

Better Start Bradford Partnership Board Minutes
Thursday 21 January 2021
Via Zoom

Meeting Started: 09:30

Meeting Ended: 11:20

Present:

Vipin Joshi	Community Board member (Chair)
Ruth Shaw	Senior Head of Strategy, Change and Delivery, Bradford District and Craven Clinical Commissioning Group – items 1 to 7 only
Sarah Hinton	Board Member, Bradford Trident
Alex Spragg	Programme Director, Better Start Bradford
Gwen Balson	Community Board member
Ishaq Shafiq	Community Board member
Karen Tetley	Community Board member
Ludmila Novosjolova	Community Board member
Samina Begum	Community Board member
Satnam Singh	Community Board member

In Attendance

Phil Hayden	Director of Programmes for Children’s Services Innovation and Improvement, CBMDC (in place of Mark Douglas)
Sara Ahern	Programme Manager, Innovation Hub (in place of Josie Dickerson)
Peter Horner	Voluntary and Community Sector representative (in place of Tracey Hogan)
Gill Thornton	Head of Programme, Better Start Bradford
Gill Hart	Funding Manager, The National Lottery Community Fund
Jill Duffy	Implementation Manager, Better Start Bradford
Liz Pal	Child Health Lead, Better Start Bradford
Heather Fawcett-Jones	Programme Facilitator, Better Start Bradford
Guy Dove	Programme Administrator, Better Start Bradford
Andrea Layzell	Workforce Development Leader, St Edmunds (item 7 only)
Robin Naylor	Chair of Governors, St Edmunds (item 7 only)

Apologies for Absence:

Mark Douglas Tracey Hogan Sarah Muckle Anne-Marie Merifield

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Vipin welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 10 December 2020

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising actions table

Sara confirmed the Innovation Hub presentation is ready to go to the Partnership Board.

Action: Sara will email the Innovation Hub presentation to the Partnership Board.

Alex has a call this afternoon with the programme lead for the IT distribution to vulnerable families workstream. There was a Children's Systems Board update on the DfE funding this week (although the focus was on school age children), and 80 per cent of devices have been distributed and their usage is being tracked. Scoping provision for age 0-5s is a piece of work to be done which Alex has a call about this afternoon. The local authority is also looking at working with voluntary sector organisations and getting corporate donations.

Action: Alex to bring a further update about IT distribution to vulnerable families to the next Partnership Board.

Sarah asked if there will be talk about internet access, because at Shine they are finding that families tend to have plenty of devices but there is a struggle to get on the internet. Alex confirmed that wi-fi and connectivity is part of the discussion and dongles are part of the hardware that has been distributed.

Gill Thornton said internet access has been discussed regularly in the BSB team. We are about to launch another Parents in the Lead round and have been considering IT equipment, but the groups are unconstituted so there would be issues regarding ownership. However, in the Parents in the Lead guidance we have asked bidders to put in the cost for wi-fi and data if needed. Some VCS and private enterprises are recycling IT equipment, and Better Start Bradford donated their old IT equipment to an organisation based at the Mayfield Centre. We could also explore resourcing local Hubs to become places for local people to use IT equipment.

4. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. 'Getting to know you' session

There was no session this month.

6. Cooking for A Better Start – contract review

Jill gave a Powerpoint presentation including the background and context to the project. Its aims are to provide practical cooking sessions and to engage 'new' BSB families not involved in our projects before. The budget is £120k over three years to deliver 12 programmes per year totalling 72 participants per year. We asked HENRY who deliver the project to manualise it and to trial having children attend some of the sessions. The project's contract ends on 31 March 2021.

The Commissioning Advisory Group discussed future options for the project at a meeting on 8 January. Option A is a straight recommission for a further three years. Option B is to recommission with adaptations and there are three variants, all including a virtual offer but with a difference in the staffing structure and the mix between face-to-face and virtual delivery. Option C is to decommission the project.

The Commissioning Advisory Group noted positive feedback about changes in behaviour, that HENRY did develop the course manual we asked them to, and having children present in the sessions was trialled. No face-to-face delivery could take place due to Covid so the project produced and distributed recipe cards via food banks and did online workshops.

The sessions currently have a single co-ordinator but HENRY have asked to have two in any future contract. Delivery with a single co-ordinator has been a challenge so they have also used sessional staff, volunteers and settings staff in nurseries.

Jill proceeded to the Commissioning Advisory Group's conclusions. They noted good engagement of previously not engaged families and good performance. They wanted a flexible virtual offer and felt that delivery with children present is important and should be retained. Any digital resources designed for the next contract should be done so with the child in mind. They also thought that the learning from the current contract is limited, and a future commission should explore if parents are confident in preparing healthy meals.

The Commissioning Advisory Group were divided about their preferred staffing model, between options B1 and B2, and wanted it to be discussed at this meeting. There were concerns about health and safety but usual practice is to have just one facilitator per session. They also queried intellectual property and HENRY confirmed that the materials developed can be used for free by us and other organisations, provided HENRY is credited wherever needed. The Commissioning Advisory Group wished to continue with the contract, with flexibility over a virtual offer, and so discounted Option A which did not have one. They recommended Option B2 (two facilitators) though the Community Board members present favoured Option B1 (one facilitator). Option B2 has a mix of face-to-face and online delivery and involves a budget of £250k over three years and was recommended subject to our discussion and clarity about intellectual property.

Peter asked if the intellectual property covers resources being adapted, because they will date over time. Jill confirmed they can be adapted, provided proper recognition of HENRY is made. Gill Thornton recalled that HENRY won the contract to service design the original course some years ago, and we had an intellectual property dispute with them then but commissioned the work. The project's resources cannot be used for commercial gain. We would expect a digitalised manual should not be changed, but there will be updates needed over time which she thought should not be a problem but she cannot speak for HENRY.

Ludmila asked how the virtual offer would be restricted to the BSB area. Jill said it would technically be available outside of our area, but the project proposes registering families first and these would be identifiable as living in the BSB area.

Phil noted the evaluation report shows that the attendees are confident in cooking skills before going on the course. He said we need a more equal distribution with more 'low confidence' people. Jill replied that this was a good point, and the Innovation Hub measures need more focus on developing healthy eating rather than cooking skills. Most BSB mums have cooking skills but we need a better measure about them making healthy meals. There is work to be done about finding course participants with low confidence.

Sarah asked if food poverty would be looked at, because at Shine they are seeing vast numbers of people in real poverty and they will not eat healthily and may not have the skills. She noted they are doing low-cost healthy food at Shine and mentioned there are a number of pop-up pantries starting in the BSB area next month and cooking skills will be needed. Jill said this was also a good point and confirmed that the project provided recipe cards via food banks and held 'Eating Well for Less' workshops, and we can speak to them about this.

Sara observed that one of the sessions focuses on shopping for healthy eating and could be adapted. She confirmed, in response to a query from Ishaq, that 128 people were put through the programme. Ishaq said there is a need to look at ethnic minority uptake in relation to this project, but Sara clarified that the Reach summary in the Innovation Hub report demonstrates that the recruitment of participants have been representative of the population and the target number of participants had been achieved in year 2. Ishaq agreed the offer should be extended online as there is a need for it. However he thought it is more difficult to learn online and to look at behaviour change. Ishaq also mentioned that other organisations as well as the pop-up pantries are doing similar things such as Wellsprings and suggested a food mapping exercise be done in the BSB area.

Gill Thornton agreed that we need to know where all the provision is and BSB's community engagement team are planning this work. They will identify all the support that is going on and it is a good idea to link it to the project.

Vipin said that at the community prep meeting there was a concern that at the outset of this project there was a desire for a local organisations to deliver it, rather than a national one like HENRY, and this same concern still exists three years on. Salma cannot attend this meeting but gave Primetime as an example of a potential delivery partner and it was suggested BSB do a scoping exercise. Using local organisations would be part of sustainability and would empower the local community.

Gwen asked about the need for face-to-face delivery, given that the pandemic situation is likely to continue for some time. Jill confirmed the options are not fixed and there would be a virtual offer developed and ready to use. The Commissioning Advisory Group had discussed Options B1 and B2. Option B2 would have more capacity with a second co-ordinator. Ruth noted that the statutory partners at that meeting had wanted additional cover but the Community Board members wanted one facilitator and we need to discuss that here. Ishaq said some resilience is needed and the extra facilitator would give flexibility.

Gwen went back to the prep meeting's discussions and asked if a volunteer could be the extra person. Jill confirmed the project already implement this, using volunteers and sessional staff to support delivery and it is anticipated that this would continue but HENRY have identified

further challenges which would benefit from an additional coordinator post. Gill Thornton said that when the contract was first awarded, we asked the provider to use local expertise and to work with local community organisations and we can reiterate that in the new contract. This would get the offer into new places and make it more community focussed.

Phil said that some people have no budget and the project needs capacity to link people in entrenched poverty with food banks and an additional co-ordinator would add capacity to enable this work to be undertaken.

Decision: The Partnership Board decided by a majority to adopt Option B2, to recommission HENRY to deliver Cooking for a Better Start with changes, noting all of the comments above.

7. Independent performance review findings

Andrea introduced herself and Robin and gave apologies from Anne-Marie Merifield who also worked on the review but cannot attend this meeting. The Partnership Board commissioned this review to look at progress and learning to date at the mid-point of the BSB programme. Covid brought challenges to the review process which took longer than intended and had to be adapted due to the pandemic.

Andrea and Robin have been invited to give a summary of the findings and recommendations. She thanked all those who had given interviews for the report. The brief for the report was clear and whilst overtaken by Covid which impacted on the research the report gives a broad assessment of progress at the mid-point of the BSB programme.

Participants were asked about community engagement, the mission statement and work during the lockdown period. Many respondents had a desire to express troubled issues though other issues were to be celebrated. St Edmunds conducted background reading in preparation for their work, such as reading all Partnership Board minutes, and picked out strands to focus on. Interviews were done via Zoom or telephone and Andrea thanked BSB for providing contact details. Over 25 participants were invited, who were a mix of professionals and parents, and professionals were asked to find parents for the review. Some parents were very involved with BSB and others were not directly signposted. St Edmunds interviewed a range of people but due to the pandemic were not able to stop them at school gates etc. as intended, but still feel there is a breadth of views.

One theme that came across was that BSB should 'try to focus on the bottom-up.' The Better Start programme is complex and St Edmunds heard several contradictory statements. Some parents were accessing BSB services but were unaware we are the funder. Communications were a thread and views were expressed about its variety, challenges and some parents do not engage and others do and share information. The vast majority said there is no simple way to reach everyone and that Covid made matters worse.

Within projects there were conflicting views that the significant investment had been disappointing whilst others identified the support that they had benefitted from. Those in strategic roles saw BSB as a valued resource for the District and it was recognised that the profile of the programme increased opportunities to participate in high level discussions and influence decision making. Professionals noted enhanced opportunities for agencies to be invited on to boards and sub-groups, more multi-agency working, and more access to SystmOne. There is more research-informed practice and use of logic models.

For the research aspect, people thought there should be a focus on what works with communities.

Andrea said people were asked what BSB is doing well. Parents are positive about the projects that they access. The staff team was positive and noted the professional development opportunities that were available. BSB staff retention is high which Andrea commented is commendable. Many respondents liked their involvement in research due to its potential to influence the early years and outcomes for families positively.

VCS representatives fed back that the initial project design and commissioning were too protracted. It took two or three years to get some projects delivering in BSB's early days which led to difficulties and frustrations. There were high expectations for local services of the £50m investment which have not been realised.

St Edmunds also asked about engagement and responsiveness and heard that solid relationships are crucial and that in communications, the strengths of the VCS were not fully brought out. Parents in the Lead is regarded as a tangible engagement tool.

It was felt that it is hard for parents to be on the Partnership Board. Members fed back that they were not asked to mentor anybody or given a mentor, and that better inductions are needed.

There was a very diverse response to questions about research. Communications about this were viewed as not always being effective so people are not well-informed. Some projects do not have enough participants for there to be effectiveness evaluations. St Edmunds recommend a regular review of each BSB project including its evaluation model.

Andrea moved on to additionality and with the decline of Sure Start, parents wrongly thought that BSB replaced children's centre services. She said the timing was unfortunate with BSB starting around the same time as cuts in statutory early years services. Infant mental health work was praised, as was the Imagination Library although very few participants went to the storytelling sessions.

One parent who has been in the country for three years was very positive about the effects BSB projects have had on her son. St Edmunds found that some parents were very informed about the BSB offer. Peer support was liked as was Better Place, and HENRY received positive comments and it was felt that BSB's FACE team were working well in communities.

Parents in the Lead was described as beneficial as smaller community groups are able to access funding without the sometimes onerous expectations of the research team. These smaller, seemingly more visible and identifiable BSB projects were mentioned positively by several interviewees.

BSB's role in Adverse Childhood Experiences work, setting up steering groups and sharing the "Resilience" film was not identified in the interviews conducted.

Professionals talked about the positive experiences in their communities and parents discussed the range of interventions, projects and opportunities that they and their friends and neighbours accessed. St Edmunds looked for 'not reached' groups but found no clear cut instances of communities that were never reached. It was felt that it is hard to engage some communities.

Andrea turned to anticipated legacy, volunteering, an understanding of research and evaluation systems and workforce development were given as examples, but there are concerns that there is less evidence of firm legacy at this point in the programme than some individuals hoped for.

Robin wished to thank everyone involved for their time and input. Their findings show how passionate people are about BSB.

Ruth said it was interesting to hear about the report and thanked St Edmunds. There were some positives in the report and some things to reflect on. The Partnership Board will need to see the report and she asked all to take time to read it then come back to a future meeting to discuss it.

Ruth noted the feedback from Partnership Board members and remembered that we did try a mentoring and buddying system which did not really work and we need to look at this again. She said that it is good to hear feedback that the BSB programme is working and messages are being heard.

Andrea confirmed she would be happy to send the report around the Partnership Board then do a full review of it at a later meeting. The responses felt local to BSB for St Edmunds who were not involved in our programme and she felt that honest responses were received.

Phil also thanked St Edmunds for the report and said he was also eager to read it. So far, it reminds him of the national evaluation of Sure Start. He noted the perception that BSB is replacing Sure Start in this area by filling gaps in provision and wondered if this could be drawn out from the report. His team want to design a credible early years offer but there is a gap between what is written and the reality on the ground. Additionality could be filling gaps in universal provision and BSB's engagement work should be part of the universal offer, with more face-to-face delivery and work with community groups. He asked that if there is an evidence base, how to draw it out and wondered how far BSB are filling the holistic needs of parents.

Andrea agreed that some gaps were being filled but this was never BSB's purpose and Phil said it was an unintended consequence. Andrea turned to awareness of families and noted that they tend to find a support network such as a Parent Involvement Worker in a school and if BSB is accessed, the support parents are getting seems to be better. St Edmunds recommend more engagement with community organisations to promote BSB's work. Work with families is best based on a sustained relationship.

Sara said it is clear from the report that there is work for the Innovation Hub to do. They already look at participation, services accessed and system change and could look at the wider system for future evaluations. She confirmed, in response to a query from Andrea, that her team already look at which communities engage in which initiatives. Gill Thornton added that the National Lottery Community Fund require us to keep demographic statistics and we do that.

Gill Thornton remarked that Sure Start was there when BSB started and our purpose is not to replace it, but to add in what works in early child development. The full national Sure Start evaluation happened after two years of our programme and we have picked up the learning.

Ishaq said there were concerns in the report but we should view them as challenges and think how to overcome them. Messages are being received and some projects will not have effectiveness evaluations but this is a 'test and learn' programme. We should put together what we have learned from the project and showcase something to build learning for the future. We all need to take personal responsibility to find solutions and there should be constructive criticism.

Alex said we need to understand the concerns and the context has been provided today and then we will finalise and share the report.

Action: February Partnership Board meeting to discuss St Edmund's recommendations and our own reflections on the independent performance review.

Phil asked for there to be enough time at next month's meeting for a discussion which may shift what happens over the next five years and inform statutory partners. We should add in an evaluation timetable if there is enough evidence for one to take place.

Gwen observed that she also wanted to read the report and noted the Partnership Board have mentioned some of the issues before such as mentoring. Communication of data has come up very often and Gwen is glad it is in the report and said we need a good discussion.

Samina asked how data about ACEs is collected and Alex said outcomes evidence will inform ACEs work which is a different thing, with resilience factors built into families.

Vipin remarked that he is always explaining to statutory partners that we are not there to fill gaps – we are to add value. We are a test-and-learn programme but need to be cost-effective. He thanked Andrea and Robin for their work.

8. Data dashboard

Sara said discussing the data dashboard and how to move it forward should improve transparency and data reporting. She confirmed it will be accessible beyond this group.

Jill explained that masses of data goes into the data dashboard, which is agreed with the other A Better Start sites and it all goes into the national data dashboard. She and Sara will come back to the Partnership Board later with suggestions as to how it could best be presented. Content includes activities, outcomes, reach, services, socio-demographics and workforce.

Activities include the numbers of enrolees, participants and completers. This is broken down into ages, ethnicity, disability, male/female and is reported on quarterly and monthly. For outcomes, there is data about key health indicators for BSB and the district, broken down into ward levels. This data includes maternal wellbeing, weight, breastfeeding, oral health, school readiness and child abuse and neglect. Our outcomes framework is aligned to the other ABS sites.

Reach data is age, ethnicity, male/female and is reported on quarterly and annually. There is also data about services including participation and completion numbers, implementation plans, and a quarterly and annual status update is provided to the National Lottery Community Fund. Socio-demographic data includes numbers of pregnant women, age, ethnicity, males and females. Workforce data includes paid staff and volunteer numbers, full time equivalents, headcounts, new starters and leavers, training events and courses for staff and volunteers.

Jill commented that there is a lot of data there. The next stage is how best to visualise it and understand what the Partnership Board wants to see. Jill and Sara will be providing ideas about this for consultation.

Sara said the visualisation is important and massive spreadsheets should be turned into graphs and charts and made easy to understand. Members may want to see cumulative numbers, or patterns over time, and some examples will be done for feedback.

Phil asked that Jill recirculate the outcomes framework and she agreed to do so.

Action: Jill to recirculate the outcomes framework.

Jill said she and Sara would give an idea of the data now, then think about its presentation. Phil noted that the indicators are of different types and so should not be presented in the same way.

Gwen said she wanted to see ethnicity breakdowns in workforce data and possibly age as well. She asked if poverty was linked to socio-economic status and employment and indicated she would like to see the languages spoken too. Sara replied that these are good points and although the contents of the data dashboard have now been agreed with the NLCF, this data sits outside of it. The Partnership Board should decide what they want to see and the Innovation Hub can consider where to pull data from and add it in to what is presented to the Partnership Board if feasible.

9. Programme monthly report

Gill Thornton noted that lots of work has been going on during lockdown thanks to the BSB team. Winter Wellbeing packs were delivered to families prior to Christmas.

The Better Place project aims to make significant progress in the control area (east of Wakefield Road) this year. The capital projects are already designed but the contractors have experienced delays due to bad weather, Brexit and the lockdown.

There will be another Masterclass on 26 February for all five ABS sites looking at reach and engaging under-served families. Gill Thornton also mentioned BSB's involvement in discussions regarding flexible commissioning for oral health which involves dentists going out into community venues. There have been some struggles with getting NHS England to support this but Judith Cummins MP will support the programme. There will be future updates on this and the programme could be piloted with our age group of children.

BSB's new Urban Ranger (Gale Maunder) started in post on 4 January. She is getting to know our area with two new Groundwork staff.

Gill Thornton moved on to Reducing Inequalities in the City and noted that the financial arrangement for this is not quite concluded yet involving ourselves, the CCG and the Little Minds Matter project.

Bradford Literacy Festival were planning a Story Trail at Bowling Park in March but this is now unlikely to happen then due to the lockdown. Alex observed that there may be a digital version instead.

Gill Thornton proceeded to the communication update which includes a number of new blogs, she highlighted the Home-Start blog by 'Phoebe' which really illustrates the value of the service.

The Community Stars Awards are now open for voting and on the T&A's website. BSB is sponsoring a category described as 'Outstanding Contribution to Earliest Years of Life.' Gill Thornton said it does not matter that only one of the three shortlisted nominees is based in the BSB area – we want to show what our work influences in the district. BSB will circulate a link to the relevant webpage.

10. Any other business

Vipin thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He asked if everyone had felt they had an opportunity to contribute to this meeting and all agreed that they had.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is provisionally on Thursday 25 February 2021, via Zoom, starting at 5.30 pm.

The meeting closed at 11.20 am.