

BRISTOL HOMELESS FORUM

Proposals for Change

The Bristol Homeless Forum (BHF) has developed from the BCAN (Bristol Christian Action Network) Homeless Forum which started in September 2001 to provide support, encouragement and resources to a wide range of groups working with homeless people in and around Bristol.

The BCAN Homeless Forum website still exists and is maintained by Paul Hazelden

http://www.bcan.org.uk/l1_homeless.html

The change of name and a revamped web site developed to reflect the increased connection with an even broader range of groups, statutory and voluntary, as a result of our key involvement in running the annual Sleepout and, connected with that, Homelessness Awareness Week.

The BHF website and twitter account have been established to provide a single social media presence to raise awareness around these events and the website states that

“The forum is open to any individual or organisation working with homeless people and homelessness issues in Bristol.”

<http://bristolhf.org.uk/>

BHF is currently running in the same way as it has for many years

- A bi-monthly meeting to share information between organisations and discuss topics of mutual interest. These are regularly attended by a few organisations (CCM, Julian Trust, Caring in Bristol, Churches together in Clifton & Redland, Bristol Soup Run Trust) and only occasionally by others such as One25. There have also been visits to these meetings by St Mungo's and BCC when it has been useful to discuss current events.
- Minutes of these meetings, including information shares, are published on the BCAN website and notifications can be sent to all those signed up to an email distribution list.

In addition to the above we have also maintained separate contact with other organisations through

- The Sleepout registration process. This includes larger organisations such as The Big Issue, Shelter, Emmaus as well as many smaller, mostly faith based, groups who support charities such as CCM.
- Homeless Awareness Week. This has involved a much larger email distribution list involving BCC, Citizens Advice, 1625ip, Second Step as well as some individuals such as Gavyn Emery (Keep Bristol Warm). There have been planning meetings to plan and coordinate event activities held quite separately from the bi-monthly BHF meetings.

We are at a point of potential change as an organisation/network where we can choose to remain a “support and encouragement” to smaller voluntary sector groups or to become a forum which encourages active participation from larger organisations as well.

This proposal sets out how we might approach the change to the latter option.

There are three main areas of change proposed

A) WEB & SOCIAL MEDIA

We should build on the potential for the website to be the "go to" reference point for homelessness issues in Bristol and attract forum members & participants from as wide a range as possible. To do this we will need to

- add forum capacity to the website
- Allow sign up to email lists from the website via MailChimp
- Use Twitter proactively to draw attention to the website
- Consider Facebook for events publicity
- Share responsibility for web management & Social Media
- Establish newsletter/briefing sheets to draw members attention to new web information

B) MEETINGS

A Web/Social Media approach to sharing information will not need meetings of the sort we currently have but there will still be a need for face to face meetings for many to feel part of a live network.

The proposal is that we have 3 kinds of meeting

1. Core/planning group meetings; these may need to be monthly in the first instance to establish the new approach, but are unlikely to be needed more than every 6-8 weeks after a while. Consideration needs to be given to whether these are closed meetings or publicised & open to wider attendance.
2. Network meetings. We could consider a programme of quarterly meetings with a focus or theme & possibly guest speakers. These should always contain an opportunity for networking and information sharing but should attempt to attract wide participation. Where other organisations are willing, they can arrange events on behalf of the forum. Caring in Bristol have run events of this sort in the past, for example. These may be events that participants are asked to contribute to financially if they become costly to arrange.
3. Event planning meetings. Some events/activities such as the Sleepout or Homelessness Awareness Week will need planning meetings for those involved in the arrangements.

C) STRUCTURE & MEMBERSHIP

There could be a core team responsible for planning and coordination of BHF activities.

Initially this can comprise 'interested & willing parties' from the regular attendees at the bi-monthly meetings. In the future we need to devise a process for ensuring this team is sustainable and has the confidence of all members.

Membership can, as now, be by sign-up to an email distribution but we will want to move to MailChimp to enable easy maintenance of the membership list and opportunities to categorise membership by interest area and possibly function (eg forum moderators).

BHF model - detailed proposal

BHF will require a simple constitution and terms of reference. We have a volunteer who can draft this document.

BHF will require a Core Management Team of 3 to 7 people, covering the following roles.

Chair	Main signatory, strategic director, spokesperson where appropriate, casting vote
Secretary	Governance, membership records, organisation of core team meetings, minute taker
Treasurer	Operation of bank account, financial record-keeping (if applicable)
Communications	Website, social media, public statements, central receipt of enquiries
Event planning	Initiating, organising and facilitating networking and special events

BHF requires volunteers to fill these roles, each of which may be taken on by one individual or shared. Additional members can be co-opted to assist with specific projects e.g. organising a shared event with their own organisation. This is intended to strengthen the skills base of the Core Team when needed and ensure that no individual has an unmanageable workload. Larger events such as Homelessness Awareness Week may require the attention of the whole of the Core Team. Routine management meetings will be held regularly with additional meetings as required to plan specific events. Where possible, communication will be carried out between meetings by phone or email to facilitate faster decision making.

The initial term in each role will be two years with the ability to roll forward twice in the same or another role, meaning no individual serves more than six consecutive years in the Core Team in any role. This will create a degree of stability with enough flexibility for new people to come forward as the forum, its focus and its membership develops over time. After the initial two year terms, subsequent appointments to the Core Team will be nominated and voted for by the forum members.

Day to day decision-making will be undertaken by the Core Team taking due account of the views of the wider membership which will be obtained formally when required. Changes to the constitution and terms of reference will be voted on by the members.

BHF will offer both individual and corporate categories of membership. This will avoid membership being restricted in numbers because particular charities or organisations are unable to send an official representative.

Individual members will be able to:

- gain support from quarterly networking meetings without the requirement to act as an official representative of their organisation;
- join the forum even if their charity or organisation does not wish to;
- join the forum even if they are not affiliated to any specific organisation;

Individual members will not be asked to adopt shared policies and their names will only be publicised with their consent. They may be invited to speak at networking meetings on the premise that they do so as individuals and can demonstrate appropriate subject matter and/or relevant knowledge and skills.

Corporate members will benefit from a shared presence on the BHF website, and will be regularly invited to partner at events and speak at networking meetings. Corporate members who send more than one individual to forum meetings will be asked to nominate a main point of contact.

Membership of the forum will be free. There is no requirement to attend a minimum number of meetings, though it should be recognised that the more views the forum can garner on a regular basis, the more effective it will be in assisting the homeless sector in our City. There is no financial obligation though voluntary donations may be sought on occasion to fund specific initiatives or events.

By joining the Forum and possibly also the Core Team, we hope that members will be able to benefit from the sharing of mutual support, information, expertise, volunteers, training opportunities, networking meetings and public events, and thus be able to deliver a stronger message with a louder voice when advocating for the homeless community.