offers of, assistance or resources, they should be free to share them with other members at any time, including at BAF meetings.

5. Update on BAF activities, including BAF training.

Len provided a written update, which is attached to these minutes.

- 3 training courses are being delivered across May, June and July. These have been very well booked, and it is hoped that further courses can be organised for the autumn.
- Bedfordshire Benefits Network meetings remain popular, with the next meeting scheduled for 10am, Wednesday 13th September.
- Advice Bedfordshire had its AGM on the 28th June, and a copy of the annual report was circulated at the meeting.
- The BAF webpages are being updated - <https://www.cvsbeds.org.uk/baf/>

6. Any other business

None

Dates of next meeting

Dates of future forum meetings: All 10.00am start:

- Thursday 2nd November 2023 - online
- Thursday 29th February 2024 – online

UPDATE REPORT

FOR BAF MEETING

29th June 2023

Update on BAF projects and activities

BAF training

BAF applied for some funding for a training programme from BCLF (from the Frank Branston Trust) earlier this year. Unfortunately, this bid was unsuccessful.

As BAF had planned to run a training programme in the spring, we therefore went ahead with charging full fees for the courses. We decided to increase the fees this year as our training fees had remained unchanged for 9 years. The new fees for members are £75 for paid staff, and £40 for volunteers - which are still very low-cost fees for specialist, professional training.

There are 3 courses in the spring programme, which are BAF's first face-to-face training courses since before the Covid pandemic.

Course	Date	Tutor	Bookings
Introduction to Benefits	16/5/23	Dean Crofts	11
Universal Credit	7/6/23	Elliott Stephenson	16
Personal Independence Payment	13/7/23	Karen Banfield	18

Thanks to Dean, Elliott and Karen for stepping forward as trainers on the programme.

The break-even figure for each course is 8 attendees. So bookings above that figure will bring in a surplus for Advice Bedfordshire and BAF. As the bookings have been very good, a much needed surplus will be made from this programme.

Please contact Len Simkins (BAF Training Facilitator) for further information.

len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk

Bedfordshire Benefits Network

These network meetings, for benefit advisers, are provided as an extra service by BAF. They are generally very well attended with an average attendance of about 20 per meeting.

At the last meeting in March we had a speaker from Atos giving a presentation on the assessments for Personal Independence Payment.

The next BBN meeting is scheduled for 10.00am on Wednesday 13th September in Bedford.

Please contact Elliott Stephenson (BBN Facilitator) for further information.

elliottstephenson@yahoo.com

Advice Bedfordshire CIC

Advice Bedfordshire is BAF's trading company, and is used to organise BAF's projects and training work.

The Company had its AGM on 28th June. A copy of the Company's Annual Report will be circulated at the Forum meeting on 29th June.

The end of year balance in the Company's bank account was £8.36. However, because of the success of BAF's spring training programme, the current balance is now a much healthier £853.36 (with a further £1,915 still due to be received in training fees).

Please contact Len Simkins (AB's Company Secretary) for further information.
len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk

BAF webpages

BAF's webpages are hosted on the CVS website. <https://www.cvsbeds.org.uk/baf/>
The webpages are currently being updated. Thanks to Natalia Ford (CVS) for help with this.
The BAF webpages (containing various information on BAF and various documents relating to BAF's activities) are:

- About BAF
- BAF – Membership
- BAF – Forum Meetings
- BAF – Training Courses
- BAF – Benefits Network
- BAF – Projects
- BAF – Advice Bedfordshire
- BAF – Contact Us

If you have any comments about the webpages, please contact Len Simkins
len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk

Len Simkins – Project Consultant