

Present: Alison Champken-Woods, Tricia Hook, Annie Jenkins, Hannah Kape, Claire Keogh, Andy McCulloch, Alison Orr, Rachel Poole, Marie Scott, Phil Stratton, Ewan Shinton, Ruth Taylor, Ian Brooker, Rebecca Vaughan, Cassie Pinnells, Belinda Lee

Apologies:

Welcome by Phil Stratton

Phil welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Communities of Practice for South Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire – Alison Champken-Woods

Last year, there was a meeting in Benson, which brought together a number of organisations and charities. They discovered that they have the same problems. Similar meetings have also started in Buckinghamshire. Being on the border, south of the community, it would be more sensible if organisations worked across boundaries, rather than go to Didcot. Alison wondered if something similar could be done in Thame to link all organisations together – linking Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Alison suggested it would be beneficial for all to look at BOB and said she would send through links: [Member Survey](#). Even though there are sub-groups, they're only talking at a high level with directors, and therefore, don't know what is happening in the community.

In her last report, it showed that voluntary organisations in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West are worth £2.1 billion. The disparity between counties was also noted – the example given that there are issues with getting Blue Badges – in Oxfordshire you can wait up to six months to get a badge. In Buckinghamshire, you don't have to wait very long. Alison had an opportunity to talk with the chair of Oxfordshire County Council and raised the issue of Blue Badges and was told that it was down to the government. Alison has also mentioned to BOB that unless there is fundamental change, there are going to be a significant number of organisations and charities that will fold in the next two to three years because of funding.

Citizens Advice Activities – Tricia Hook

Tricia reported that they are revising their opening hours. As of Monday 10th June, they will open for drop-ins three days a week – Monday, Tuesday and Thursday - and that they are standardising hours from 9.30am – 1.30pm on all three days. They will also be increasing the number of booked appointments to help smooth things out. They will be making it clear to clients that they can't expect their whole problem to be solved in a drop-in because they don't have the capacity. But they will invite them back with an appointment within a couple of weeks to take their issues forward.

Also mentioned that some of TAG's residents/clients might soon receive letters about "managed migration", which is the government's initiative to move everybody currently on legacy benefits over to Universal Credit. They are anticipating a lot of issues because the information received so far suggests that somebody moving from legacy benefits to Universal Credit will be entitled to a transitional payment if they are worse off. However, the DWP are so far making quite a number of mistakes with those calculations and when the mistakes come to light, they are recovering the money that's been overpaid, which is traumatic for those impacted. Tricia advised that the fixed payments will reduce as the person's benefit increases. For example, people moving house would need to be careful that they transition at the right time. Citizens Advice is training individual volunteers to help in that specific area.

Tricia also mentioned that they are facing a bit of a crisis at Citizen's Advice inasmuch as there are plans afoot for a massive refurbishment of the toilet block next to the advice bureau. They are expecting the work to last at least ten weeks, during which time they don't think they will be able to operate from the building. They need three private interview rooms, two small rooms for people taking phone calls, and a larger space for people writing-up notes etc. every Mon, Tues & Thurs. They will be meeting on the 17th to discuss.

Thame Youth Work Plans Update – Hannah Kape

Hannah advised that they run a Youth Café at Christchurch every Wednesday during term time for years seven to nine and Youth Zone at Monkey Puzzle on alternate Thursdays for ten- to thirteen-year-olds. They include mentoring, which they have been doing for a while and plan to continue. Since the group last met, they have had a number of holiday activities, including an activity morning with Lucy Electric where they did lots of robotics. They had a movie night. They've been running a book club, which only has low numbers but that is what they want as the library is small. Last week they had another book club as well as laser tag. They have another laser tag coming up over summer for International Youth Day on the 12th August. They are planning more book clubs and movie nights, support game sessions, cooking sessions, and depending on weather, they are trying for some photography sessions. SODC might do Summer Escape, although haven't heard from them. They don't charge anything. All that they ask for is a consent form, which is available on their website. They have to work within their means as they don't have a building. They rely on volunteers. Have had a lot of positive feedback from parents this year.

Debit Centre – Ruth Taylor

Advised that the money coaching course mentioned previously has happened and they had three families through. They would like to run again individually with families, teaching them how to budget. The Debt Centre is quiet at the moment. Happy to help anyone in debt. It's a free service.

Red Kite Family Centre – Marie Scott

Last time mentioned SOHA events which they were able to run for families which were well received – there was baking and arts and crafts. They have more events planned for summer. Good to be out in the community. Got quite a few courses happening soon and into September – school readiness, family courses. They are slightly more financially stable.

Thomley Hall – Ewan Shinton

Ewan reported that they have had their busiest year ever. It shows that there is demand for what they do, which is an ever-increasing demand. They are limited by the numbers they can take. They offer paid-for activities which make up a small part of their income. They have the Accessible Festival coming up on 6th July. On the day, they will be opening an interactive water feature, a spray park, which is currently being built. It is very safe for young people. They will also be opening an outdoor woodland adventure centre. They opened the first stage during half-term. After three days, they had 439,000 social media hits.

Age UK Oxfordshire - Rachel Poole

Rachel mentioned that on 21st May they had a market day. They spoke to lots of people. They are also getting involved with the Oxford Bus Co. who want to have a "chatty bus" initiative end of July/early August (Age UK hop on the bus and chat with people and hand out packs). They will halve the bus price for the day. People from MIND will be on the bus as well. A date is yet to be confirmed, possibly early July or August. The service is open for anyone over 18.

Sharing Life – Phil Stratton

Phil reported that there is continuing demand for the Food Bank. Very grateful for the amount of support they are receiving this year. The Taste of Thame helped to raise around £500. The Carnival is also supporting Sharing Life, and the Thame Mayor is fundraising for the organisation this year. They spend around £2,000 each month just stocking food in addition to what they get from the supermarkets.

AOB

Phil put to the group if the 8th October would work for the next meeting as the hall is unavailable on the original scheduled date? The majority agreed that Tuesday 8th October would work.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 8 October 2024 @ 2pm