

**Present:**

Elliott Stephenson	Grand Union Housing Group (Deputy Chair)
Sam Conder	Macmillan Welfare Rights Service – Central Bedfordshire Council
Debra Aikin	Beds RCC
Gemma McLean	Beds RCC
Pat Bonnet	Central Bedfordshire Council - Tenancy Support
Clare Copleston	The Disability Resource Centre
Len Simkins	Advice Bedfordshire
Debra Brewster	Mind BLMK
Charmaine Neita	Amicus Trust
Jenny Harris	Carers in Bedfordshire
Wendy Jephcote	Autism Bedfordshire
Melanie Gomez	Hightown Housing Association
Francesca Marritt	Citizens Advice Bedford
Sarah Broughton	Bedford Foodbank
Steven Kunes	Hightown Housing Association
Nichola Thompson	Hightown Housing Association
Martin Trinder	CVS Beds (minutes)
Adam Wilson	Noah Enterprise
Brian Cunningham	BRASS

**Apologies:**

Amanda Ryan	BPHA (chair)
Paulette Rennie	Bedford Community Support Group
Georgia Bowers	Bedford Libraries - Bedford Borough Council
Karen Lister	Debt Advice Service – Salvation Army Bedford
Steve Perry	AgeUK Bedfordshire
Clare Anderson	Sight Concern Bedfordshire
Sarah Hughes	Central Bedfordshire Council – Community Engagement

**3. Minutes of last Forum meeting (29<sup>th</sup> June 2023) and matters arising**

The minutes of the last Forum meeting were agreed.

Matters arising – The Steering Group are yet to consider the need to develop a new, campaigning anti-poverty network.

**4. Main Discussion Item - Housing/Homelessness**

Elliott and Fran led the discussion, with numerous members contributing their experiences and knowledge. Key points included:

- Not enough affordable accommodation locally.
- Those seeking temporary accommodation are being housed further away than before - Leicester was given as one example.

- Numerous people (including families) placed in inappropriate accommodation, with no cooking facilities.
- People returning to the UK for medical reasons often struggle to find accommodation.
- The increase in Section 21 (no fault) evictions as some landlords seek to cash in their assets, or seek to increase the rent level
- The impact of high interest rates on both landlords and homeowners with mortgages.
- Bedford CAB have a part-time Homeless Prevention Advisor, who has seen a huge demand for their support. Numerous members report similar increases in housing related enquiries.

Martin highlighted the Winter Shelter provision in Bedford being set up by Kings Arms Project (<https://kingsarmsproject.org/volunteer/>) and the ongoing conversations between Bedford Homeless Partnership and the Local Authority.

## 5. Information Exchange

### Sam - Macmillan

[https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/18/health\\_and\\_social\\_care/324/macmillan\\_welfare\\_rights\\_service\\_central\\_bedfordshire](https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/18/health_and_social_care/324/macmillan_welfare_rights_service_central_bedfordshire)

The service still has a waiting list of 4-6 weeks, but a new advisor is starting soon, which should help to reduce that list.

### Jemma -Beds RCC

<https://bedsrcc.org.uk/what-we-do/health-wellbeing/village-community-agents/>

Jemma highlighted that there is now a Town Agent for Bedford and Kempston Town (Karen Sharp).

### Debra - Beds RCC

<https://bedsrcc.org.uk/what-we-do/health-wellbeing/good-neighbour/>

### Pat – Tenancy Support – Central Bedfordshire Council

[https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/74/housing/1428/supporting\\_our\\_tenants](https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/74/housing/1428/supporting_our_tenants)

### Charmaine - Amicus

<https://www.amicustrust.org/Listing/Category/services>

Dominic Ball is the new CEO of Amicus Trust

### Fran – Citizens Advice Bedford

<https://www.bedfordcab.org.uk/our-services.html>

CAB now have an Immigration Advisor in training, with plans to register with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner at Level 2.

### Adam - Noah Enterprise

[www.noahenterprise.org](http://www.noahenterprise.org)

Currently looking for volunteers to assist with the outreach service in the south of the county. Adam will send details to Martin to pass on to the Volunteering Team at CVS.

### Sarah - Bedford Foodbank

<https://bedford.foodbank.org.uk>

The warehouse is being relocated in mid-November, providing more space for storage and for more volunteers to operate. Some people are handing back food that takes energy to prepare, such as pasta. Ongoing challenges of supporting people in temporary accommodation with only a kettle to prepare food.

**Brian - BRASS**

[www.brassbedford.org.uk](http://www.brassbedford.org.uk)

Xmas parties being organised. Currently recruiting for fundraiser. The service is busier now than it was pre-COVID19.

**Debra - MIND**

<https://www.mind-blmk.org.uk/>

Range of services on offer. Referral for Bedford are high.

**Wendy - Autism Bedfordshire**

<https://www.autismbedfordshire.net/support-for-adults/>

**Jenny - Carers in Bedfordshire**

<https://carersinbeds.org.uk/>

Central Beds – some financial support possibly available (up to £200) for unpaid carers if they are registered with Carers in Bedfordshire.

**Martin - CVS**

<https://www.cvsbeds.org.uk/>

Trustee Week starts next week (6-12 November), with a range of trustee recruitment activities, alongside setting up a Trustees network to support those already volunteering.

Martin also asked if partners had been in contact with a Hygiene Bank for Bedford, or were involved in delivering Warm spaces for the coming winter.

**Elliott - Grand Union Housing Group**

[https://www.guhg.co.uk/help-advice/benefit\\_and\\_money\\_advice-services/](https://www.guhg.co.uk/help-advice/benefit_and_money_advice-services/)

A new Debt Advice apprentice has been appointed and is currently in training. Also appointed a new role Customer Support Co-ordinator to help with response to emergency food/fuel poverty, help with basic furnishings, homelessness prevention and enabling internal moves.

**6. Mutual Assistance**

All members were reminded that if they have any requests for, or offers of, assistance or resources, they should be free to share them with other members at any time, including at BAF meetings.

**7. Update on BAF activities, including BAF training.**

Len provided a written report which can be found at the end of these minutes.

**8. Any other business**

Due to work commitments Amanda Ryan has stepped down as Chair of BAF, but will remain a member of the Steering Group. Members of the Steering Group attending today will discuss the appointment of a new chair after this meeting.

BAF Members placed on record their appreciation and thanks to Amanda.

**Date of next meeting**

Thursday 29th February 2024 – 10am – online

# UPDATE REPORT

## FOR BAF MEETING

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023

## Update on BAF projects and activities

### BAF training

BAF arranged a training programme in the spring for BAF members. The programme consisted of 3 full-day courses presented by 3 different trainers.

Course	Date	Tutor	Venue	Attendance
Introduction to Benefits	16/5/23	Dean Crofts	Bunyan Meeting	11
Universal Credit	7/6/23	Elliott Stephenson	CVS	15
Personal Independence Payment	13/7/23	Karen Banfield	CVS	12

The training programme was very successful.

- In total **38 people attended** the 3 courses
- The **general feedback** from the course evaluation forms was very positive. Across all 3 courses
  - 100% fully felt the course fulfilled their **expectations**
  - 100% fully felt that the course was at the **right level** for their needs
  - 100% fully felt that the **knowledge/skills** they gained on this course would help them in their work
- In terms of more **specific opinions on the courses**, the overall average feedback from the evaluation forms across the 3 courses was also very positive.
  - **Course structure and content** – 97% stated this was very good
  - **Training materials** – 91% stated these were very good
  - **Trainers and course delivery** – 100% stated these were very good
  - **Venues** – 82% stated these were very good
- A **surplus of £1,099.36** was made from the programme for BAF

The **recommendations** from the training programme, agreed by BAF's Steering Group, are:

1. BAF should **run another training programme**. Possibly in early 2024?
2. BAF members should be asked what their **current training needs** are before planning the next programme, and their **preference for the training venue**.
3. BAF should develop a **Cancellation Policy** to clarify how cancellations and potential refunds are dealt with.

Please contact Len Simkins (Training Consultant) for further information.  
[len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk](mailto:len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk)

## Bedfordshire Benefits Network

These network meetings, for benefit advisers, are provided as an extra service by BAF. They are held every 6 months and are generally very well attended.

The **next BBN meeting** is scheduled for 10.00am on **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024** in Bedford.

Please contact Elliott Stephenson (BBN Facilitator) for further information.  
[elliottstephenson@yahoo.com](mailto:elliottstephenson@yahoo.com)

## Advice Bedfordshire CIC

Advice Bedfordshire is BAF's trading company, and is used to organise BAF's projects and training work.

After a quiet year of activity in 2022/23, the Company has had a much busier year in 2023/24 with organising BAF's training programme.

The current balance in the Company bank account is now £3,033.36 – although the final expenses from the training programme will now be paid.

Please contact Len Simkins (AB's Company Secretary) for further information.  
[len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk](mailto:len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk)

## BAF webpages

BAF's webpages are hosted on the CVS website. <https://www.cvsbeds.org.uk/baf/>

Most of the webpages have recently been updated. Thanks to Natalia Ford (CVS) for help with this.

The BAF webpages (containing various information on BAF and its activities) are:

- About BAF
- Membership
- Forum Meetings
- Training Courses
- Benefits Network
- Projects
- Advice Bedfordshire
- Contact Us

If you have any comments about the webpages, please contact Len Simkins  
[len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk](mailto:len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk)

Len Simkins – Project Consultant