



Tackling Poverty Together

in Bedfordshire

www.tacklingpoverty-beds.org.uk

MINUTES OF TPT GROUP MEETING

County Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford
11th November 2008

Present:

Sarah Hughes (Chair)	Bedfordshire County Council – Economic Growth
Lindsay Mitton	Bedfordshire County Council - Economic Growth
Mark Smith	CVS Mid & North Bedfordshire
Peter Doyle	Bedford Credit Union
Anne Slade	Bedford Credit Union
Jackie Hamilton	Mid Beds CAB
Stephanie Randolph	Mature Citizens' Action Group (Bedford & District)
Nicky Dahl	BPHA
Anona Hoyle	Bedford Borough Council
Tanya Richardson	Website Consultant
Glenis Orkisz	Bedford Race Equality Council
Len Simkins	Infotrain
Susannah Rastall	Infotrain

1. Apologies

Helen Nottingham	Voluntary and Community Action South Beds
Jacqui Blake	Job Centre Plus
Pat Horn	Mature Citizens' Action Group (Bedford & District)

Action

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting (8th July) were accepted as an accurate record

2.2 Matters arising:

The situation at the Bedford CAB is now more positive – the national CAB is overseeing the management of the bureau and a new Manager has just been appointed. The LSC contract for debt advice has been reinstated and a specialist housing advice service will also be available from this week.

3. Action Plan 2008/2009

Len distributed copies of the updated action plan for discussion:

3.1 Group Meetings

There will be one more TPT meeting under the current contract. As it is unclear how the TPT Group will operate when the 2 new unitary authorities take over in April, this will need to be reviewed at the next meeting.

3.2 Newsletter

Two more editions of *Poverty News* will be produced this financial year – one in January and one for early April.

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The new format of the newsletter was well received. A suggestion was made to include a 'contents' list but it was decided that as the newsletter was easy to read, and only 4 pages long, this was not needed as the space could be better used.

Lindsay reconfirmed that she no longer required paper copies.

Any items for inclusion in the next edition should be sent to Susannah at susannah.rastall@infotrain.co.uk by 20th December.

All

3.3 TPT Website

The revamped website has been launched and the site is now clearer and more attractive. Tanya confirmed that there have been 100 visitors to the site up to the end of October.

The bookings page worked well for the recent Child Poverty Event with 29 bookings received via the website.

Future and past events are now on separate pages. Future events is a key page and Tanya requested a brief outline of any future event relevant to the TPT, with dates, be sent to her for updating the website.

In order to continue to draw people to the website – Tanya requested that any useful links, including a brief summary of the link, be forwarded to her.

ALL

Lindsay will continue to liaise with Tanya on further development of the Group's website.

LM

3.4 Links with LAA thematic groups and Countywide Partnership

Links with LAA groups are proving successful and the TPT is becoming more well-known. These groups include "Including Everyone Group", Social Cohesion" as well as the "Countywide Partnership".

Sarah confirmed that her involvement with NI 152 which is around worklessness also links in with NI 116 the indicator on tackling child poverty which is now part of Bedfordshire's new Local Area Agreement. Sarah to send to LS the NI 152 Delivery Plan. This can then be shared with the Group.

3.5 Benefits Take-up Campaign

The recent Advice Fair was very successful – Anona to send a summary report to LS for inclusion on the website and Poverty News.

AH

3.6 Annual Review

The annual review of the TPT Group's work will take place at the next meeting in March. Len confirmed that the Group is on schedule with the action points for this year.

4. Plans for 2009/10

4.1 Future funding of the TPT Group

No agreement has been reached regarding funding for the TPT Group as yet. This currently comes out of the Economic Growth funding and Sarah has reported on the added value, at low cost, of the Group to the new emerging local authorities. Her report has been formally accepted and she will send the executive summary to Len for Poverty News.

SH

She will also send it to Mark so that he can present this to Mid Beds District Council.

SH

Sarah also confirmed that the County Council will be closing down budgets by Christmas for the handover to the new authorities.

Central Beds has confirmed they will be honouring budgets for voluntary organisations in the short term and will then review them over the next year. Bedford has not confirmed any budgets as yet.

Tanya pointed out that a decision needs to be made on certain funding commitments shortly – for instance hosting for the website will be due for renewal in March.

4.2 Future plans of the TPT Group

No agreement has been made on whether the TPT Group should continue countywide or whether there should be one group per authority. Len suggested a proposal whereby the group would be Countywide but hosted by one authority.

Sarah to reflect and send email to Len by the end of the week on how the TPT should position themselves over the transition to the new authorities. She will also communicate the value of the commitments the TPT currently has and will find out about any proposed arrangements for funding to voluntary groups that have commitments to make.

SH

5. Credit Union in Mid Bedfordshire

5.1 Update and future plans – Anne Slade (Mid Beds Development Worker)

Anne introduced herself, informing the group of her past work experience at Stevenage Credit Union.

Anne also thanked the Group for the work that went into the feasibility study as this has helped her with her current work in Mid Beds. She then gave a summary of the work that is going ahead with the expansion of the Bedford Credit Union into Mid Beds. AS to email a copy of this summary to LS.

AS

Currently they have 6 volunteers for Mid Beds – 3 from the Bedford Credit Union and 3 new volunteers. A new collection point has been set up in Shefford. Research is continuing into operational issues and promotional material.

The aim is to approach local employers to reach a wider audience and offer payroll facilities. And to encourage young people and junior savers to join the Credit Union through schools.

There are many challenges to overcome such as:

- Rural poverty
- Transport
- Operational issues
- Loan sharks (Provident Mutual charge very high interest rates for loans)
- Debt

The Credit Union also aims to work on preventative measures in partnership with other agencies and this is key to future work in Mid Beds along with funding from local sponsors.

Comments and questions were then made by the Group on Anne's presentation:

- The Bedford Credit Union website seems out-of-date – Peter Doyle explained that the site is currently not active and being reviewed. If the problem is a hosting issue Tanya confirmed that Create could offer hosting at £30 a year. Details of the BCU can also be put on the TPT website. This was agreed.
- There is a need to recruit more volunteers and members – Aragon Housing have publicised the benefits of the Credit Union and 5 new members were recruited. Lindsay suggested new volunteers can be approached via BRCC and the Volunteer Bureau. More publicity can be achieved through the Children's Centres at their quarterly centre network meetings.
- Nicky also pointed out that in 2010 all Post Office accounts will be closed which means limited alternatives for vulnerable groups and suggested the possible link-up with post office outreach. The Credit Union could fill this gap by offering basic bank accounts. AS to email SH regarding this possibility.

AS

6. Migrant Workers

The conclusions and recommendations from the Migrant Workers Report were distributed to those present.

Lindsay confirmed that a Needs Assessment has been completed and recommendations will be assessed and fed back to the group. LM will send this to Anne with demographics of migrant workers for information. At present the TPT Group has no further action to take.

LM

MAF (Multi Agency Forum for asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers) currently has the same issues as the TPT Group with regards to future arrangements and its position within the two new authorities. An action plan is required and Lindsay will update the TPT Group of its future. Sarah is now Chair of MAF.

LM

7. Child Poverty Indicator

7.1 Child Poverty Event/Network

It was generally agreed that the inclusion of the child poverty indicator in the Local Area Agreement was a direct consequence of the TPT Child Poverty Seminar in December 2007 and was a significant achievement.

Len reported that the launch of the Bedfordshire Child Poverty Network on Friday 7th November was very successful.

The draft delivery plan of the child poverty indicator (NI 116) was presented to the Group.

Sarah reconfirmed the links between NI 152 and NI 116. Action on one indicator has a direct impact on another. Sarah is also involved in the development of the Economic Participation plan in Central Beds and links have been highlighted to NI 116. SH to send details.

8. Impact of Economic Crisis on Frontline Advice Agencies

As part of The County Council's initiative to better support local business during the economic downturn all invoices are to be paid at 20 days rather than 30 days.

To better understand the increased demands on frontline advice agencies Sarah asked the agencies present to forward their experience of any increased workload and what they would like in terms of extra short term funding that would help.

8.1 BPHA

Nicky confirmed that they had taken on 2 new money advisors; however there had been a 20% increase in demand for advice. Extra admin help would ease this burden.

8.2 Citizens Advice Bureaux

Jackie confirmed that there had been more enquiries in South Beds (Dunstable and Leighton Linslade CABx) regarding debt issues. More homeowners were coming in with money difficulties, increased fuel costs were also contributing to the debt problems.

At Mid Beds CAB, due to the increase in advice enquiries, there was a lack of space to interview people. Extra space for a interview room would be useful.

Jackie Hamilton informed the group that there was a need to train up more frontline advice workers - all debt advisors are volunteers and more paid staff are needed.

8.3 Bedford Credit Union

Peter confirmed that Liz Stevens has resigned her position as Development Worker. In order to recruit another a budget of £1500 to £2000 is required to advertise and interview for the post.

8.4 Bedfordshire Advice Forum

Len suggested that funding for training for voluntary sector staff / volunteers on money advice and other related issues would be of great benefit.

Sarah requested that proposals for extra funding be sent to her.

ALL

9. Activity Update / Poverty News

The next edition of **Poverty News** will be distributed in January 2008. Please send any items for inclusion to Susannah (susannah.rastall@infotrain.co.uk) by the December 20th.

ALL

There will be one further newsletter in March under the current contract.

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10. Any Other Business

10.1 **BRASS** – the move to Tavistock Street has been extremely successful.

10.2 **Bedford Volunteer Bureau** - Gerry Sansom is retiring and Will Sparrow is taking over.

10.3 **“Keep Well, Keep Warm”** – Anona confirmed that there will be a market stall in Bedford on the 10th December and leaflets at the Town Hall as part of the “Keep Well, Keep Warm” campaign.

10.4 **Financial Capability Training** – this will take place at the Mid Beds District County Offices on the 18th November and 4th December. SH hopes to attend in December.

10.5 **Housing Advice** – Stephanie pointed out that as a housing advisor she has come across clients that have had to spend their housing allowance on fuel costs and are then having problems paying rent. As these are tenants of private landlords housing allowance is no longer paid direct to landlords. Anona will also try and find out the number of landlords requesting that benefit be paid direct to them for tenants that have defaulted on rent payments.

AH

11. Next Meeting

The date of the next TPT Group meeting will be Tuesday 3rd March 2009. The meeting will be held at 10.00am 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: Susannah Rastall on 01234 360607) Please contact Susannah for further information or copies of any documents discussed at the meeting.