

**Better Start Bradford Partnership Board Minutes**  
**Thursday 16 November 2023**  
**Via Zoom**

**Meeting Started:** 17:35

**Meeting Ended:** 18:45

**Present:**

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Vipin Joshi         | Community Board member (Chair)   |
| Ruth Shaw           | Senior Head of Integration and Change (Health and Care) for Women and Children, Bradford District and Craven Health & Care Partnership |
| Alex Spragg         | Programme Director, Better Start Bradford  |
| Josie Dickerson     | Programme Director, Born in Bradford Innovation Hub  |
| Rizwana Jamil       | Ward Councillor, Bradford Council  |
| Gwen Balson         | Community Board member (Vice Chair)  |
| Samina Begum        | Community Board member (Vice Chair) item 8 onwards   |
| Aroosa Meherban     | Community Board member   |
| Gazala Taj          | Community Board member   |
| Humera Mahmood      | Community Board member   |
| Karen Tetley        | Community Board member   |
| Ludmila Novosjolova | Community Board member   |

**In Attendance**

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Sola Onifade          | Contract & Implementation Manager, Better Start Bradford |
| Heather Fawcett-Jones | Contract & Implementation Officer, Better Start Bradford |
| Guy Dove              | Senior Programme Administrator, Better Start Bradford    |

**Apologies for Absence:**

|               |              |              |               |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Sarah Hinton  | Ishaq Shafiq | Marium Haque | Carlton Smith |
| Gill Thornton | Lisa Brett   | Gill Hart    | Sarah Exall   |
| Salma Nawaz   |              |              |               |

**1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**

Vipin 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 – 19 October 2023**

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

**3. Matters Arising actions table**

Alex said that clarification had been asked for about a spike in BD4 Family's figures for reaching new families in 2021/22. This was as a result of the project's approach during and after Covid lockdown restrictions. The project held an outdoor street party which reached over 300 new families. They also caught up with a backlog of door-knocking once Covid restrictions were lifted. During lockdown, BD4 Family's social media activity engagement increased, with all these factors leading to the surge in their figures.

**4. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**5. 'Getting to know you' session**

Ishaq had agreed to cover this agenda item, but Alex explained that unfortunately, Ishaq had to send his apologies for this meeting. Hopefully, he will do his presentation at a future meeting.

**6. Incredible Years contract review**

Sola explained that Incredible Years Toddler is delivered by Barnardo's and is an evidence-based parenting programme which promotes positive attachment between parents and their toddlers and supports parents to encourage their children's language, social and emotional development.

The project has also supported practitioners to attain workforce accreditation as an Incredible Years Coach which increases the strength of the early years workforce.

The Better Start Bradford Incredible Years contract began in September 2018 and is due to end on 31 March 2024, with a total contract value of £1.9 million. The course is delivered by trained facilitators in a group format in 2-hour weekly sessions over 13 weeks. Prior to the groups, three pre-course visits are made to the enrolled parents.

The project provides language support (provision of interpreters where necessary); creche services and transportation to / from group session locations when needed to facilitate the full participation of the parents in the group sessions.

Sola summarised the projects successes and lessons learned. We have found that the Incredible Years Toddler model can be delivered as designed and there was high fidelity to the model. The project has a high conversion rate for completion by the parents. Barnardo's has been able to build positive relationships with the project's families through its delivery of Incredible Years.

Incredible Years has been awarded Start for Life funding, but this is for Incredible Years Pre School, an older age group than for the BSB version of the project. The project is therefore able to retain its original team despite staff attrition in the sector, keeping knowledge and experience within the organisation.

The intensive accreditation process was delayed due to Covid, but five out of six facilitators have been awarded accreditation as Incredible Years Coaches and the final person is near completion.

The pandemic enabled staff to increase their skills in virtual delivery and there were no significant gaps in delivery during Covid.

The project did experience some implementation challenges, delivery was impacted by changes within the delivery sites, referral pathways, implementation realities, bad weather, language challenges, family situations and Covid restrictions.

Staff reduction within the health visiting team in Bradford East affected referral numbers as health visitors were identified as the main referral source in service design. Facilitators were therefore required to participate in the recruitment of families, which was not their original purpose, and this affected their capacity to deliver sessions.

The team lost its UK mentor which slowed down the accreditation process, but as previously mentioned, five out of six facilitators have become Incredible Years Coaches.

Some families dropped out of the project, especially during summer holidays due to childcare issues. Interpreters are a supporting strategy of delivery but using these affected some sessions, especially when role play was needed.

In relation to sustainability and next steps for the project, the Start for Life funding will extend delivery of Incredible Years Pre-School until 31 March 2025 and across the whole district. Barnardo's are also exploring alternative funding sources and BSB need our key stakeholders to please support them to continue the project's good work.

Sola shared that the recommendation from the Commissioning Advisory Group is that the Partnership Board approves that the Incredible Years Toddler project closes as scheduled by 31 March 2024, and continues with Incredible Years Pre-School until 31 March 2025, with the Start for Life funding.

Josie drew out the key elements of the Innovation Hub evaluation. It found that once referrals are in the project, participation and completion rates are really good. She reflected that over the length of such a project there are many factors affecting completion, but this project performs very well in relation to this. How the referral process is set up is very important and this will be the same for Start for Life.

The Innovation Hub are excited about this project as the 'before and after' evaluation showed that parents felt more competent and the children scored higher on the 'Ages and Stages' measure, which meets Incredible Years requirements. Josie explained that this does not show effectiveness as there was no control group, but it is really promising. Effectiveness can hopefully be shown in Incredible Years, but this will take time as we need to wait for the appropriate data to be pulled when the children are old enough.

Josie remarked that the two Incredible Years offers are different programmes for different age groups. Funding Incredible Years Toddler was a preventative approach by BSB, the evaluation may show high impact in children's outcomes, and we need to think about the project continuing.

Alex noted that the Start for Life funding the project allows existing knowledge and skillsets to be retained. The accreditation is for both Incredible Years programmes and we are keeping expertise in the district to deliver Incredible Years Toddler in the future if there are funds.

Humera asked when Incredible Years Pre-School is delivering as she signed up six months ago but never heard back. Alex said the first course was cancelled due to lack of interest and Heather added that the first course starts in December. Aroosa remarked that she knows several people who would be interested and one who wants to repeat the course as it was really good.

**Action: Heather to pass all the above feedback on to Barnardo's.**

**Decision: The Partnership Board (subject to the agreement of those members not present) approves that the Incredible Years Toddler project closes as scheduled by 31 March 2024, and continues with Incredible Years Pre-school until 31 March 2025, with the Start for Life funding.**

## **7. Forest Schools contract review**

Sola shared that Forest Schools is delivered by Get Out More and was set up as a response to addressing environmental inequalities across the BSB area, to demonstrate the importance of outdoor play and engagement with the natural environment to the healthy development of children.

The project started in April 2018 and is due to end on 31 March 2024, the total contract value is £863k.

The delivery approach is that children are recruited from nursery settings and attend a two-hour weekly session for a period of nine weeks (originally ten weeks), with their parents and/or caregivers, to enable experience sharing. Forest School practitioners work alongside an early years specialist to facilitate the group sessions.

The project also conducts training in the green spaces and parks in the BSB area for teachers and parents to create a sustained culture of outdoor learning amongst children in home and school settings.

The project has also run standalone free Family Play Sessions for local families in parks and green spaces on a drop-in basis.

Sola summarised the project's successes and lessons learned. There was an improvement in confidence for parents and a positive impact on children's social and emotional and language skills. Engaging in the Forest School project provided personal and professional benefits for nursery staff and parents. Sola said parents were hesitant at first but there is now more appreciation of the importance of outdoor play to children's development.

There is a need to access quality green spaces close to home and build confidence to go further afield. Families are eager for trips at times that suit them, i.e. weekends and holidays and many are not aware of what green spaces are on offer locally.

There have been tremendous positive benefits of collaborating with schools, local engagement officers and other agencies in the area. Some settings have gained equipment and developed their own green spaces as a result of working with the project.

Sola then described some challenges to implementation that the project encountered. Due to scheduling clashes (teacher strikes, school training days, Eid, sports, and transition days etc.) and poor weather conditions, the 10-week 2-hour sessions was reduced to 9 weeks. This caused the definition of 'completion' to be changed from 7 weeks out of 10 attended to 6 weeks out of 9.

Since 2021, trainees were encouraged to co-deliver the Forest School sessions to implement learning and build up their confidence and experience in a Forest School setting.

Due to the project's observation of the lack of or inadequate outdoor spaces, there was a variation in plan to offer nurseries support to 'improve resources for outdoor play'. Some settings used this to get equipment, but others improved their outdoor space.

The project reflected that the cost-of-living crisis has also had an impact on families as there is more need for free facilitated activities as they face the strain of rising costs and are less willing or able to pay for sessions.

In relation to sustainability and next steps, the project has secured a six-month contract with Better Place to support nature-based activities, which runs to 30 September 2024. Get Out More is exploring potential funding from schools and grants from other organisations and partnering with nurseries and schools who would pay to receive Forest Schools training.

Get Out More are exploring national funding opportunities from Comic Relief, Children in Need, and the Ernest Cook Trust. They are also looking into local funding from Bradford Council Holiday Activities and Food programme, and Community Chest. They are also exploring how they can align with other funded initiatives across the district such as City of Culture and Trees for Climate Action.

Forest Schools training levels 1 and 3 are to be offered on a fee-paying basis, supporting the development of further skilled workers in the sector and in the locality.

Get Out More are keen to position themselves to better influence policy and decision making at Bradford Council regarding the impact of Forest Schools on children's social and emotional development. They would welcome the support of BSB in introducing them to key contacts, for example with decision makers within Public Health, Education Services and Workforce Development.

Sola said that the recommendation from Commissioning Advisory Group is that the Partnership Board approves that the Forest Schools Play project comes to an end as scheduled by 31 March 2024.

Josie commented that Forest Schools should be seen as a big success for BSB. Forest Schools had not traditionally been delivered in the early years, the children are usually five

years old. We did not know if toddlers would cope with it or if it could be delivered, but by working with nurseries, the project was successful. She said Get Out More have been very impressive.

The Innovation Hub have completed an implementation evaluation for Forest Schools and found that it was implemented very well. Completion rates and engagement were good. There was also an ethnography survey undertaken some years ago which included observations – Josie explained that nothing was ‘measured’ but there were high satisfaction scores from parents and some lovely quotes. Children have learned to play in outdoor spaces such as woods, not just on equipment such as swings and slides and so on.

Josie said her team would like to test the school readiness of children who completed the Forest School project and Get Out More are trying to help with this.

Ruth agreed that it feels like a success and Forest Schools is a lovely programme. For sustainability, she suggested linking with the district physical health strategy launch, the Play Partnership and for the mental health element of the project, links with Healthy Minds, which is a partnership programme. It should not just be schools looking at the project. Alex confirmed that we have linked to the Play Partnership, but she is not sure about Healthy Minds.

**Action: BSB to work on linking Forest Schools with other partners as mentioned above.**

Vipin wished to thank Josie for both Innovation Hub reports, the Community prep meeting participants described them as clear and with the right amount of detail and an improvement on the reports from years ago.

**Decision: The Partnership Board agreed that the Forest Schools Play project comes to an end as scheduled by 31 March 2024.**

## **8. Talking Together contract extension proposal**

Alex presented this agenda item as Gill Thornton was unable to attend due to illness.

Talking Together is one of BSB’s longest-standing projects and is currently due to end in May 2024. It is delivered by BHT Early Education and Training and offers a universal language assessment at age 2 followed by a 6-week in-home language support intervention for children at risk of language development delay.

Take-up of the assessment is high, and completion of the course has consistently met targets. This has allowed there to be the oTTER trial in 2018 looking at the signs of effectiveness in the project which indicated the feasibility for a full Randomised Control Trial evaluation.

Unfortunately, the RCT has not taken place due to the pandemic, and then Covid Recovery Funding of the project was rescinded and diverted elsewhere. However, BHT have explored external funding of the RCT and will be bidding to the Education Endowment Foundation. If successful, the EEF would fund the delivery of the project while the RCT is being undertaken.

This proposal is for a 6-month contract extension to November 2024, so that Talking Together can undertake the application stage for the external funding. The project must be operational for a successful bid. The RCT would increase the evidence base for the project and increase its potential for future sustainability.

The contract extension would allow more children to receive the intervention (another 100 is estimated). BHT propose a slightly reduced team but are confident delivery is achievable, with trained language development workers retained in the team. The project will also explore other potential funding routes if there is a contract extension.

A significant delay in child language development has been identified due to Covid which has brought funding, but the timescale is slow, and this extension would 'bridge some of the gap'. The project wants to undertake some follow-up work on children with language delay they saw pre, during and post-Covid.

Alex explained that Talking Together underspend has accumulated due to staff vacancies and Covid restrictions reducing delivery. The underspend is sufficient to fund the extra six months, which means that there is no additional funding ask for the Partnership Board.

Alex explained that there is information about the EEF bid process and timescale in the meeting papers. The bid needs to be submitted in December 2023, with the decision in September 2024. If the bid fails, BSB will move to close down the project in November 2024, and if it is successful, we will work on its transition.

The Commissioning Advisory Group discussed the extension proposal last week and were supportive of it, noting that it would increase the project's reach, sustainability and raise its level of evidence. They recommended that the Partnership Board support the extension.

Aroosa asked if the extension would involve the 1:1 sessions in the home that Talking Together includes, or the groups. Alex confirmed that it would be the 1:1 home intervention. The groups (Owlets) have received Public Health and Start for Life funding continuation funding. Aroosa remarked that she is glad the groups are continuing.

Ruth noted that there are other conversations about early language support and funding through other networks, but these involve settings, not home-based support. She said it would be good to have both so comparisons can be made for future funding. It is good to bring extra funding into the district.

Josie said all involved should be proud of Talking Together, as it was locally developed and shows evidence of promise. However, funders go for older age groups, and she suggested that this goes back to raising the evidence for prevention.

Vipin thought of our risk appetite level and said we have got to take a risk and the extension would be using existing underspend and the project needs to be supported.

**Decision: The Partnership Board (subject to the consent of those members not present) approved the six-month contract extension for Talking Together.**

## **9. Programme monthly report**

Alex mentioned that the next set of Live Learning sessions have now started. This is a five-week programme which has been extended to a wider cohort and provides a useful introduction to several aspects of prevention and early intervention.

Baby Week is taking place this week and Alex noted that she has seen some Partnership Board members participating and supporting events so far. We have received 250 requests

for this year's resource pack, the Healthy Habits Bumper Box. These provide a range of low or no-cost ideas with a focus on health, diet, movement and nutrition and feedback we have received from settings is positive.

Alex referenced the 'Baby Week Wiggle' which has had a significant social media presence including George Webster from Cbeebies which has had several thousand views. The Family Event this year is at Odsal stadium on 20 November. Ruth commented that she attended the Workforce Event, and it was fantastic to see the BSB staff team demonstrating the Wiggle.

Alex noted that the National Lottery Community Fund have asked us to help with an internal training session about the importance of play in the early years and we have linked Forest Schools, Better Place, and the Innovation Hub with this.

The local authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee is conducting a review of child poverty and will visit the Wednesday morning Stay and Play group at the Mayfield Centre to talk to some parents about the impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on them and what support they are able to access.

Alex proceeded to Programme Resources. The new Activities Fund Co-ordinator has left to take up a permanent role at the NHS. As there is now a full Family and Community Engagement Team, we are able to proceed with the postponed round 3 of the Happy Early Years Fund. The panel meeting is next week and will consider 12 funding applications.

Alex noted that the Community Board member vacancy is being advertised and she asked all to share the recruitment information.

The report provides an update about the Start for Life funded projects which are now delivering on a district wide footprint. Alex said this is one of the ways we can demonstrate how we are spreading our learning more widely across the district.

The series of Innovation Hub evaluation workshops have now been delivered to BSB project staff and the wider team. These should help to make projects as evaluation ready as possible and ensure evaluations are embedded in funding bids. There has been good feedback about the workshops' usefulness.

Alex moved on to the Talking Bradford Pathway and a link to its infographic was sent out with the report. There will be a bigger launch of the pathway which is still in consultation, and she asked members to provide feedback on the pathway.

The BSB app has had to close as it will no longer be supported, we have looked at other options and have chosen to use a WhatsApp group. A QR code to join the group is in the report and is also on our website. The transition has happened smoothly, and WhatsApp notifications are coming through.

Baby Week has been advertised on big screens in the district, mostly free of charge as allowed by Bradford Council and the Baby Week Wiggle has been played on the big screen in City Park.

Best Beginnings, who run the Baby Buddy App have approached us to use our Moments That Matter videos, as a result of Alex sharing the resource at a national conference. Alex confirmed we are happy to share these.



The Family and Community Engagement team have attended various events and promoted Baby Week and opportunities for volunteering. Festive Fun events are being planned. The FACE team attended Nature and Therapy Training provided by Better Place which received positive feedback. They are also supporting the 'retro-recruitment' by BiBBS, who have achieved significant publicity about recruiting their 5,000<sup>th</sup> baby.

Alex noted the latest NCB Insight article about the district roll-out of MECSH. Ruth said Edwina presented to the Healthy Children and Families Partnership Board about this, which was very clear and well received. Alex commented that this is good to hear, and we are getting noticed and the programme's 'test and learn' ethos is being understood.

#### **10. Any other business**

Only a few register of interest forms have been received back but some Community Board members said they had not seen the email requesting it, it was agreed that a further email would be sent.

**Action: All Partnership Board members who have not completed a register of interests form for 12 months to do so (Guy will email the form out again).**

Alex mentioned the Community Star Awards and that we have shared the finalists for the early years award we are sponsoring. Also, Shummel, our Engagement Manager has been nominated for one of the other award categories, Volunteer of the Year. She asked members to vote to email herself or Guy if they want to attend the awards ceremony on Wednesday 6 December at the Bradford Hotel. Alex observed that it is an uplifting event and an opportunity to highlight the importance of the early years.

Finally, Vipin asked everyone if they had felt able to participate in this meeting and all agreed that they did. He thanked all for attending.

#### **11. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is on Thursday 14 December 2023, via Zoom, starting at 9.30 am.

The meeting closed at 6.45 pm.