



Hammersmith and Fulham Advice Forum

Minutes

3 March 2016, 2pm – 4pm

Copies and attachments to the minutes are held on the Advice Station website at:
<http://www.advicestation.org.uk/info/reports-resources/advice-forum/afm-03032016>

Venue: Hammersmith Town Hall, London W6 9JU

Attendees:

Barbara Drozdowicz	EEAC (Eastern Europe Advice Centre)
Boguslaw Szewczyk	Glass Door
Carly Thomas	Shelter
Celia Barrett	Hestia
Clarissa Stoneham	HF CAB
Fawad Bhatti	LBHF
Kam Babrah	DWP
Kasia Marszalec	HF CAB (Roof +)
Katherine Green	Crosslight
Keith Mallinson	HF Mind
Liam Hennessy	HF Mind
Malgosia Pakulska	EEAC (Eastern Europe Advice Centre)
Mandy Goodall	HF Law Centre (Minutes)
Mike England	LBHF
Pam Sedgwick	Staying First
Sue James	HF Law Centre (Chair)
Sue Spiller	LBHF
Teresa Itabor	LBHF Housing
Tim Drake	Inside Out
Tom Kenny	Action on Disability
Tracy Schouburgh	LBHF
Zahra Beg	LBHF Housing Options

1. Minutes of the last meeting & matters arising

No comments or amendments to the minutes of the last meeting.

2. Housing Strategy and Options Customer Engagement Project - progress to date

Mike England, Lead Director for Housing, Housing Strategy and Options, LBH&F gave an overview of the Customer Engagement project, the aim of which was to see how LBH&F engaged with its clients and to make improvements to the process where applicable.

An action plan is being worked on and will be presented at this meeting when available.

Key findings / issues / actions include:

- Improve the service at 145 Kings Street
- Location of advice agencies at 145 King Street
- Improve letters to clients – clarity and tone
- Training and development of client facing staff
- Online tracking of applications
- Information flow to third sector organisations (contacts, working, practices etc)

Work will be managed via projects – 37 in total, 16 have been started. Projects vary in size and duration – short, medium and long term. Projects will be circulated in due course.

3. Homelessness Prevention Strategy

Mike England gave an overview of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy. The policy is now available and is held with the minutes on the Advice Station website.

4. Welfare Reform taskforce

The Welfare Reform Taskforce is mentioned in the Homeless Prevention Strategy and members were keen to know what this was and how they could be involved.

Mike England, gave an overview of the Welfare Reform Taskforce (WRT).

The initiative for the WRT came from the Futures Board (meet every 6 weeks to consider the issues and priorities in LBHF) in response to the client journey of many H&F residents who are seen by many agencies, struggle to get timely advice etc.

The WRT wish to develop a more person centred approach and perhaps introduce a guide or mentoring services. Members of the WRT include JCP, H&F Foodbank, H&F CAB.

HFAF attendees thought that the WRT should have wider representation from third sector agencies. Many expressed interest in being part of this. Some of them are carrying out similar work and / or have submitted funding bids along the lines of this work (H&F Mind, H&F Law Centre, AoD).

Mind are currently piloting a Social Prescriptions project – this could be a good one to work with / feed back to the WRT.

5. Housing Benefit update

Paul Rosenberg, Head of Operations, Assessments, H&F Direct, LBH&F, gave an update on housing benefit. Overview with upcoming changes and details of liaison arrangements is held with the minutes on the Advice Station website

Main points:

Approx 5k pieces of outstanding work

Average time to process new claims is 21 days.

DHP budget in 2015/16 = £787k and is likely to be slightly overspent. This has helped 866 households. Benefit cap accounts for 45% of the awards value, spare room subsidy has the greatest number of claims (39%).

DHP budget in 2016 / 2017 will increase to £908k.

Benefit cap will fall in London to £23,000 (£15,410 for single adults) from October 2016.

Housing Benefit has a reduced backdating period of 1 month from April 2016 (previously 6 months)

Other Welfare Reform issues:

Universal Credit digital roll out – Hammersmith goes live at the end of June 2016, Shepherds Bush and Fulham from Dec 2016. The service has gone live in Hounslow.
Attendees had concerns about getting this right for H&F residents.

Attendees requested DWP meetings with specialists from Belfast and Glasgow. **MG to progress with DWP.**

6. Review of past year - including Evaluation of Advice Conference

Mandy Goodall gave a presentation of the H&F Advice Conference held on 21 January 2016.
Presentation is held with the minutes on the Advice Station website.

The conference was very well attended with positive feedback.
140 people attended the conference. We received 43 completed Evaluation forms.

The event overall scored 8.5 / 10. More than 95% of attendees agreed that the conference was a good use of their time and that they would attend an H&F Advice Conference next year.

March 2017 agreed as the month for the next conference.

7. The year ahead – including working sub groups

3 groups agreed:

Welfare Reform
Housing and Homelessness
Advice Strategy

MG to sort dates and arrange meetings

8. Dates of next meetings

27 April 2016
22 June 2016

All Advice Forum meetings are held between 2pm and 4pm at H&F Town Hall.