

MINUTES OF TPT GROUP MEETING

County Hall, Bedford

19th September 2006

Present:

Sarah Hughes (Chair)	Bedfordshire County Council
Len Simkins	Infotrain
Mark Smith	CVS Mid & North Bedfordshire
Sue Walmsley	Infotrain
Peter Doyle	Bedford Credit Union
Grazina Keen	Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Nick Costin	South Bedfordshire District Council
Steve Hill	Aragon Housing Association
Lina Rapkeviciene	Bedford Community Rights Centre
Avinash Mandalia	Bedford Community Rights Centre
Abigail Basketter	Bedford Borough Council
Sutish Mahrra	Jobcentre Plus

1. Apologies

Tanya Richardson	Website Consultant
James Hurd	Bedford Borough Council
Alasdair Christie	Mid Bedfordshire CAB
Jill Dickinson	Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Anona Thomson	Bedford Borough Council
Philippa Harris	Bedford & District CAB
Kim Norris	Bedford Credit Union
Maureen Baker	BPHA
Marcus Pheasant	Furniture Link Bedford

Action

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting (6th June 2006) were accepted as an accurate record.

2.2 Matters arising:

Item 2.2: Alasdair Christie had recently joined the Group as representative of **Mid Bedfordshire CAB**. However, Alasdair will be leaving Mid Beds CAB in the near future. It was decided to invite the new Manager to join the Group when he/she is in place. Steve Hill of **Aragon Housing Association** and Sutish Mahrra of **Jobcentre Plus** have joined the Group. **Community & Voluntary Action South Bedfordshire** have, as yet, not responded to an invitation to join the Group.

Item 3.5: Themes/issues for future projects will be considered at the next meeting after the results of the Membership Survey are known.

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All other matters were covered on this meeting's agenda

3. TPT Group Action Plan 2006-07

3.1 Theme for next meeting

Suggestions for the theme for the next meeting were made as follows:

- **Charitable help / trust funds** - Avinash Mandalia cited the Anglian Water Plus Fund as a useful community resource to help individuals with debts.
- **Services for elderly people** - home improvement loans/grants etc.
- **Countywide Partnership** arrangements in terms of the LAA and Countywide Assembly.
- Changes to **benefit delivery centres** at Jobcentre Plus.
- **Migrant workers**

3.2 Membership Review

A Membership Survey questionnaire has been distributed (by post and email) to all members - the return date is 29th September. All members are asked to complete and return the questionnaire.

All

Maureen Baker of BPHA has indicated that she can no longer keep up her membership of the Group. It was agreed that BPHA representation was important to the Group. Len will contact BPHA to see if a link can be maintained.

LS

3.3 TPT Website

The latest figures for website usage were distributed. Activity remains fairly constant with the 'partners and links' page still the most popular.

Tanya is continuing to work on updating the website design and will bring 3 draft designs to the next meeting. She will email them to Group members for consideration before the meeting.

TR

Tanya asked that all members inform her of any appropriate activity / event for inclusion on the Group's website.

All

3.4 Benefits Take-up Campaign in Bedford

Len informed the Group that there was no further news on this proposed campaign, but Bedford Partnership Board (BPB) Including Everyone Group was due to meet on 20th September. BPB is in the process of working out protocols for allocating and managing funds. It is unlikely that the take-up campaign will happen before 2007/08.

Len reiterated that once the Bedford campaign framework is set up it may be possible to extend it to Mid and/or South Bedfordshire. Len will continue to update the Group on progress.

LS

Sue will update the Action Plan 2006-07 indicating where success criteria have been met. The Action Plan will be available on the Group website.

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4. Fuel Poverty in Bedfordshire

- #### 4.1
- The Group welcomed Abigail Basketter (Bedford Borough Council), Grazina Keen (Mid Beds. District Council) and Nick Costin (South Beds. District Council) who had accepted an invitation to update the Group on actions being taken to reduce the number of people living in fuel poverty in their areas.

4.2 Abigail Basketter (Energy & Waste Efficiency Officer at Bedford Borough Council) began with a definition of fuel poverty "A fuel poor household is one that needs to spend more than 10% of its income on all fuel use in order to heat its home to an adequate standard of warmth (21°C in the living room and 18°C in the other occupied rooms). The causes of fuel poverty include the energy efficiency of a property; the occupancy level compared to the size of the property; the income of a household; the cost of fuel and the external environment. The over-60s form the largest single vulnerable group. Families with young children and the long-term sick or disabled are also considered vulnerable.

The Government has set targets for the eradication of fuel poverty in vulnerable groups and those living in social housing by 2010, and the total eradication of fuel poverty by 2016. Rising fuel costs are undoing some of the progress made to date with households sliding back into fuel poverty.

In Bedford Borough, Queens Park, Kingsbrook, Cauldwell, Castle and Goldington wards have been identified as vulnerable to fuel poverty. These wards contain older (i.e. less energy efficient) housing and low incomes.

In 2003 Bedford Borough Council drew up a Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan. The Steering Group meets quarterly and focuses on the promotion of grants, a training programme for advisors to identify vulnerable households and a referral scheme for those living in fuel poverty to access grants and discounts available.

Abigail pointed out that there are many variable factors contributing to fuel poverty making it difficult to identify vulnerable households. A small change in one factor can push a household into fuel poverty.

4.3 Grazina Keen (Housing Research and Policy Officer at Mid Beds. District Council) described MBDC's 5-year Fuel Poverty Strategy adopted in July 2006 with an Action Plan to be delivered with partners (Bedford Borough Council, Aragon Housing Association, advice agencies, charities, etc.). Fuel poverty and home energy efficiency are interlinked. The Strategy's aim is to ensure affordable warmth for the most vulnerable.

A Fuel Poverty Toolkit has been developed to identify potentially fuel-poor households. Over 16,000 households have been identified as potentially fuel poor in Mid Beds. This figure is probably closer to 20,000 given recent fuel price rises. The wards most affected - Biggleswade Ivel, Sandy Pinnacle, Flitwick East etc. - are amongst the most deprived in the county.

Grazina noted the following as ways to move forward:

- Strong partnerships to develop joint initiatives – expanding the Affordable Warmth Group.
- Targeting promotional campaigns, for example – 1,000 vulnerable people in Sandy, Biggleswade, Ampthill and Flitwick with the Biggleswade Pensioners' Association – at the end of Oct 06.
- Attendance at older persons' groups and village fetes across the District to promote grants and give practical tips on saving energy.
- Developing a joint referral scheme – the Warm Beds campaign (involving young people), joint promotional activities (Energy Action Week), marketing (bookmarks?) and training to key visiting staff.
- Grants – Home Improvement Grants (heating) – the threshold has been lowered from 150 points to under 100 to enable easier access.

- Insulation grants – either through a well-reputed private contractor or energy supplier.
- Low energy light-bulbs.
- Action in the private rented sector – Landlord Accreditation Scheme; trying to set up a private tenants' forum and carrying out a survey.

4.4 Nick Costin (Private Sector Housing Manager at South Beds. District Council) began by explaining that he heads a team of only four officers to deal with all private sector housing issues and that disabled service grants take up the majority of their workload. The responsibility for energy efficiency and affordable warmth was added to the PSH role in June this year.

A 2003 survey in South Beds of approximately 43,000 private sector dwellings showed that more than half were built before 1944. Nearly 10% have a low enough SAP rating to fail the "decent homes standards". The ODPM Ready Reckoner suggests that 2,263 vulnerable households live in non-decent homes - many non decent due to poor energy efficiency. There have been no detailed fuel poverty surveys in addition to this.

SBDC is working closely with Beds. and Herts. Energy Efficiency Advice Centre - all enquiries are directed to them. They also operate a referral scheme for Affordable Warmth Grants for those who do not qualify for the national Warm Front Grants. A household does not need to be in receipt of benefits in order to qualify for an Affordable Warmth Grant.

SBDC offers an Emergency Repair Assistance grant for the over 60s and disabled for heating repairs. Essential Works Grants can also be used for heating and insulation improvement, but these are means tested.

Nick has begun to do some joint work with Warm Front and is hoping to do a mailout before winter. A bid for funding for a full-time Home Energy Conservation Officer for 2007/08 has been put in.

Energy efficiency will receive a higher priority in SBDC's Housing Strategy 2007.

4.5 Discussion:

Q What would success look like? Is eradication by 2016 possible?

- The only way to negate variable factors is to ensure all housing is energy-efficient.
- It is possible to influence other factors, but housing is controllable.
- Benefit/grant take-up is important. This is achievable through education, advice and raising awareness.
- There are different problems within Bedfordshire, e.g. rural housing often has no cavity walls.
- Increased National Government funding would help.

Q Although the short term solution seems to be increased awareness/ education and grants take-up, the long term solution appears to be improvement of property. Is there any way of logging which properties have been insulated?

- Stock Conditions Surveys are only carried out every 5 years

- Standards of insulation change regularly, therefore needs to be "topped up" regularly. Statistics are required by Government, but these detail how many properties have been insulated, not which houses. It is therefore difficult to be specific.
- Housing Association landlords are generally better at meeting energy efficiency standards than private landlords.

Q Is there any value in the suggestion that it may be possible to place uninsulated households in a higher council tax bracket, with a possible tie-in to the 'carbon tax'?

- The use of the tax system in this instance may prove counter-productive.
- Energy Efficiency Rating will be introduced in 2007 for selling and renting properties.
- Educating people as to how to use heating systems, e.g. reducing energy consumption using the thermostat, is important.

Q How can the voluntary sector help?

- Grazina is working with Mid Beds. Village Care Scheme (Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charities) and uses voluntary groups for the elderly. Abigail is also working with the Village Care Schemes. Both try to link up with voluntary groups and events as a means of disseminating information to vulnerable groups and individuals.
- Mark will liaise with Grazina, Nick and Abigail to look into using the CVS newsletters.
- Len confirmed that the proposed Benefits Take-up Campaign in Bedford could include affordable warmth grants take-up.

4.6 Other Comments:

- Bedford Borough is in the process of setting up an affordable warmth grant. They also use Beds. & Herts. EEAC as their main contact. The EEAC keep track of all funding/grants available at any given time.
- MBDC operates a system of top-ups for Warm Front grants.
- Countywide Partnership arrangements - a key element will be consultation with older people - a question could be asked regarding fuel poverty.
- Energy advice was not part of the plans for the Advice Plus bid being made by local advice agencies.
- A countywide person dedicated to affordable warmth / home improvement grants would be of use.

5. Development of a Credit Union in Mid Bedfordshire

5.1 The Focus Group met on 12th September (notes from this meeting will be made available), though this was not a very productive meeting.

Although volunteers are being recruited (6 or 7 from the Biggleswade and Sandy area) there is still a great deal of groundwork to be done. A 'pre-feasibility' study needs to be carried out as to whether to start from scratch or to extend the existing common bond of, e.g. Bedford Credit Union. Peter Doyle informed the Group that there had been board-level

discussions as to the possibility of extending BCU's Bond, but they are waiting for more information. In addition, there may be a problem with the FSA as BCU extended its Bond last year.

Steve Hill (Aragon Housing) will work with Jill Dickinson (Mid Beds. District Council) to push this matter forward.

SH

It was agreed that the next Credit Union meeting should be held on 5th October 2006.

6. Links with local LSPs / LAA

- 6.1 At the last meeting, it was suggested that the Group look at the anti-poverty outcomes from the LAA and LSPs using the indicator that all outcomes should **"improve the economic and social well-being of deprived communities"**.
- 6.2 Bedford Partnership Board's "Including Everyone" chapter of their Community Plan contains a Social Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan. Len distributed copies. Len expressed the opinion that it is probably not possible to measure these actions against the suggested indicator. Len also expressed his disappointment at the delays in implementing parts of the Action Plan.
- 6.3 Mid Beds. LSP's Tackling Disadvantage Strategy is where anti-poverty outcomes would be. Mark Smith is no longer a member of Mid Beds. LSP although he can continue to update the Group, with Jill Dickinson, as to how well their Strategy is addressing poverty using whatever indicators are appropriate.
- 6.4 At present, there is no countywide anti-poverty strategy. Sarah suggested that it may be possible to invite Sue Nelson (Beds. County Council Head of Policy) to the next Group meeting.
- 6.5 It was stressed that the role of the TPT Group is not to scrutinise LSPs/ LAA, but to monitor and highlight successes and failures on poverty issues, and to offer support.

SH

7. Activity Update / Poverty News

- 7.1 Activity update details will appear in the next edition of **Poverty News** which will be distributed in October. Please forward any items for inclusion to Sue (sue.walmsley@infotrain.co.uk) by early October.
- 7.2 **CVS Mid & North Beds.** - Voluntary Works website due to go live soon.
- 7.3 **Bedford Community Rights Centre** has volunteer translators for many Eastern European languages.

8. Any Other Business

- 8.1 None

9. Next Meeting

Monday 4th December at 10.00 am at County Hall, Bedford.

Documents discussed at this meeting can be found at www.tacklingpoverty-beds.org.uk

Tackling Poverty together Group meetings are facilitated by Infotrain (Contact: Sue Walmsley on 01234 360607)
Please contact Sue for further information or copies of any documents discussed at the meeting