

CONSTITUTION

1. NAME

The name of the organisation shall be the **Bedfordshire Advice Forum** (hereafter known as BAF).

2. OBJECTIVE

To promote and support the provision of social welfare advice and information services in Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton.

3. POWERS AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF BAF

In furtherance of the objective aforesaid but not otherwise BAF may:

- (i) Apply for, invite, obtain, collect and receive money, funds, securities and other sources of income and capital by way of fees, contributions, subscriptions, donations, grants, and other lawful means.
- (ii) Set membership fees, which shall be determined at each Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- (iii) Open a bank account and other facilities for banking.
- (iv) Draw, accept, and negotiate cheques, promissory notes and other negotiable instruments.
- (v) Purchase, licence, hire, subscribe for and by any other lawful means acquire meeting/training facilities, publications, office equipment, stationery and any other chattels whatsoever.
- (vi) Employ, or contract with, on a full or part-time basis, or on a voluntary basis, any persons or organisation whose particular skills, qualifications or knowledge may be of assistance in attaining the objectives of BAF.
- (vii) Make rules for the general administration and conduct of business of BAF, including setting up and using a trading company to organise BAF's trading activities
- (viii) Enter into contracts of insurance in respect of any matter in which BAF or its members has an insurable interest.
- (ix) Nominate a member to represent BAF on other groups / committees / forums.

4. MEMBERSHIP OF BAF

- (i) Membership of BAF is intended for not-for-profit organisations and social enterprises that provide advice or information on social welfare, civil legal matters - either as the main function of the organisation or as an important part of its work.
- (ii) “Advice and information on social welfare, civil legal matters” covers advice and information on:
- Civil liberties
 - Challenging statutory bodies
 - Community care
 - Consumer rights
 - Debt and money advice
 - Disability rights
 - Educational rights
 - Employment rights
 - Environmental rights
 - Equality rights
 - Family issues
 - Health rights
 - Housing rights
 - Immigration, nationality and asylum rights
 - Welfare benefits

N.B. The above list is not exhaustive

BAF members may provide advice or information at any level – including information, advice, casework or representation.

- (iii) Organisations that provide 2nd tier support or network services to organisations which are providing advice or information can also join BAF.
- (iv) Organisations that solely provide other sorts of advice and information cannot join BAF. This includes organisations solely providing:
- Business advice (as opposed to employment advice)
 - Non-rights advice

N.B. The above list is not exhaustive

- (v) BAF members may be from the public/statutory sector, or from the voluntary, community and social enterprise or not-for-profit sector, but not from the private sector.
- (vi) BAF members are encouraged to obtain a relevant quality mark, at the appropriate level, for their advice and information services
- (vii) All BAF members shall have an equality and diversity policy. BAF will work to ensure that principles and best practice are applied to ensure that its work and membership does not discriminate against any individuals or organisation.
- (viii) A member organisation shall cease to be a member of BAF if:
- It resigns in writing; or
 - Any fees or subscriptions owed by it have not been paid before the next due date; or
 - It is expelled by a two thirds (rounded up) majority of votes of members present and voting at an AGM or a Special Meeting; or
 - It fails to respond to membership update requests and reminders.

5. BAF STEERING GROUP

- (i) The general control and management of the activities of BAF shall be vested in a Steering Group who may exercise all such powers of BAF and act on behalf of BAF.
- (ii) All cheques, promissory notes, and other negotiable instruments paid to or by BAF shall be signed, drawn, accepted, endorsed or otherwise executed in such a manner as the Steering Group shall from time to time determine.
- (iii) The Steering Group will produce an Annual Report of BAF's activities, which will be publicly available.
- (iv) The Steering Group will ensure that BAF accounts are independently examined before each AGM.
- (v) The Steering Group will decide on membership applications to BAF.

6. BAF OFFICERS AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE STEERING GROUP

- (i) A Chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary and Treasurer shall be elected by the members of BAF at each AGM. BAF members may elect other officers or representatives as appropriate
- (ii) The Chair, Deputy Chair, Treasurer and Secretary of BAF (if the posts are filled) will automatically be members of the Steering Group.
- (iii) The Chair of BAF's trading company (Advice Bedfordshire CIC) will also automatically be a member of the Steering Group.
- (iv) The Steering Group shall also have no less than 1 and no more than 4 other members. These other members of the Steering Group shall be elected by a majority vote of members of BAF at each AGM – subject to at least two thirds (rounded up) of the total Steering Group membership being from the non-statutory sector.
- (v) The members of the Steering Group have the power to fill any vacancy which may arise in the period between AGMs being held.
- (vi) Between AGMs, a person shall cease to be a BAF Officer or a member of the Steering Group if:
 - He/she resigns in writing; or
 - He/she is absent from two consecutive meetings of the Steering Group without reasons being given; or
 - He/she is de-selected by a majority vote of BAF members present and voting at a Special Meeting called for that purpose.
 - His/her organisation ceases to be a member of BAF.

7. STEERING GROUP MEETINGS

- (i) The Steering Group shall hold not less than 3 meetings a year.
- (ii) A meeting of the Steering Group can be called by the Secretary or by at least 2 members of the Steering Group.
- (iii) The Chair of BAF will be the Chair of the Steering Group. The Deputy Chair will chair the meeting if the BAF Chair is unable to attend a Steering Group meeting.
- (iv) Notices and agendas for Steering Group meetings shall be given to members of the Steering Group at least seven days in advance of any meeting of the Steering Group. This notice can be waived, if at least 3 members of the Steering Group agree.
- (v) At any meeting of the Steering Group, 4 members, or two thirds (rounded up) of Steering Group members, whichever is the lower number, shall constitute a quorum, provided at least two are BAF Officers.
- (vi) Matters arising at the meetings shall be decided by a simple majority vote of members of the Steering Group present and voting at the meeting.
- (vii) Where matters come to a vote, each member of the Steering Group has a single vote. In the event of an equality of votes the Chair shall be entitled to an extra or casting vote.
- (viii) Any member of BAF shall be entitled to attend and speak at meetings of the Steering Group but not to vote.
- (ix) The Steering Group may from time to time appoint one or more Sub-Committees with such composition and power and terms of reference as the Steering Group think fit.
- (x) The Steering Group shall cause minutes to be taken of all the proceedings of their meetings and meetings of any Sub-Committee.
- (xi) Minutes of Steering Group meetings will be distributed to Steering Group members but will be available to all BAF members on request.

8. MEETINGS OF BAF

- (i) There will be a minimum of 3 meetings of BAF annually of which one shall be the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- (ii) Notices and agendas for meetings will usually be sent out no later than seven days prior to the date set. Items for the agenda should be with the BAF Secretary fourteen days before the meeting date.
- (iii) At any meeting of BAF, 8 members, or one third (rounded up) of BAF members, whichever is the lower number, shall constitute a quorum, provided at least two are members of the Steering Group.
- (iv) Where a matter comes to a vote, each member organisation has a single vote. In the event of equality of votes, the Chair has a second or casting vote.
- (v) BAF shall cause minutes to be taken of all the proceedings of their meetings. Minutes will be distributed to all BAF members.

9. SPECIAL MEETINGS OF BAF AND AGMs

- (i) A Special Meeting can be called by the Steering Group or by at least 3 members of BAF.
- (ii) At least 14 days notice shall be given, to all members of BAF, of a Special Meeting. This notice can be waived if at least one third (rounded up) of members agree.
- (iii) There will be an Annual General Meeting (AGM) within fifteen months of the previous AGM.
- (iv) At least fourteen days notice shall be given to all members of BAF of an AGM.
- (v) The notices for Special Meetings and AGMs shall specify the date, place and time of the meeting and the business to be discussed.
- (vi) Any member of BAF shall be entitled to attend, speak and vote at Special Meetings and AGMs.
- (vii) At any Special Meeting or AGM 8 BAF members or one third (rounded up) of BAF members, whichever is the lower number, shall constitute a quorum, provided at least two are members of the BAF Steering Group.
- (viii) Most matters arising shall be passed by a majority vote of members present and voting at the Special Meeting or AGM.
- (ix) Some matters arising, as specified in this Constitution, shall only be passed if there is a two thirds (rounded up) majority of votes of members present and voting at a quorate Special Meeting or AGM.
- (x) BAF shall cause minutes to be taken of all the proceedings of Special Meetings and AGMs. Minutes will be distributed to all BAF members.

10. ACCOUNTS

- (i) The Steering Group shall cause proper books of accounts to be kept with respect to all:
 - (a) Sums of money received and expended by BAF and the matters in respect of which such receipts and expenditure take place; and
 - (b) Sales and purchases by BAF; and
 - (c) Assets and liabilities of BAF.
- (ii) The accounts shall be kept at such a place as the Steering Group shall decide and shall be open to inspection by any member of BAF and other persons authorised by the Treasurer.
- (iv) The Steering Group will ensure that BAF accounts are independently examined before each AGM.
- (iii) At each AGM, the Steering Group shall present full details of the accounts including an Income and Expenditure Account and a Balance Sheet.

11. ALTERATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

- (i) The Constitution can only be altered if there is a two thirds (rounded up) majority of votes of members present and voting at a quorate AGM or a Special Meeting convened for that purpose.
- (ii) This Constitution can only be altered by not less than two thirds (rounded up) of the votes of members present and voting at an AGM or a Special Meeting convened for the purpose.

12. WINDING UP OF BAF

- (i) BAF may be dissolved by a resolution passed by a two thirds (rounded up) majority of votes of members present and voting at a quorate AGM or a Special Meeting convened for that purpose.
- (ii) On dissolution, having paid any of BAF's outstanding debts, any remaining funds of BAF shall be given to an organisation, or organisations, of a similar mind.
- (iii) The members present and voting at an AGM or a Special Meeting convened for the purpose of dissolving BAF will decide which organisation(s) shall receive any remaining BAF funds.

The original Constitution of Bedford Advice Forum was adopted on 21st March 2000.

Major revision was agreed at the BAF AGM on 26th April 2004 (expansion into Mid Beds)

Major revision was agreed at the BAF AGM on 19th April 2007 (expansion into South Beds and change of name)

Further revision was agreed at the BAF AGM on 20th June 2012 (deletion of reference to CLS, and confirmation of BB and CB remit)

Further revision was agreed at the BAF AGM on 19th June 2014 (addition of reference to Advice Bedfordshire)

The latest version of the Constitution was agreed at the BAF AGM on 26th June 2026 (expansion into Luton)