

Minutes of Forum Meeting

6th February 2020

The Rufus Centre, Flitwick

Present:

Samantha Condor	Macmillan Welfare Rights
Brian Cunningham	BRASS
Chera Gilbert	Disability Resource Centre/Advice Central
Sarah Hughes (Item 6 onwards)	Central Bedfordshire Council
Karen Lister	Salvation Army, Bedford
Sylvia McDowell	Money Advice at St Andrews
Len Simkins	Autism Bedfordshire
Elliott Stephenson	Grand Union Housing Group
Martin Trinder	CVS Beds

Apologies

Sarah Broughton	Bedford Foodbank
Alex Franciszkow	PBIC
Christina King	Mid Beds Citizen Advice

Action

Brian Cunningham chaired the meeting on behalf of BAF's Steering Group.

2 Apologies for absence were noted (listed above).

3 Minutes of last Forum meeting (7th November 2019) and Matters Arising

The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed.

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

4 Future of BAF meetings – an update following a survey of members

The results of the survey, initiated due to low numbers at previous meetings, was shared and discussed.

The key findings were:

- 20 organisations contributed to the survey.
- The majority of people found the meetings useful.
- The majority of people found the content of meetings useful and relevant. Networking is particularly important.
- Many people find attending 3 meetings a year difficult due to time pressures.
- There was a preference for meetings in the morning.

The Steering Group have considered all the feedback and proposed the following:

- A reduction from three to two meetings a year
- One in Bedford and one in Central Bedfordshire (Amptill or Flitwick area)
- Morning meetings, including lunch to allow for more networking.

It was also agreed to roll out use of the email distribution system to allow members to quickly disseminate information to each other.

This was agreed by all present.

5 Discussion: funding opportunities for the advice sector

Those present discussed funding opportunities, the challenges facing the sector, and the current funding sources that they were considering or receiving support from.

Advice UK provide a comprehensive funding update on their website for members:
<https://www.adviceuk.org.uk/member-services/members-area/funding-update/>

CVS Beds provides a local funders guide on their website:
<http://www.cvsbeds.org.uk/fundersinbedfordshire>

6 Information Exchange

Sam – Macmillan Welfare Rights – The service will now continue beyond March 2020, with staff being given permanent contracts.

Sylvia - Money Advice at St Andrews – Sylvia took the opportunity to highlight the Alderman Newton Educational Foundation, which can make small grant to individuals in the Bedford area.

Karen - Salvation Army – A new service leaflet has been produced. Karen will send to Martin for distribution to members.

Chera - DRC/Advice Central - Advice Central have produced new publicity leaflets for partners to use and share. Copies were available at the meeting for partners to take away.

Elliott - Grand Union Housing Group – Elliott reminded colleagues that staff are now able to outreach as required across Bedfordshire.

Len - Autism Beds – Len highlighted the two charity shops that Autism Beds currently have, and the opportunity for organisations looking to offer recognised training qualification to work in partnership, as Autism Beds is a registered Open College Network Assessment Centre.

Martin - CVS – Martin discussed the issue of how the sector might better co-ordinate donations of goods, equipment and food, etc.

7 Update on BAF activities (including training)

Len provided an update (attached)

The two training courses were popular and dates for future meetings are being considered.

The Bedfordshire Benefits Network continues to see good attendance. The next meeting is on the 12th March in Bedford.

Len attends the Bedford Anti-Poverty Action Group (BEDIPAG), which is discussing organising a school uniform exchange system in the summer.

8 Update on Central Bedfordshire Advice Strategy and VCSE Review

Sarah provided an update on a number of issues

- Sarah highlighted funding schemes currently in operation in Central Bedfordshire, including the Community Asset Grant Scheme and the Ward Councillor Grant Scheme.
https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/42/stronger_communities/678/community_grants
 - Sarah also explained that the Cheering Volunteering Awards were now looking for nominations.
https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/27/about_your_council/279/stronger_communities/7
 - Funding for Advice Central and the 3 Citizens Advice services has also been awarded for
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2020-21.

- Advice Strategy – BAF is responsible for facilitating the Advice Strategy Management Group, which oversees the Advice Strategy. The current Advice Strategy will be refreshed from April 2020, and a new delivery plan is being developed and agreed at a meeting in June.
- VCSE Review – Central Bedfordshire Council have commissioned consultants to undertake the review, which will include some meetings for organisations to attend and contribute to it.

9 Any other business

None

Future meeting dates

- 11th June, 10am-1pm, including lunch. Bedford venue
- 26th November, 10am-1pm, including lunch. Central Bedfordshire venue.

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

BAF PROJECTS - UPDATE REPORT

for BAF meeting on 6/2/20

BAF training

BAF ran 2 courses in late 2019.

Course	Date	Location	Trainers	Attendance
Introduction to Benefits (Full day)	20/11/19	CVS, Bedford	Len Simkins and Elliott Stephenson	17
Personal Independence Payment (Full day)	11/12/19	CVS, Bedford	Len Simkins and Elliott Stephenson	10

The first course was fully booked – with 2 reserves and some other people unable to attend on that date. It may be worth running another session in 2020.

Feedback from both courses was positive – especially the PIP course. On the introductory course some people felt it was not detailed enough, although some others thought there was too much information!

Some ideas for future training or workshops are:

- Introduction to Benefits
- Universal Credit
- Interviewing skills for advisers
- Good practice in obtaining client feedback

Bedfordshire Benefits Network

Our network meetings to discuss benefit issues continue to go well.

Representatives from CBC and BBC Housing Benefit Offices, and from the DWP, regularly attend the meetings. Attendance at meetings is very good with 26 people at the last meeting.

The next meeting is on 12th March 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 next meeting is on 27th April.

The Advice Strategy will be refreshed from April 2020 and a new Delivery Plan is currently being developed.

A promotional flyer (“Everybody’s got a role in advice”) has been produced and will be distributed to all frontline staff in Central Bedfordshire.

Advice Bedfordshire

BAF's trading company continues to organise BAF activities and events when required.

The current balance in the Company's bank account is **£903.29**.

Bedford Independent Poverty Action Group

IPAG is the anti-poverty group in Bedford. BAF is represented at IPAG meetings

IPAG is currently looking to organise a school uniform exchange system this summer in Bedford.

Voluntaryworks Consortium

BAF is a partner in the Voluntaryworks (VW) Consortium, which is the network for VCS infrastructure organisations and networks.

The next VW Consortium meeting is on 30th April 2020.

Len Simkins (Project Consultant)
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