

National News

Poor prevented from accessing legal services

In response to a government review of how legal aid services are paid for, judges from the court of appeal down to district judges have accused the government of "emasculating" civil legal aid, threatening access to justice for the poor and vulnerable. They say ministers have allowed legal aid for criminal, family and asylum cases to swell unchecked, squeezing the funds for helping disadvantaged people with legal problems such as debt and housing. They also point out that the budget for civil aid has been cut from £378m in 1995-96 to £210m in 2004-05. In the same period, family legal aid went up from £373m to £452m and asylum aid soared from £24m to £148m.

A coalition of over 40 organisations from the advice, poverty and justice sectors (Access to Justice Alliance) has mounted a campaign, **A Right to Justice**, against the continuing cuts faced by legal aid services. For more information visit www.accesstojusticealliance.org.uk

Social Exclusion & Tackling Poverty Government Reports

- **A Sure Start to Later Life: Ending Inequalities for Older People** - launched in January. The report examines how services can tackle and prevent social exclusion amongst older people. The report can be downloaded from www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/page.asp?id=573 or telephone 0870 1226 236 for hard copies.
- **Making a difference: Tackling poverty a progress report** was published by the DWP in March. The report includes the latest statistics on poverty. Information on the figures is available at www.dwp.gov.uk/mediacentre/pressreleases/2006/mar/cphs015-090306.asp the full report can be downloaded from www.dep.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2006/poverty/tackling-poverty.pdf
- **The Equalities Review interim report** was published in March looking at persistent inequalities and current challenges. Comments and contributions to the final report can be made via www.wired-gov.net/WGArticle.aspx

Government misses target to cut child poverty

Figures released in March show that the Government failed to meet its target of cutting child poverty by a quarter between 1998-99 and 2004-05. Child poverty is defined as children living in households earning less than 60% of median income. By 2003-04, child poverty had fallen by 15% or 600,000 since 1998-99. To meet the 25% target, the number of children in poor households would have had to fall by another 400,000 in 2004-05.

ODPM changes

Now that John Prescott has apparently been stripped of most of his duties as Deputy Prime Minister it is unclear as to who will assume responsibility for the **Social Exclusion Unit**. Further details should be available in time for the next edition of *Poverty News*.

If you have any comments on **Poverty News**, or would like to contribute an article, please contact: Sue Walmsley on 01234 360607 or go to the 'contact us' page on the TPT website: www.tacklingpoverty-beds.org.uk

TPT Group Action Plan

At its last meeting in March, the **Tackling Poverty Together Group** formulated its Action Plan for 2006/07. As well as continuing to hold regular meetings, produce *Poverty News* and maintain the TPT Website, the Group intends to continue to work on two key initiatives that were formulated last year:

- **To promote and support the development of a Credit Union in Mid Bedfordshire** - an initial meeting was held in April at Aragon Housing Association with Mid Beds. District Council, Mid Beds. CVS and Bedford Credit Union. The Group is looking to work with, and train, a group of local individuals who want to develop a Credit Union from the grass roots.
- **To encourage the organisation of a benefits take-up campaign in Bedfordshire** - The Group is currently working with Bedford Partnership Board on a proposal to fund and develop a take-up campaign in Bedford in 2007

Further details of these and the Group's other activities can be found at www.tacklingpoverty-beds.org.uk

Update

Eastern Region

Update

The following parishes have so far been awarded grants under the **Interim Parish Plans scheme** which ran from April 2005 until March 2006: Felmersham & Radwell; Harlington; Roxton; and Stevington. It is expected that by the end of March the following parishes will also have receive awards to enable them to undertake a Parish Plan: Cranfield; Heath & Reach; Thurleigh; Northill; Pertenhall & Swineshead; Apsley Guise; and Willington. It is expected that it will take another year to eighteen months before all of these parish plans are completed.

From April there will be no separate grant programme for parish plans. Under the Rural White Paper 2004 there will be just three schemes for rural areas. The relevant scheme for communities and the voluntary sector is the **Rural Social and Community Programme (RSCP)**. The RSCP has taken longer to develop in Bedfordshire than in other counties. It is expected that the necessary changes to the draft Business Case will be completed by the end of March. The RSCP will be aligned with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) at least for the first year of operation (April 2006 to March 2007).

Work is proceeding in the regions to negotiate the second round of 66 **Local Area Agreements (LAAs)**. Further submissions were made in February and the final sign-off was due on 24 March 2006. An evaluation of the second round LAAs is currently underway. The final report was due in March. Work is underway to agree a plan for developing capacity in LSPs in order to deliver the LAA agenda.

Due to the restructuring of GO-East, **Tony Dadoun** no longer has a Bedfordshire remit and will no longer be a member of the TPT Group. Tony has played a very active part in TPT Group meetings and activities (especially contributing to *Poverty News*), over a number of years, bringing the regional rural perspective to discussions. The Group is sorry to lose Tony but wishes him well in his new role. The new GO-East contact is **Lisa Roberts**, she can be contacted on 01223 372647 or email lisa.roberts@goeast.gsi.gov.uk

Update

South Bedfordshire

Update

The **Downside Estate Multi-Agency** celebrated 50 years of Downside and the launch of the new Estate Plan at "On the Up3!" on 6th May at Downside Lower School, Dunstable. For more information, please contact Andrew Dwyer at Free form on 020 7241 7473 or email andyd@freeform.org.uk

Money Matters Credit Union – the three-year Marsh Farm project ended on 1st April. The credit union will continue to operate from their office in Lewsey community Centre, Landrace Road, Luton. This office is normally staffed on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 10.00 am to 3.00 pm and on Friday evenings from 6.30 pm to 8.30 pm. To contact Money Matters, call 01582 666877 (24hr answerphone) or email lewsey@money matters-cu.co.uk

Growth & Investment in the Voluntary and Community Sector - free seminar on 23rd May from 12.00-3.00pm. The seminar is open to organisations from South Bedfordshire and Luton. To book a place, or for more information, call the Training & Development Team on 01414 160751 or email training@action-southbeds.org.uk - places are limited.

Update

Mid Bedfordshire

Update

Mid Beds. CAB moved to its new "Citizone" offices in Ampthill at the end of April. The CAB will offer a 'drop-in' service in Ampthill, an appointments-only service in Biggleswade and a telephone service in Chicksands. For more information visit www.midbedscab.dial.pipex.com

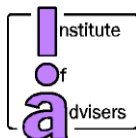
Mid Bedfordshire District Council is developing a **Fuel Poverty Strategy** and **Fuel Poverty Toolkit**. Resources are to be targeted at those wards identified as most at risk from fuel poverty. All relevant agencies (e.g. PCTs) are being involved in the consultation stage of the development of this strategy. A residents' panel will be consulted soon.

Mid Beds. District Council is also undertaking its annual review of its "Tackling Disadvantage" action plan. For more information contact Rob Parsons on 01525 842120 or email rob.parsons@midbeds.gov.uk

Conference

"Advice at a Crossroads"

Conference



Thursday 25th May 2006
BVSC
138 Digbeth, Birmingham

A one day conference looking at the influences on the advice sector and the challenges ahead for the sector and its workforce
Presentations, panel discussions and topic groups on:

- National Occupational Standards • Big Lottery Advice Programme • Access to Justice • Causes of Action • Advice Forums

For more information or to book your place visit www.advisersinstitute.org.uk or telephone 01322 566057
Delegate rates: Voluntary sector / charities £88.13 (inc VAT) Other organisations £129.25 (inc VAT) 20% discount for Institute Members

Update

Bedfordshire...

Update

Bedfordshire Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) held its AGM in March. For more information contact Len Simkins on 01234 360607 or email len.simkins@infotrain.co.uk

Age Concern Bedfordshire conducted **Your Rights Week** – its annual campaign to encourage older people to claim the benefits to which they are entitled - from 7th to 14th April. Displays were mounted in libraries across Bedfordshire to encourage benefit take-up. For more information contact Age Concern Bedfordshire on 01234 360510.

Macmillan Cancer Relief and **Bedfordshire County Council's Welfare Rights Service** have entered into a partnership to provide and improve welfare rights advice across the County to people affected by cancer including carers and families. This initiative was prompted by Macmillan's *Better Deal* campaign for people affected by cancer and was launched on 6th April. For more information contact Gary Johnson on 01234 228057 or email Gary.Johnson@bedscc.gov.uk

Tackling Deprivation Addressing Disadvantage

One of Bedfordshire County Council's 15 priorities is the creation of 50,000 jobs by 2021. Economic opportunity and prosperity are key to the route out of poverty and disadvantage. The Council has allocated additional capital and revenue resources to economic development to increase activity towards achieving this job target.

One of the Council's 4 strategic objectives is to 'help those who need our help most' involving the newly created Children Services directorate and Adult Services. In addition the economic development service is leading a corporate group to improve the Council's impact on poverty and deprivation by:

- developing understanding and awareness of the issues
- consolidating and improving access to the evidence base and information on deprivation and activity
- being clear and knowledgeable about what they are (and are not) doing
- learning how to better tackle the issues
- establishing indicators and measures for improvement
- linking mainstream with additional / external funding
- thinking neighbourhoods
- identifying more actions

Services involved so far include Extended Schools' Trading Standards, Equality and Diversity, Transport policy, BDAT, Adult Education etc.

More information contact Sarah Hughes 01234 228582 or email sarah.hughes@bedscc.gov.uk

Update

Bedford

Update

Bedford Alliance Against Poverty (BAAP) held its AGM in March. BAAP is working to secure funding for an annual anti-poverty event. For more information contact Hazel Mitchell on HMitchell@bedford.gov.uk

Bedford Borough Council offers a home visiting benefits advice service for those aged 75 or over, the disabled or housebound. Benefits advisors are also available to give talks to groups such as over 60s clubs or coffee mornings. To arrange a home visit, or a talk call 01234 221688. For benefits advice over the phone, call 01234 221670.

Money Management Help Wanted

Donna Wilkinson, Economic Development Officer at South Bedfordshire District Council is working on a project to improve the money management skills of local people. The project will include running training sessions on financial literacy, training local people to help others with financial management and putting together written materials.

Donna is looking for examples of such schemes elsewhere to get a better idea of what has been successful, what works, what doesn't etc. If you know of any schemes similar to this, or can help Donna with any further information, please contact her on 01582 474191 or email Donna.Wilkinson@southbeds.gov.uk

Advice for Asylum Seekers



Free Advice Surgery for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Provided by **Bedfordshire African Support Project (BASP)** in partnership with **Bedford Race Equality Council**

Expert advice and guidance for asylum seekers and refugees and members of African communities

When?
Every Friday

What time?
10:00am - 4:00pm

Where?
BEDFORD REC, 36 MILL STREET, BEDFORD
☎ 01234 350459

NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY

Advice Available On:

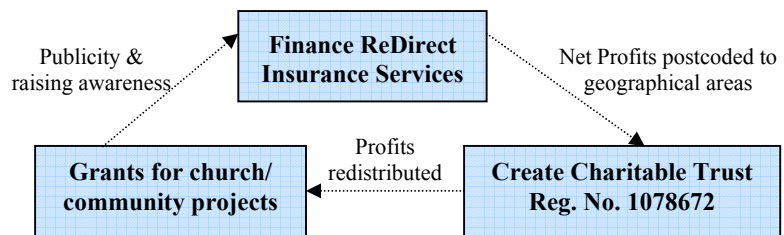
Immigration & Nationality	Interpretation & Translation
Welfare Benefits	Job Search
Employment	Training
Education	

Finance ReDirect/Create - insuring the voluntary sector

Finance ReDirect is an innovative social enterprise based in Bedford that has formed partnerships with insurance providers to be able to offer a comprehensive range of insurance services for organisations in the not for profit and business sectors.

What distinguishes Finance ReDirect from run of the mill insurance providers is that it is the trading subsidiary of the registered charity **Create** and distributes its profits back to the charity. Create, in turn, distributes the profits as grants to local community and charitable projects. Further information about Create and how to access grants can be found on their website:

www.create-charity.org.uk



Finance ReDirect has recently received funding to develop a range of insurance products aimed at organisations in the voluntary sector and to address in particular the need for public liability insurance. Under their *Community Group Scheme*, low cost public liability insurance can be arranged to cover group meetings in hired premises etc. To find out if your community group is eligible, or for information on general insurance provided, visit www.financeredirect.co.uk or call 0845 3732759.

Finance ReDirect currently has a job vacancy for an **Administrator** to look after client files as well as general clerical duties. Hours are negotiable (minimum 20 hours a week) and salary will be dependent on experience. For more information contact Tanya Richardson (Managing Director) on 01234 358535.

Mid Bedfordshire Home Energy Efficiency & Fuel Poverty



Mid Bedfordshire District Council has recently undertaken a consultation on its **Home Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty Strategy 2006-2011**.

The aim of the consultation was to seek the views of those most at risk from fuel poverty and statutory as well as voluntary organisations, on the proposed plan of action.

The key aim of the new Strategy will be:

To work with our partners to ensure affordable warmth for the most vulnerable residents in Mid Bedfordshire

The key aim and objectives of the Strategy were developed during a multi-agency strategy development workshop held on the 17th February.

This workshop saw key professional partners working together to discuss a coordinated approach to tackling fuel poverty in the District. The agencies included: Aragon Housing Association, Bedford PCT, Beds. Rural Communities Charity, Age Concern, Herts. & Beds. Energy Efficiency Advice Centre, neighbouring Local Authorities, and others. Mid Beds District Council realises that the Strategy will only work if all the key agencies are signed up to it and take coordinated action. The Council aims to set up effective communication links with officers in Beds. Heartlands PCT, Social Services, local charity / voluntary organisations, and other relevant bodies.

If you would like to comment on the Strategy or would like more information or feel you can help, please contact Grazina Keen, Housing Research and Policy Officer on 0845 8495479 or email: Grazina.Keen@midbeds.gov.uk

Online benefits publications

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has announced that three of its major publications are to be published online in 2006.

There are four different packages available. Two are based around the *Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook*: a basic version, *Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Online*, consists of the *Handbook* text only, but updated throughout the year; a comprehensive version, *Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Law Online*, includes consolidated social security legislation fully linked to the *Handbook* text. *Child Support Law Online* and *Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Law Online* are also available.

For more information on each package, including prices, visit www.cpag.org.uk/publications