

BEDFORDSHIRE BENEFITS NETWORK

Terms of Reference

Background

Bedfordshire Benefits Network (BBN) was formally set up in 2012 by Bedfordshire Advice Forum (BAF) to act as a replacement for the old Bedfordshire Rights and Information Exchange Forum (BRIEF) network, which stopped operating in 2009 after Local Government Reorganisation in Bedfordshire.

BAF members had shown a strong interest in forming a new benefits network, and two pilot meetings of the new network were very well attended in 2011.

The Benefits Network has operated successfully since 2012 with good attendances at the meetings.

Role of the BBN

The BBN provides opportunities for:

- Local benefit advisers to meet and share information on welfare benefit issues
- Local benefit advisers to hear about, and discuss, recent and forthcoming benefit changes
- Local benefit authorities to give an update on their services and develop links with local benefit advisers
- Local benefit advisers to raise questions with the benefit authorities about benefit issues
- Local benefit issues to be raised, through the BBN, with relevant strategic bodies

Membership

Membership of the BBN is open to any local advice organisation, benefit adviser, or other organisation or person interested in benefits issues. Members should be based in, or work in, Bedford Borough or Central Bedfordshire - or a surrounding area. Members can be from the voluntary, statutory or commercial sectors.

Membership of the BBN is informal and simply consists of an email distribution list of individual names. Although the BBN is organised by BAF, and is primarily aimed at BAF members, membership of the BBN is not currently limited to BAF members.

There is currently no charge for being a BBN member, although BAF may decide to introduce some sort of fee in the future.

All BBN members are welcome to attend BBN meetings.

Other relevant partners and guests may be invited to attend, or be sent details of, BBN meetings without becoming members as such.

BBN meetings

BBN meetings are held as required by members, if funding and resources allow.

Meetings are currently held twice a year in Bedford.

Agendas for meetings should be sent out at least a week before the meeting. Minutes should be produced and circulated within three weeks of the meeting.

If a matter cannot be agreed unanimously at a meeting, and a vote needs to be taken, each member of the BBN at the meeting has one vote.

Chair

The current Chair of the BBN is **James Hurd** (Bedford Borough Council).

There will be an election of the Chair every two years, at a BBN meeting.

Facilitator

BAF appoints a facilitator to organise the BBN meetings. **Elliott Stephenson** is the current facilitator, working in a freelance capacity.

The facilitator arranges the BBN meetings, provides supporting documents for discussion at the meetings, and supervises production of the minutes of the meetings.

BAF has overall responsibility for the BBN. Plans and updates from the BBN meetings are reported back to BAF's Steering Group and to BAF Forum meetings. Documents from BBN meetings are also put on BAF's webpages.

Review mechanism

These terms of reference should be reviewed at least every three years by BAF's Steering Group and by BBN members.

Funding

Support for the BBN is currently being provided by Bedfordshire Advice Forum. Funding to keep the BBN sustainable will need to be reviewed. At some point the need for a membership fee may need to be discussed.

Updated September 2022

To be reviewed in September 2025

Bedfordshire Benefits Network meetings are organised by



on behalf of

