

## SOCIAL EXCLUSION UNIT - UPDATE

### Who's Who

The General Election earlier this year resulted in some changes at the ODPM Ministerial team:

- **David Miliband** is Minister for Communities and Local Government
- **Phil Woolas** is Minister for Local Government with specific responsibility for social exclusion, neighbourhood renewal and Supporting People issues
- **Yvette Cooper** is Minister for Housing and Planning
- **Jim Fitzpatrick** and **Baroness Andrews** are both Parliamentary under Secretary of States

More details from [seuenquiries@odpm.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:seuenquiries@odpm.gsi.gov.uk)

### What's What

- **'Youth Matters' Green Paper** - consultation period until 28<sup>th</sup> October, visit [www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations)
- **Equalities Review** - to investigate the causes of persistent discrimination and inequality in British society - for more details contact [rosie.seymour@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:rosie.seymour@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk)
- **'Include Me In'** - a report on helping homeless people back into work available from [www.demos.co.uk/catalogue](http://www.demos.co.uk/catalogue)
- **The Commission for Rural Communities** has recently launched a new database with examples of how communities have been tackling issues such as social exclusion.

### BENEFITS TAKE-UP AND ADVICE IN BEDFORDSHIRE

Earlier this year Bedfordshire's Tackling Poverty Together Group (TPT Group) commissioned some research into the take-up of benefits and benefits advice provision in Bedfordshire. This research is part of the Group's wider aim of developing a "baseline for tackling poverty action" by undertaking "gap analysis" in Bedfordshire.

The research, funded by Bedfordshire County Council, and undertaken by infotrain (a local consultancy company), aimed to: produce a succinct picture of the current provision of and access to benefits advice, and take-up of benefits in Bedfordshire; identify key gaps in provision; and suggest possible ways of closing the gaps.

The research report has recently been completed and suggests there are gaps in advice provision for various vulnerable groups (such as the elderly and those with mental health problems) and in rural areas; a lack of support and training for frontline benefit advisors in Bedfordshire; and are gaps in advice on benefit issues relating to immigration, refugees, and migrant workers.

Copies of the report are now available. The TPT Group will also send the report to all Bedfordshire Local Strategic Partnerships and will propose that the recommendations are included in their action plans.

For more information contact Len Simkins on 01234 360607 or [len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk](mailto:len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk)

### CHANGES TO BENEFIT CLAIMING PROCESS

As from 27<sup>th</sup> July 2005 the way working age people claim benefit changed. Those changes are due to the introduction of the Jobcentre Plus's **Customer Management System (CMS)** - a telephone based claim process.

Under CMS working age people will make their new or repeat claim for Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), Income Support (IS) or Incapacity Benefit (IB) by calling Jobcentre Plus and their claims details will be taken over the telephone. They will also make their claim for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) at the same time.

Working age people wanting to claim benefit should initially contact Jobcentre plus on **0845 603 2451**. Jobcentre Plus staff will take some basic claim information from them.

Then Jobcentre Plus will call the claimant back at an agreed time to gather the more detailed information needed for their benefit claims. All the information that is given will be printed out and sent to the claimant for them to check and sign. The claimant will return this printed information, along with any documents needed to support their benefit claim, to their local Jobcentre Plus office at a time agreed during the telephone call. Jobcentre Plus will then pass the HB/CTB claim details to the appropriate local authority.

The local authority is still responsible for working out entitlement to HB/CTB and it will still need to ask some customers to provide additional documentation, for example proof of rent and non-dependants income details, before the claim can be processed.

- If you have any comments of **Poverty News**, or would like to contribute an article, please contact Sue Walmsley on 01234 360607 or email [sue.walmsley@infotrain.co.uk](mailto:sue.walmsley@infotrain.co.uk)
- This edition of **Poverty News** is shorter than normal due to the summer break - normal service will be resumed with the next issue.
- The TPT Group is considering changing the design of **Poverty News** possibly changing to a 'pdf' format. We would welcome your comments / suggestions for improving our design.

# Update...Update...Update...Update...Update...

## THE COST OF DEBT - TPT Conference

On 1<sup>st</sup> July the TPT Group hosted its 4<sup>th</sup> countywide anti-poverty conference in Bedfordshire. The aims of the conference were: to examine and raise awareness of the effects of consumer debt on individuals, families and wider society; and to identify and promote ways to prevent and manage debt e.g. through credit unions.

The conference speakers, from the TPT Group, Citizens Advice, the National Institute of Economic & Social Research and Lewisham Credit Union, provided a wide-ranging overview of the scale, effects and management of debt. The afternoon session included an innovative element in the form of an interactive theatre production during which the conference delegates worked with the actors to develop a "play" based on their perceptions of the effects of debt. Later in the afternoon delegates broke into three workshops focussing on local debt issues.

The Conference Report has now been produced and will be distributed to all delegates shortly. One feature of note from the conference evaluation is that 76% of delegates said they would be taking some form of action as a direct result of the conference (many referring to building closer links with credit unions). The report and the conference recommendations will be discussed by the TPT Group at its next meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September.

For more information contact Len Simkins on 01234 360607 or email [len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk](mailto:len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk)

## BEDFORD / NORTH BEDFORDSHIRE

Bedford Credit Union is looking for more partners to join their **Money Management and Budgeting project** in providing outreach programmes for its clients. The key module for students is "Keeping Track of your Money". This module covers all the basics for personal needs in avoiding debt and keeping out of debt, personal budgeting, form filling and CV writing to secure employment. The course is for 20-30 hours over 8-10 weeks depending on the ability of students.

BCU's **Work Experience programme** is now up and running and more students are welcome. BCU is currently meeting companies and voluntary groups who are willing to provide work experience. A weekly course is running at the North Beds. CVS in Bromham Road every Wednesday morning. Anyone can join at any time as it is a rolling programme. The possibility of running an evening course and courses in different venues is being investigated.

For more information please contact David Sparks on 01234 346352 or email [david.sparks@zoom.co.uk](mailto:david.sparks@zoom.co.uk)

## EASTERN REGION

**Modernising Rural Delivery:** The first phase of modernising rural delivery has now been completed. Socio-economic programmes previously administered by the Countryside Agency have been re-located as follows: **To EEDA:** Most of the Vital Villages grant programme including Parish Transport Grant, Rural Transport Partnership and Community Services Grants. Contact: Allison Conder, Development Manager, EEDA, 01223 484684. **To GO-East:** RCC Service Level Agreements, Rural Action East contracts and Parish Plans. Contact: Tony Dadoun 01223 372595 or [Tdadoun.GO-East@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Tdadoun.GO-East@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk)

**Legacy Parish Plans:** There are 126 of these plans across the region. Administrative responsibility for delivery of these plans has passed to Rural Action East. Contact: Claire Bradshaw 01473 242546 or [claire.bradshaw@RuralActionEast.org.uk](mailto:claire.bradshaw@RuralActionEast.org.uk)

**Interim Parish Plans:** Bedfordshire RCC has delegated responsibility for administration and delivery of these new plans for 2005/06. BRCC also has a budget to enable new plans to come forward. Contact: Zoe Ashbee at BRCC on 01234 838771 or [zoe@bedsrcc.bdx.co.uk](mailto:zoe@bedsrcc.bdx.co.uk)

**Rural Social and Community Programme (RSCP):** a new rural grant programme which starts in April 2006. Its aims are to build on the capacity of rural communities so that they can work together to shape their own future; to help socially excluded individuals in rural communities and to develop the capacity of the Voluntary and Community Services and of the Town and Parish Council sector to reinforce the delivery of the first two aims. For further details contact: Tony Dadoun (details as above).

**Evaluation of the Voluntary and Community Infrastructure Investment Programme (IIP):** An interim evaluation of IIP will be available shortly. Bedfordshire IIP is tasked with the development of a local consortium to identify what voluntary and community sector infrastructure bodies need to tackle rural social exclusion in the county. The report looks at positive outcomes so far, but also examines the challenges which need to be addressed if the aims of the programme are to be met. For further information contact: Claire Witcombe 01223 372606 or [CWitcombe.GO-East@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:CWitcombe.GO-East@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk)

## FUNDING

The Financial Services Authority (FSA) **Financial Capability Innovation Fund** is available for community or voluntary organisations to fund projects designed to help people deal with their money. For more details call 020 7066 0084 or visit [www.fsa.gov.uk/financial\\_capability](http://www.fsa.gov.uk/financial_capability)