

Minutes of Forum meeting

24th September 2015
Aragon Housing Offices, Ampthill

Present:

Annette Pacey (Treasurer)	BPHA
Peter Rayner	BPHA
Brian Cunningham (Vice-Chair)	BRASS
Elliott Stephenson	Aragon Housing Association
Fiona McLeod	Money Advice at St Andrew's
Len Simkins	Autism Bedfordshire
Jason Tsiricos	PBIC
David Verney (Chair)	Advice Bedfordshire
Martin Trinder	CVS
David Wood	Citizens Advice Leighton Linlade
Paulette Rennie	Bedford Community Self-Help Group

Apologies

Trevor Moisey	Rutland Road Church
Daniela Vuolo	Central Bedfordshire Libraries

Ann Whitmore (Salvation Army) and Sue Palmer (Voluntary and Community Action) have left their respective organisations.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Action</i>
2	Minutes of last Forum meeting (17th June 2015) and Matters Arising	<p>The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed.</p> <p>There were no matters arising that were not on the agenda.</p>	
3	A talk and discussion on the Implications of the Summer 2015 Budget on the Advice Sector	<p>Elliott provided the meeting with an excellent overview of the key changes proposed in the recent budgets, following the 2015 General Election – presentation on BAF website.</p> <p>In the discussion that followed there was broad concern regarding the combined effect of the proposed changes.</p> <p>The steering group will look at a further update to members at the next meeting, along with any training required.</p> <p>It was highlighted that the roll-out of Universal Credit will also require some further training in both Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.</p> <p>It was agreed to highlight the issues to the wider sector by signposting that this presentations and the presentation made at the Benefits Network are available on the BAF website.</p>	
4	Update on the Central Bedfordshire Advice Strategy	<p>Len and David W provided the meeting with an update on Advice Strategy – presentation on BAF website.</p> <p>A refreshed strategy has been developed and will be going out for consultation in October. Once the strategy has been adopted, the delivery plan will be developed and a number of BAF partners will want to contribute to this.</p> <p>David V highlighted that BAF are approaching Bedford Borough Council to discuss the need for a similar strategy.</p>	

5 Information Exchange

Aragon – Currently recruiting for a welfare assistant. Elliott is still seconded to cover his Manger's role.

BRASS – Brian reported an increase in volunteers following recent news coverage of the refugee crisis in Europe. BRASS has also received some additional funding from the Harpur Trust and are through to round two with a National Lottery bid.

Money Advice at St Andrews – A loss of two advisors has meant a slight change in opening hours. Some issues with non-attendance at pre-arranged meetings, and other agencies indicated similar challenges.

Bedford Community Self-Help Group – Paulette reported the luncheon club is still running and is very popular on a Tuesday. Lots of benefits advice requests from retired people.

PBIC – Service open to all EU migrants. The workclub open on a Tuesday (10am-12pm, Bradgate Road) and there are advice drop in sessions on a Friday (9.30am -1pm, Bradgate Road) and Wednesday (9.30am-12.30pm, Queens Park).

BPHA – Peter explained that there is a funding gap between the old EU funding and the new EU funding scheme, but BPHA is still providing employment/training support to BPHA clients.

Leighton Linslade CAB – CAB's are rebranding to Citizens Advice over the coming months, along with a new logo. Leighton Linslade are celebrating 40 years with an event at the Leighton Buzzard Library Theatre on the 23rd October.

CVS – David has been updating the VOCypf database, along with website entries for organisations working with Children, Families and Young People. The BAF entry needs to be updated (steering group to consider this at their next meeting)

6 Update on current BAF activities

Len provided a brief update:

- The advice skills training has now finished.
- Bedfordshire Benefits Network - The last meeting had over 20 attendees and the next meeting will be on 9th March.

7 Any other business

- Elliott reported interest from JobCentrePlus regarding finding 'Volunteer Placements' and will circulate some information.
- Turn2us are holding a workshop in Milton Keynes on 29th September to 'help front-line workers and volunteers ('intermediaries') to use Turn2us' tools and services to support people in financial need'. More information on the Turn2us website.
- Len explained that he would be attending future meeting on behalf of Autism Bedfordshire.
- Len will be sending out a brief survey at the end of September to map advice services in Central Beds as part of the Advice Strategy.

7 Date of next Forum meeting

To be confirmed