

Better Start Bradford Partnership Board Minutes
Thursday 20 July 2023
Via Zoom

Meeting Started: 09:35

Meeting Ended: 11:10

Present:

Ruth Shaw	Senior Head of Integration and Change (Health and Care) for Women and Children, Bradford District and Craven Health & Care Partnership (Chair)
Alex Spragg	Programme Director, Better Start Bradford
Josie Dickerson	Programme Director, Born in Bradford Innovation Hub
Ashraf Miah	Development Officer, Community Action Bradford and District
Sarah Exall	Consultant in Public Health, CBMDC (items 1 to 7 only)
Rizwana Jamil	Ward Councillor, Bradford Council

In Attendance

Gill Hart	Funding Manager, The National Lottery Community Fund
Gill Thornton	Head of Programme, Better Start Bradford
Sarah Worstead	Senior Manager of Integration and Change (Health and Care) for Women and Children, Bradford District and Craven Health & Care Partnership
Guy Dove	Senior Programme Administrator, Better Start Bradford

Apologies for Absence:

Vipin Joshi	Gwen Balson	Karen Tetley	Lisa Brett
Marium Haque	Carlton Smith	Samina Begum	Gazala Taj
Salma Nawaz	Sarah Hinton	Ishaq Shafiq	

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Ruth welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies.

The meeting was inquorate, and it was agreed to discuss and make recommendations which would then be emailed to the whole Partnership Board asking for comments and approval. A deadline for Partnership Board members to respond by will be imposed, with any not responding assumed to agree with the proposed recommendations.

Action: Alex to send an email to the whole Partnership Board detailing the recommendations from this meeting asking for ratification within a given time.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 22 June 2023

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

Gill Thornton noted the reference to Urban 95 which is a 7-week academy about creating urban spaces for people under 95 cm tall. It comprised of an online group and follow-up events including a residential course. Bradford was not accepted onto the residential course, but received positive feedback and is part of an urban design network.

3. Matters Arising actions table

Alex confirmed that an email was sent to the whole Partnership Board detailing the recommendations from our June meeting asking for ratification within a given time, because the meeting was inquorate. Alex thanked the people who responded and confirmed that the recommendations were ratified.

The item about the staff recruitment and retention policy is on this meeting's agenda.

4. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. 'Getting to know you' session

This was not covered this month. Ruth remarked that it is a shame that we have not had anyone cover this for a while and she finds the presentations interesting. Alex noted that we have two new Community Board members, and she will try to get these sessions going again from September.

Action: Alex to ask Partnership Board members to do the getting to know you session.

6. Year 8 final accounts

Alex presented the written report that was sent out with the meeting papers, noting that Better Start Bradford currently have no finance manager. For the full year ending 31 March 2023, there was an underspend of just over £800k, against a budget of £7.9 million, so it was about 10 per cent. This is a slight reduction from the underspend for the year that was predicted in December 2022.

Alex explained that there is a significant underspend on Salaries due to leavers, and vacancies taking longer to fill than expected or were unfilled. The Learning Together budget was underspent by 12 per cent for the year, this includes Baby Week, our sponsorship of the Bradford Literature Festival, networking events and our training offer. Less training has been delivered this year due to capacity issues and other reasons.

There is also a significant underspend on Marketing and Communications. Alex mentioned that we commissioned no videos during the year and resources such as branded clothing has been re-used. Work on the next stage of our website development has restarted.

For Professional, Legal and Consultancy, we have had to pay placement fees for our Public Health Leadership Fellow, Alex noted that until now placements have been fully funded, but the resource has been very welcome.

During the year under review, we did no large advertising or significant promotion of Big Little Moments. Also, an Area Wellbeing Survey (linked to Better Place) was budgeted for but has been postponed, causing an underspend.

Alex explained that many other aspects of Management Revenue are under budget due to hybrid working. There are now more people working in the office so some costs have increased. BSB are encouraging more office-based work and our team meetings are now being held in person.

Alex turned to Projects, Personalised Midwifery has the largest underspend as they have experienced significant recruitment issues resulting in the full project not being delivered. An Improvement Plan has been agreed and recruitment is ongoing.

Baby Steps had an increased budget because its delivery changed from targeted to universal during the year. We have had an underspend on our Contract & Implementation Officers budget as that team have been a staff member down all year.

Most of the Innovation Fund projects have come to their end with a small underspend. The Resilient Dads project was not delivered in full and had a significant underspend, and this was reinvested into further work by the HABIT (oral health) Innovation Fund project.

Alex explained the Happy Early Years (HEY! Fund) underspend is due to the fact that whilst the panel meeting took place in February 2023, the contracts were not awarded until the beginning of the next financial year.

Alex said that the spreadsheet sent out with the meeting papers had a line-by-line description of the variances. The accounts were presented to the Finance & Audit Sub-Committee on 6 July who were happy to recommend they were accepted.

Ruth expressed concern about gaps in the BSB staff structure and wondered if there are the same issues in other A Better Start sites. Gill Hart confirmed that the other sites have had difficulties in recruiting over the last 1 to 2 years and it has been a tough market in general. Southend, however, have been successful in recruiting over the last six months for some reason.

Other reasons for recruitment difficulties include short-term contracts, less stability in roles and more fixed-term contracts. Secondments could be a solution, but our partners are struggling with recruitment themselves. Gill Hart said that short-term contracts work for some people, but 'narrow the pool.'

Rizwana suggested looking at different ways to engage with people, such as apprenticeships, or a different marketing strategy. She agreed that staff shortages affect the delivery of projects.

Gill Thornton said the situation is challenging. She confirmed BSB are looking at freelancers and putting out contracts where this could be a solution. Three jobs are currently out for advert, and we have interviews lined up for two of them, though there are very few candidates. Having lots of new staff also has an impact on the team as capacity is required to give new people need support and mentoring.

We currently have no engagement team apart from Shummel, the new manager, who is visiting all community venues and publicising our offer and events that are taking place over the summer. The vacancy job description has been reviewed, BSB need people who can link with communities and support training and upskilling and training for the new staff will be provided if needed. The possibility of apprenticeships was discussed but not felt to be suitable for these roles.

BSB have had to be realistic about what work we can do, and some things are of a lower priority.

Sarah asked if underspend is carried forward to future years. Alex confirmed that it is, and is reprofiled in our 10-year budget. Sarah suggested (thinking of the 'Resilience' DVD) making a film about the BSB programme and gathering our learning into the film or perhaps producing a webinar. This could be commissioned over the next 18 months, and it would be publicised and distributed. Alex was supportive of this and Gill Thornton added that it ties in with our Knowledge and Dissemination strategy. Sarah mentioned also using Josie's research and Ruth thought the film was an excellent idea and the idea shows the benefit of partnership working.

Josie confirmed that she liked Sarah's idea too. As for recruitment, Born in Bradford and the perinatal project administrators are in a similar situation to BSB. People are leaving for good opportunities elsewhere though she hopes the PPAs will transfer to Start for Life. Due to their shorter timeline than BSB's, they cannot even offer a 12-month contract and the NHS are too busy to offer secondments. She suggested putting staff into BSB to finish off evaluation work etc or giving people in the wider partnership a development opportunity.

Gill Thornton said she was thinking of something similar and maybe the Innovation Hub/BiBBS and BSB could share staff more. This is a conversation we could have and there are some relevant skills their staff may have that BSB do not.

Action: Alex to ensure potential staff sharing between BSB and the Innovation Hub is discussed at their next strategic meeting.

Sarah mentioned that Public Health training is always a fixed term contract of four or five years and is always oversubscribed. She suggested BSB tie in with this in some way, so people get more skills. Gill Thornton said this is also worth looking at. Some of the BSB staff have done the Public Health skills training already and staff would need access to accreditation.

Action: The Public Health training is run by Health Education England and Sarah will link in them in with Alex and Gill Thornton.

Decision: The Partnership Board (subject to the agreement of those members not present) notes and accepts the accounts for the year ending 31 March 2023.

7. Staff recruitment and retention incentives proposal

Alex explained that the proposal was developed in response to the recruitment and retention challenges and the Partnership Board has already agreed in principle to adopting a policy. As requested by the Partnership Board a more detailed and costed options appraisal was presented to the Finance & Audit Sub-Committee on 6 July.

Alex outlined the background to the proposal, that 10 BSB staff out of a team of 30 have left over the last 8 months and we have found recruitment challenging and want to retain as many of our existing employees as possible. The payment support recruitment and retention to new roles as new recruits would not have enough service to be eligible for redundancy.

Three proposals have been worked up. Option A is a fixed payment for all staff of £4,500, which is twice the average monthly gross salary. This should improve the wellbeing of staff which is being affected by the changes and the uncertainty. There is a risk, however that this would be less attractive to staff with senior roles. The cost is £162k.

Option B is based on two times actual monthly salary and would involve a higher cost of £210k. This does include the differentiation for people with senior roles but would have less incentive for part time and lower paid staff.

Gwen has suggested merging the two options so that those in leadership positions get Option B and everyone else Option A. The cost is closer to Option B than Option A but is slightly reduced - £191k.

The Finance & Audit Sub-Committee recognised the concerns about recruitment. The fixed payment (Option A) was recommended to the Partnership Board as they preferred a fixed cost, due to the fact it is cheaper and shows equity to all the team.

Rizwana asked if exit interviews are done for leavers. Alex confirmed that they are and a thorough analysis has been done and there will be an internal session about it later today. Many BSB staff left for career progression and changes in the wider structure in Bradford have created more external opportunities. It is part of our sustainability and legacy that people who 'know' BSB are in the wider system.

Alex said that BSB need to retain experienced staff and incentivise new recruits who will be on short contracts. The policy gives some certainty for staff getting the fixed payment plus redundancy and rewards them for their service.

Guy noted that the retention payment would be taxed so BSB staff would not actually receive the full £4,500 or whatever amount is decided.

Josie noted that some leavers took up a good position in Bradford thanks to BSB funding and we need to gather this and document it. Ruth mentioned volunteer Doulas going on to formal education and employment and it is not a failure that people are leaving.

Gill Thornton agreed that mapping destinations is a good idea, not just for the BSB team and she mentioned the student placements we have (a whole cohort of people) and volunteers. This could be a couple of pages in an end of programme report or part of the suggested video.

Decision: The Partnership Board (subject to the agreement of those members not present) selected Option A, a fixed retention payment of £4,500 made to all staff who remain in post until the programme closure or the role is made redundant.

8. Annual Review of Partnership and Governance

Alex explained that the Partnership Board is asked to review the Partnership Agreement annually. She asked for any questions and concerns and Ruth mentioned the representation from some of the other partners.

Alex said that Lisa Brett attended regularly but has transferred over to the Children's and Families Trust. We should have representation from the Trust and Children's Services and Alex has requested a catch-up with Marium Haque.

Alex confirmed she has flagged up non-attendees such as the Care Trust, Maternity and West Yorkshire Police. All have capacity issues, and they are involved with other community projects.

Ruth noted less attendance than in previous years, staffing issues at our partners, their personnel has changed and that partners are engaged in different ways. Alex observed that there is the Strategic Reference Group and Maternity tend to attend that, the Care Trust are variable, and the police have attended those meetings more.

Ruth remarked that the Care Trust should be on key strategic boards in the district and Alex said she does have catch-ups with Michelle Holgate and she might need to speak to Therese Patten.

As we are approaching the end of the programme, Ruth noted that key partners hold part of the legacy, and they need to hear others' perspectives of their work.

9. Start for Life update

Gill Thornton mentioned that BSB and A Better Start were involved in the set-up of Start for Life. Bradford is one of 75 local authorities selected from a competitive process to pilot Start for Life. It was due to start in October 2022 with a set-up and development period.

Gill Thornton shared the purpose of Start for Life, which is to provide support to parents and carers so they are able to nurture their babies and children. It is also contributing to reducing inequalities in health and education outcomes for babies, children and families by ensuring that support provided is communicated to all parents and carers, including those who are hardest to reach and/or most in need of it, and building the evidence base for what works when it comes to improving health and education outcomes for babies, children and families in different delivery contexts.

The review of early years with Andrea Leadsom, which BSB were involved with, led to a focus on five specific areas. The first one is perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationships, Gill Thornton said our Little Minds Matter model has significantly influenced what has been included in the guidance and inclusion of this is a significant step forward as it was not explicitly in the Sure Start offer. The other specific areas are parenting, infant feeding, home learning environment and making sure parents know about the offer, can access it and are involved.

Six BSB projects have been picked up for expansion by Start for Life, but all of them will have a slightly different offer to what we are funding. The Partnership Board need to approve their contract variations.

The Start for Life guidance says that their offer should be delivered through Family Hubs. In Bradford, these already exist and are part of the Children and Families Trust and they are being enhanced. Gill Thornton said it is fortunate that the infrastructure is already here in Bradford.

The Start for Life guidance also mentions embedding this programme within local strategies which will help set the vision and direction for the long-term, sustained change in delivery of Family Hubs and Start for Life services in the local area. This is needed as the extra Start for Life funding is only committed to March 2025.

The Start for Life contract with BSB is for £3.12 million which will be paid to the relevant projects. Some underspend has been carried forward from the first year of the contract.

Gill Thornton went through some of the contract variations required for Start for Life. Little Minds Matter involves increasing the upper age range of the child to 30 months and some other changes. Perinatal Peer Support includes paid peer supporters as well as volunteers and more groups.

For cost reasons, the Baby Steps offer will be targeted whereas the BSB service is universal. The project is hiring more staff and will try to reach more families. The Start for Life HENRY offer is mostly about facilitator training and running workshops for parents. Breastfeeding Support will be targeted to localities, offering the service in four additional wards to BSB's three. Incredible Years will be a different version within Start for Life involving older children (pre-schoolers, not toddlers). Gill Thornton confirmed that the Incredible Years facilitators we trained can deliver both versions of the project.

The organisations receiving Start for Life funding in Bradford are Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust, Family Action, Action for Children, HENRY, Barnardo's and Health for All. Gill Thornton explained that there is less funding in Year 2 as the impact of Start for Life needs to happen in Year 1.

Gill Thornton confirmed that the Commissioning Advisory Group recommended the Partnership Board approve the contract variations.

Josie commented that there is lots of learning and impact from BSB and this has influenced Start for Life in Bradford and she hopes it would in other districts. There are evaluation opportunities in the wider roll-out but Start for Life evaluation only involves key performance indicators. Her team want to use the same measures as now and Josie shall be meeting Start for Life lead Rachel Burdin and Josie does not want to lose the evaluation opportunities. Gill Thornton observed that we are well placed as all the relevant projects use SystemOne.

Decision: The Partnership Board (subject to the agreement of those members not present) approve the contract variations needed for Start for Life.

10. Programme monthly report

Gill Thornton shared a highlight being the recent Bradford Literature Festival and our sponsorship of its early years offer, which delivered some great activities. We have embraced the sponsorship opportunity as a way of sharing the the importance of reading to very small children, and enabling the BSB community to engage in the district event.

Alex explained that the National Children's Bureau have had their learning contract extended by the National Lottery Community Fund. This includes the Annual Event, Insight papers and Communities of Practice. There is also their policy work, round table discussions and it has been agreed that their influencing work has been useful, and this will continue.

Gill Thornton mentioned the recent Reducing Inequalities Alliance workshop which was to choose priority areas and actions. We will be involved in food and nutrition, ensuring the voice of very small children is heard, getting parents involved and a challenge to the food industry about ultra-processed foods. This fits our programme objectives.

Gill Thornton mentioned our pathways work for Talking Bradford, speech, language, and communication support. She then mentioned our staff vacancies, we are interviewing for two of the posts soon and are using a recruitment agency to help find a new finance manager following two unsuccessful rounds of recruitment. A new early years facilitator starts in post in early September.

A few of our projects are rated as 'Amber,' but Gill Thornton explained the two ESOL projects are not doing anything wrong. Doulas have now improved, and they have a new manager, and the Carlisle Business Centre has a new (interim) chief executive. Breastfeeding Support have had issues with the quality of their referrals but are working to resolve this.

BSB held a Volunteer Fair last month and several BSB projects attended. Attendees were given a goody bag and hopefully there will be some volunteers recruited because of the event.

Gill Thornton mentioned the Comms work done for the HEY! Fund, and the evaluation workshops being delivered by the Innovation Hub. The evaluation workshops are to help projects to get ready for their next phase in terms of how they measure their services effectively and write their own evaluation plans for funding bids.

BSB have also helped with the publicity for Better Place outdoor events. We are already promoting Baby Week and trying to get the workforce and parents to its events.

Gill Thornton mentioned the engagement work done for Bradford Literature Festival. Shummel has done a lot of engagement work and she referred to the photos in the report of an event at Seymour Park. She also confirmed that the risk register was considered by the Finance & Audit Sub-Committee.

An NCB Insight paper was recently published about the Continuity of Care model, and how it improves birth outcomes and maternal mental health.

Ruth commented that the programme monthly report is a really useful reminder about what is happening, of links and the work done out in the community.

Rizwana (who was in the Seymour Park photos) remarked that it is always good to see BSB represented at community events. It is also good that many things in the report are rated Green. Gill Thornton responded that it is good to see local councillors at events.

Ruth thanked Gill Thornton for the report and said it shows that lots of work goes on.

11. Any other business

Josie said that BiBFest took place earlier this month and she will report on it at our next meeting. It included a panel discussion about how BSB shaped the Start for Life offer.

Retrospective recruitment for BiBBS has just been launched, up to children aged 7, Josie explained that they are looking for not previously involved families to opt into the study and her team are attending summer events and running Comms campaigns and she asked all to please promote this work. There were nearly 40 sign ups from a recent event at Horton Park. The criteria are the same as in 2016 – the family must have BSB residency and not moved into the area after the child was born. Josie's team also hope to recruit more partners to BiBBS as well as mums and children.

Finally, Ruth asked everyone if they had felt able to participate in this meeting and all agreed that they did. Alex thanked Ruth for agreeing to chair the meeting at short notice.

12. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is on Thursday 14 September 2023, provisionally via Zoom, starting at 5.30 pm.

The meeting closed at 11.10 am.