

## Minutes of Forum Meeting

7th February 2019

### Grand Union Housing – Ampthill

#### Present:

Brian Cunningham  
Paulette Rennie  
Len Simkins  
Chantel Sutherland  
Tina Sullivan  
Samantha Conder  
Sylvia MacDowell  
Carol Madden  
Sarah Hughes  
Gordon Angus  
Tabitha Park  
Kash Karimzandi  
Martin Trinder

BRASS  
Bedford Community Self-Help Group  
Autism Bedfordshire  
Grand Union Housing Group  
Grand Union Housing Group  
Macmillan Welfare Rights – Central Bedfordshire Council  
Money Advice at St Andrews  
Money Advice at St Andrews  
Central Bedfordshire Council  
Advice Central  
Citizens Advice Leighton Linlade  
Citizens Advice Leighton Linlade  
CVS Beds

#### Apologies

Georgia Bowers  
Elliott Stephenson  
Trevor Moisey  
Caroline Lewis  
Wendy Bird  
Helen Turney  
Karen Lister

Bedford Borough Council Libraries  
Grand Union Housing Group  
Three Rivers Church, Bedford  
Mind BLMK  
Bedfordshire Police  
BCHA  
Salvation Army

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#### Action

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1 **Welcome and introductions** - Brian Cunningham chaired the meeting on behalf of BAF's Steering Group.

2 **Apologies for absence** were noted (listed above).

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#### 3 **Minutes of last Forum meeting (1 November 2018) and Matters Arising**

The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed.

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

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#### 4 **Presentation – Brexit – Implications for the Local Advice Sector**

Martin gave a presentation on BREXIT, which was followed by a group discussion and information share. A copy of the presentation can be found below.

Of particular note was the launch of the OISC Level 1 Immigration (limited to the EU Settlement Scheme registration), for 'not for profit or charitable organisations that intend to offer their clients advice and services in this area only and can offer free advice and services or charge only a modest fee to contribute to the running of the organisation'.

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#### 5 **Central Bedfordshire Advice Strategy**

Len gave a presentation on the Advice Strategy and BAF's role. A copy of the presentation can be found on the BAF website.

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## 6 Update on BAF activities

Len provided verbal report on the work of BAF – see attached for a written report.

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## 7 Information Exchange

**Sylvia - Money Advice** - The service continues to support a small number of people, but with a highly personalised service. More advisors are needed.

**Chantel - Grand Union Housing Group**

- Tina Sullivan has now joined the team
- Project Mackenzie is a programme aimed at young people aged 16-24 and not in education, employment or training
- GU are co-hosting a Jobs Fair on 30 April at Flitwick Village Hall

**Sam –Macmillan Welfare Rights** – Currently recruiting for a full-time advisor.

**Gordon – Advice Central / Disability Resource Centre** – The gym at Poynters Road has been re-equipped with '12 new pieces of the very latest fitness tech, especially designed so that disabled people and people with health conditions can exercise safely.'

**Tabitha – Citizens Advice Leighton Linlade** – Tabitha provided an update from the three CA's in Central Bedfordshire.

- All CAs are now seeing the impact of Universal Credit, in addition to the usual post-Christmas rush.
- Currently trialling a digital drop-in at the library
- CA Leighton are holding a Fundraising concert on the 9<sup>th</sup> March
- Tabitha will soon be leaving CA Leighton, with Kash taking over.

**Martin – CVS** - A poverty networking event is being held in Bedford on 21<sup>st</sup> March. BAF have been invited to contribute to the discussions and have a stall at the event.

**Paulette – Bedford Community Self Help Group** – The Lunch club at Mount Zion church on Midland Road continues.

**Brian - BRASS** – 205 case 'matters' were dealt with last month, which is a new record for the service. There are now 16 Syrian families within the Borough.

**Len - Autism Bedfordshire**

- The new charity shop on Bedford High Street has had a successful start.
  - AB is now a registered NOCN centre to be able to offer qualification to clients.
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## 8 Any other business

- **BAF Steering Group** – Brian asked if other BAF members would consider joining the Steering Group, which meets three times a year to plan the BAF meetings and oversee other activities.
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Future meeting dates – 2pm start:

- 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019
  - 7<sup>th</sup> November 2019
  - 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020
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# BAF PROJECTS - UPDATE REPORT

(for BAF meeting on 7/2/19)

## BAF training

The 2018 autumn training programme went very well. There were 41 attendees in total.

Course	Date	Location	Trainers	Bookings	Attendees
Introduction to Benefits (Full day)	12/9/18	Bedford	Len Simkins	8	7
Disability Benefits (Full day)	26/9/18	Bedford	Len Simkins and Elliott Stephenson	17	16
Universal Credit (Full day)	31/10/18	Dunstable	Len Simkins and Elliott Stephenson	18	18
<b>Totals</b>				<b>43</b>	<b>41</b>

Infotrain managed the administration of the courses. Len and Elliott were the trainers. Elliott provided his time free of charge through Grand Union Housing Group.

A financial report has been presented to BAF's Steering Group. BAF made a surplus from the training programme of **£644.68**.

Feedback from the courses was very positive. Examples of the feedback are given below.

Course	Did the course fulfil expectations?	Was the course at the right level for your needs?	Course structure	Training materials	Trainers
Introduction to Benefits	Yes: 88%	Yes: 88%	Very good: 88%	Very good: 88%	Very good: 88%
Disability Benefits	Yes: 100%	Yes: 88%	Very good: 88%	Very good: 86%	Very good: 88%
Universal Credit	Yes: 94%	Yes: 100%	Very good: 100%	Very good: 94%	Very good: 100%

It is recommended that BAF organises some further training courses later in 2019.

## **Bedfordshire Benefits Network**

Our network meetings to discuss benefit issues continue to go well. Representatives from CBC and BBC Housing Benefit Offices continue to attend the meetings, and we have developed closer links with the local JobCentre Plus office over the last year or so.

Two meetings of the network have been planned for 2018/19. The first meeting was held in September and 22 people attended. The next meeting is on 13/3/19 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 6/3/19.

An update on the Advice Strategy work will be given at today's BAF meeting.

## **Building Better Opportunities Project (Financial Inclusion)**

BAF is a partner in the Voluntaryworks (VW) Consortium.

VW's trading company, VW Ltd, is the lead body for a **Building Better Opportunities (Financial Inclusion) project**, which is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and the ESF. This project provides financial inclusion support to unemployed and economically inactive people, to help them move towards employment or education.

BAF has been providing some management support for the BBO project through its trading company, Advice Bedfordshire.

The project is going well and is on schedule to meet its revised targets. 228 participants have now been supported by the project. The project has very good results for supporting participants from priority groups including: people aged 50+; people with disabilities; and people from BME backgrounds (especially Asian women).

The project will end on 31/3/19.

Len Simkins (Project Consultant)  
**Email:** len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk

## BREXIT the local implications

- LRFs asked by Government to undertake specific contingency planning particularly if a No Deal
- Bedfordshire might be asked to assist other regions with heavier demand under Mutual Aid
- Luton London Airport impact
- Major roads – M1/A1/A5/A6
- Pockets of medium to large businesses

## BREXIT the regional picture

- Many Government Departments will have regional offices and the MHCLG has a regional team attending LRFs
- Some Category 1 and 2 responders are organised regionally e.g. East of England Ambulance Service, Anglia Water
- Implications for resources and capability will vary with some regions having a heavier demand e.g. Kent, London e.g. Highways England 15% of key staff being redeployed to Kent.
- Consideration being given to some sort of regional structure for LRFs at least for the Strategic level

## Possible impact nationally

- Travel, Freight & Borders - delays in and out of UK
- Disruption of Services – traffic, fuel delivery, medical supplies, food imports, vets supplies, essential chemicals for water supply etc.
- Status of EU/UK citizens - EU nationals leaving UK nationals coming back, impact on recruitment and retention
- Information & Data Sharing – international access to and sharing of data e.g. law enforcement
- Protests and demonstrations – public order issues e.g. outside Parliament

## EU Exit

‘The government has launched a public information campaign to ensure that UK citizens, businesses, civil society organisations, EU citizens living in the UK and UK nationals living in the EU are well informed about how Brexit will affect them and the practical steps they will need to take to be ready.’

The campaign is available at [www.gov.uk/euexit](http://www.gov.uk/euexit)

## Possible impact locally

- Reduced capability due to Mutual Aid requests
- Luton London Airport – currently not thought to be a major issue, small cargo operation. Immigration checks.
- Possible major increase in road transport causing delays in essential supplies to services and retail/food outlets
- Impact on key services of right to work and reside requirements/EU nationals leaving e.g. for private care homes, hospitals, agriculture
- Implications for vulnerable people
- Might be protests/demonstrations

## Voluntary Sector Implications

- Settled status - Staff, volunteers and beneficiaries?
- Workforce implications
- Potential economic impact – increasing demand on services
- Potential impact of civil unrest at a grassroots level.
  
- EU Funding Sources – ‘ensures that UK organisations, such as charities, businesses and universities, will continue to receive funding over a project’s lifetime if they successfully bid into EU-funded programmes before the end of 2020.’

## Giving advice on EU Settlement

At the moment, it's a criminal offence for a person to provide immigration advice or services in the UK unless their organisation meets certain requirements set down by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). However, the OISC has just launched a 'Level 1 EU Settlement Scheme' for not for profit or charitable organisations that can 'offer free advice and services or charge only a modest fee to contribute to the running of the organisation.' [Click here.](#)

Details about what assistance can be given without having to be 'regulated' can be found [here.](#)

## BREXIT and the Voluntary Sector

Wednesday 27 February, 2pm, 43 Bromham Road, Bedford.

CVS Beds are holding an informal meeting for local voluntary organisations to discuss the impact of the UK leaving the EU. 'Deal or no-deal', the meeting will be an opportunity to share information and consider what actions organisations should take. If you are planning to attend please email [info@cvsbeds.org.uk](mailto:info@cvsbeds.org.uk)