

## Bedfordshire Advice Forum - Members

- Advice UK (Eastern Region) • Advocacy Alliance • Age Concern Bedfordshire
  - Anchor 'Staying-Put' Bedford
  - Aragon Housing Association
  - Bedford & District CAB
  - Bedford African Caribbean Forum
    - Bedford Bangladeshi Women's Association
    - Bedford Borough Council (Customer Advisory Team)
  - Bedford Borough Council (Housing Advice Service) • Bedford College
    - Bedford Community Rights Centre
    - Bedford Concern for the Homeless & Rootless
  - Bedford Credit Union Ltd • Bedford Foyer (BPHA) • Bedford Housing Link
    - Bedford Race Equality Council
    - Bedford Samaritans
  - Bedford Volunteer Bureau • Bedford YMCA • Beds Child Poverty Action Group
  - Beds County Council (Inform 0-19) • Beds County Council (Trading Standards)
    - Beds County Council (Welfare Rights Service)
    - Bedfordshire Police (Welfare Department)
    - Bedfordshire Refugee & Asylum Seeker Support
      - Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (Carers Short Breaks)
      - Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (Village Care Schemes)
        - Beds & Herts Energy Efficiency Advice Centre • BPHA
        - Christian Family Care • Create / Finance ReDirect Ltd
        - Community & Voluntary Service (Mid & North Bedfordshire)
      - Disability Resource Centre • Down's Heart Group • Dunstable CAB
        - Family Groups (Bedford) • Home-Start (North & Mid Beds)
          - Hospice at Home Volunteers (Bedford)
    - Hospice at Home Volunteers (Leighton Buzzard) • Jephson Housing Association
      - King's Arms Project • Langley House Trust • Leighton Linslade CAB
        - Luton Irish Forum • Luton Law Centre • Luton Rights
    - Macmillan Welfare Rights Service • Mayday Trust • Mid Bedfordshire CAB
    - Peterhouse Project • Places for People • Polish-British Integration Centre
      - Relate • Rutland Road Church • Sight Concern Bedfordshire
    - South Beds District Council (Benefits Service) • Spurgeon's Child Care
      - SSAFA • Surestart Cauldwell • The Bedford Charity
        - University of Bedfordshire (Student Welfare)
          - Victim Support Bedfordshire
      - Voluntary & Community Action South Bedfordshire

**BAF Membership (26<sup>th</sup> June 2008) = 65 Members**

## Bedfordshire Advice Forum

*Promoting and supporting the provision of advice and information services in Bedfordshire*

# Annual Report 2007/2008

Our local advice forum was originally formed in 1997 as Bedford Advice Forum. Initially BAF only covered North Bedfordshire, but it expanded its geographical boundary in 2001 to include Mid Bedfordshire. In 2007 BAF further expanded its membership criteria to encompass South Bedfordshire thus becoming Bedfordshire Advice Forum.

BAF aims to:

- **Promote and support the provision of advice and information services in Bedfordshire**
- **Provide a forum for exchanging information on the provision, gaps and resource requirements of advice and information services in Bedfordshire**
- **Deliver and support training in collaboration with BAF member agencies**
- **Seek funding for projects to develop advice services relevant to local needs**

The members of BAF are not-for-profit organisations (from the voluntary and public/statutory sectors) that provide advice or information on civil legal matters - either as the main function of the organisation or as an important part of its work.

**This Annual Report highlights the achievements of Bedfordshire Advice Forum during 2007/2008**

## BAF Activities in 2007/08

### BAF Meetings

Last year BAF held **4 Forum meetings** for its members to discuss various issues affecting the local advice and information sector. The meetings also provided members with an opportunity to publicise changes and developments in their own organisations.

A number of useful **presentations** were made at the Forum meetings including:

- **Mid Beds Credit Union** - results of the feasibility study on setting up a new credit union
- **New advice services in Bedfordshire** - information on: BPHA debt advice service; restructured services at Mid Beds CAB; Macmillan Welfare Rights Service; and Bedford Community Rights Centre debt advice service
- **Elizabeth Finn Care** - information and referral criteria for a charity which gives grants to people in poverty
- **Q-cas Project** - update on the new quality system in Bedfordshire for community advice groups

BAF also held an **AGM** in April 2007.

BAF's **Steering Group**, which was elected at the AGM, also met 4 times during the year to plan and oversee BAF's work.

The members of the Steering Group in 2007/08 were:

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| David Verney         | - Age Concern Bedfordshire (Chair)                  |
| Annette Pacey        | - BPHA (Treasurer)                                  |
| Len Simkins          | - Advice <sup>UK</sup> - Eastern Region (Secretary) |
| Wendy Anderson-Welsh | - Bedford Race Equality Council                     |
| Gary Johnson         | - Beds. County Council, Welfare Rights Service      |
| Tanya Richardson     | - Create / Finance ReDirect                         |
| David Waggott        | - Mid Beds Citizens Advice Bureau                   |

The Forum, AGM and Steering Group meetings were organised by **Infotrain**, on behalf of BAF.

## BAF Strategy

During 2007/08 BAF continued working on its future strategy which had been launched the previous year.

The key developments in 2007/08 were:

- **Extension of BAF to include South Bedfordshire** - this change has made BAF stronger with 7 new groups joining BAF from the South Beds. area.
- **Legal status for BAF** - to give BAF a legal identity and limited liability protection, a community interest company was formed in November 2007. **Advice Bedfordshire**, which will act as BAF's trading company, started trading in April 2008.

## BAF Training Courses

BAF organised 3 training courses for members in 2007/08: Introduction to Benefits; Benefits Update; and Disability Benefits.

Trainers for the courses were provided by BAF members: Advice<sup>UK</sup> (Eastern Region) and Beds. County Council's Welfare Rights Service.

The courses were attended by 45 participants in total and were very well received.

## Q-cas

Last year BAF supported the development of Q-cas - the new quality assurance system for community advice groups that is being developed in Bedfordshire.

The quality standards were developed in 2007 and were then piloted with 6 local community groups. This work was managed by a BAF member, Bedford Race Equality Council.

As part of the project a series of training courses were organised on advice skills. These courses were made available to BAF members and 44 participants from BAF agencies attended the training.

Although the initial funding for the project, from Capacity Builders, has now ended it is hoped that further funding can be obtained for further development work.