



Tackling Poverty Together

in Bedfordshire

www.tacklingpoverty-beds.org.uk

TPT GROUP - MINUTES OF MEETING

County Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford

3rd March 2009

Present:

Len Simkins
Lindsay Mitton
Mark Smith
Peter Doyle
Nicky Dahl
Anona Hoyle
Tanya Richardson
Jackie Hamilton
Glenis Orkisz
Susannah Rastall

Infotrain (Acting Chair)
Bedfordshire County Council - Economic Growth
CVS Mid & North Bedfordshire
Bedford Credit Union
BPHA
Bedford Borough Council
Website Consultant
Mid Beds CAB
Bedford Race Equality Council
Infotrain

	Topic	Subject	Action
1	Apologies	Sarah Hughes Jacqui Blake Steve Hill Jo Greene James Hurd Ann Slade	Beds County Council – Economic Growth Jobcentre Plus Aragon Housing Association Beds CPAG Bedford Borough Council Bedford Credit Union
2	Minutes and Matters Arising		
2.1	Previous minutes	The minutes of the previous meeting (11 th November 2008) were accepted as an accurate record	
2.2	Matters arising	Item 2.2 - Len reported that Lorraine Gunther is the new Manager at Bedford CAB and services have much improved. The bureau is now moving forward again.	
3	Action Plan 2008/2009	An updated Action Plan for 2008/09 was distributed to the Group for the annual review of TPT activities.	
3.1	Group Meetings	3 meetings were held in 2008/09 – each with a different theme – the theme of this meeting being the annual review. 3 meetings a year was considered appropriate given the busy schedules of those that attend.	
3.2	Newsletter	The final newsletter for this year will come out at the beginning of April. It was agreed that 4 times a year is the right frequency. The design and layout has been improved and overall the newsletter is very well received.	Infotrain
3.3	Website	The feedback on the new design of the website has been very good. There are a few broken links that Mark will go through with Tanya so that these can be rectified.	MS / TR
	<i>Child Poverty Page</i>	There is a new page dedicated to child poverty on the website. Len has provided the relevant information for this page and will update it on a regular basis. The new Child Poverty Network will use this page as an information tool.	
	<i>No. of visitors</i>	The target of 200 visits per page has not yet been met in 2008/09 – the number of visitors to the site is 150. The events page is the most popular page after the home page and the number of visitors increases whenever the site is used to book places for an event or seminar.	

Members can advertise events on this page. However, these would need to be poverty related events only.

Reporting on visitors will be easier in 2009/10 as the new site will be more established and the pages will have been consistent throughout the year. Overall the website works well and is building up resources and links.

Nicky asked what was being done to increase awareness of the website. At present this is being done in the following ways:

- use of bookings for events/seminars
- web address is in the TPT logo
- publicity in *Poverty News*
- Child Poverty Network will use website
- Links to associated groups/agencies

It was agreed that it is important to have links to and from relevant agencies/organisations as this will increase traffic to the site.

3.4 Projects

Links with thematic groups

Links have been developed with different thematic groups, LSPs and the Countywide Partnership - with the TPT having an input to these groups.

Benefits For All

A report, from James Hurd, on the local benefits take-up campaign was distributed to the Group by Anona. This was very positive. The most successful parts of the Campaign were the Advice Fairs that took place in 2007 and 2008.

Anona reported that Bedford has been more successful than some other areas in ensuring that older people are getting the benefits they are entitled to.

It is unknown whether there will be any future benefit advice campaigns or outreach work. Anona will find out if there are future plans by the Bedford Borough to do this.

AH

It was generally agreed by the Group that there is a significant gap in benefits advice and help for people in the rural areas. Mid Beds CAB confirmed that they are hoping the new unitary authority in Central Beds will recognise this is an issue.

It was suggested that this issue be raised at the new thematic groups – Social Inclusion, Community Cohesion and Culture Thematic Partnership (Bedford) and Stronger Communities (Central Beds)

LS / SH

Anona pointed out that it may be possible to work with the Police to inform people in rural communities about benefits as a partner in their work on community safety.

Mid Beds Credit Union

Peter reported that the new collection point at Shefford Baptist Church in Mid Beds is beginning to attract new customers. The training of volunteers is going ahead well and new Directors have been recruited – 4 of whom are from Mid Beds.

The number of new members is below target but the launch of the Credit Union in Mid Beds was a few months later than planned.

Paypoint - Bedford Credit Union has had a recent meeting with the Cooperative Bank regarding Paypoint facilities – unfortunately this will be very expensive at £0.50 a transaction which is not an option at present.

BCU has been publicising their services in local newsletters and at local fetes. The BCU website has been redone and is now up and running: www.bedfordcreditunion.org.uk .

Peter reported that, surprisingly, there are signs that there has been a reduction in loans take-up due to the recession. In general, credit unions will be affected by the reduction in bank interest rates and for BCU there is also a certain amount of uncertainty on funding due to LGR.

The recent Government initiative to tackle illegal loan sharks is helping to publicise the benefits of credit unions.

Child Poverty Seminar Child Poverty is now part of the Bedfordshire's Local Authority Agreement as a local indicator (NI116). See item 5 below.

Migrant Workers Seminar This TPT seminar raised awareness of the concerns surrounding Migrant Workers. Migrant Workers are now supported by MAF (Multi Agency Forum for asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers) which has an uncertain future due to LGR. It is hoped that there will be countywide coverage and MAF meetings will alternate between Central Beds and Bedford Borough in order to engage South and Mid Beds. An action plan still needs to be agreed.

4 Plans for 2009/10

4.1 Future funding

Lindsay confirmed that there will be continued financial support for the TPT Group by the new unitary authorities. There will probably be a 50/50 split in funding between Central Beds and Bedford Borough – these allocations will be discussed again in March 2009. Representation has not yet been agreed but it is expected that one Council will host the meetings.

Tanya explained that from the 1st April she will need to pay for the TPT website and needs confirmation in writing that her costs will be covered. Lindsay confirmed that everything should be sent out in writing during March.

Mark confirmed that he had been discussing the importance of the TPT Group with Ian Porter and Peter Fraser at Central Beds.

4.2 Future plans

Meetings The Group agreed that it made sense to split meetings between Bedford and Central Beds as long this was practical for all members.

At the next meeting it was agreed to look at issues that the Group needs to get involved in plus discuss ideas for possible future seminars. Future plans will be formalised when the new authorities are in place.

Newsletter To continue 4 times a year

Website To carry on as in 2008/09

5 Local Area Agreement – update on poverty related indicators

5.1 NI 116 – Proportion of children in poverty

Len distributed a report on the new Task Group for Bedfordshire's Child Poverty Network.

The Task Group will be as inclusive as possible and the different sectors involved in child poverty issues have been asked to appoint representatives to sit on the Group. 28 people have requested to join. There are still some gaps and these sectors will be contacted. The Group will be contacting the Learning Skills Council and The Chamber following their decline to join the Task Group.

The formal launch of the Task Group was due to take place on the 5th February but was cancelled due to the bad weather – this will now take place on the 16th March.

Len distributed a further report on the proposed research into Child Poverty in Bedfordshire – this also included a summary of the delivery plan for 2008/09.

It is expected that further research will need to be done next year – this will involve research into what poverty actually means for families in Bedfordshire and if any of the initiatives undertaken to help children in poverty make a real difference to people's lives.

One challenge for the Task Group will be whether strategies are agreed on a countywide basis or whether there will be different strategies for the two unitary councils.

It was reported that there is a government consultation paper into the possibility of a statutory requirement by local authorities to tackle and report on child poverty issues

5.2 NI 152 – Working age people on out of work benefits

Minutes of the NI 152 Steering Group were distributed to those present. It is proposed that NI 152 will remain as a countywide initiative. The Steering Group are currently renegotiating the NI 152 target as this is no longer realistic due to the impact of the economic downturn.

The Economic Participation Plan is being consulted upon – this covers funding for skills, employment and enterprise.

6 Economic Crisis – funding for frontline advice agencies

Extra funding by the County Council has been given to selected Bedfordshire advice agencies to help with increased workloads due to the economic crisis. Full details of the funding are listed on the back page of *Poverty News*.

Those agencies at the meeting reported on progress.

Mid Beds CAB – Financial capability training has been started and has now been taken up by all CABs in Bedfordshire.

Bedford Credit Union – a new publicity campaign focussed on Mid Beds has been started and 2 new posts for a BCU development officer and a school development officer have been advertised. There were over 100 applications.

BREC – they have been able to increase the hours of 1 project worker who is trained to give advice. BREC also have more capacity to link with other organisations.

BAF – a short training programme on claiming benefits, redundancy rights and dealing with debt is currently being organised.

Lindsay distributed a presentation giving a summary of the support the Economic Growth Team have given to local businesses and frontline advice services to help support individuals through the Credit Crunch.

It was not known if the two new Councils will be offering similar support in the future. Len confirmed that BAF were proposing to the two new councils that they develop an '**advice strategy**'. This could be used as a key tool in tackling poverty.

7 Any Other Business

- (i) **Economic Participation Plan** – Lindsay confirmed that regional funding will not be countywide but will go to the two individual unitary councils.
- (ii) Anona informed the group that there had been 41 successful requests to pay **Local Housing Allowance** to private landlords – this follows a concern raised at the last meeting by Stephanie Randolph in her role as housing advisor.
- (iii) **BPHA** – Nicky advised the Group that with extra funding from the ESF and Beds County Council they will be taking on extra staff and a full-time 'tackling worklessness' officer.
- (iv) Mark confirmed that there will be a **Funding Fair** in June at the Corn Exchange. This will be from 1 – 7 pm.
- (v) **BRASS** are currently interviewing for a new co-ordinator and Mark is designing a website for them.
- (vi) Jackie informed the group that **Beds CABx** have been awarded £20,000 by the Nationwide to enable more recruitment of volunteers. This will mean they can recruit 20 volunteers over the year plus a volunteer coordinator.
- (vii) Jackie also explained that a **Bedfordshire Financial Capability Forum** is being launched.
- (vii) **Bedford Credit Union** – Peter confirmed that Aragon Housing have agreed to pay the joining fee for their tenants in Mid Bedfordshire.
- (ix) **International Women's Day** – Glenis informed the Group that the International Women's Forum has organised an event to celebrate International Women's Day at the Meeting Room in Bedford Library on Saturday 7th March.
- (x) **BRIEF** – Bedfordshire Rights Information Exchange Forum will cease to exist from April – Len felt this should be raised as an issue with the thematic groups as benefits advice is key to tackling poverty.

8 Date of next meeting

Thursday 25th June at 10.00 – venue to be confirmed.

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.