

Better Start Bradford Partnership Board Minutes
Thursday 21 March 2024
Via Zoom

Meeting Started: 17:15

Meeting Ended: 18:20

Present:

Vipin Joshi	Community Board member (Chair)
Sarah Hinton	Board Member, Bradford Trident
Gill Thornton	Programme Director, Better Start Bradford
Josie Dickerson	Programme Director, Born in Bradford Innovation Hub
Gwen Balson	Community Board member (Vice Chair)
Samina Begum	Community Board member (Vice Chair)
Aroosa Meherban	Community Board member
Gazala Taj	Community Board member
Humera Mahmood	Community Board member
Ishaq Shafiq	Community Board member (item 6 onwards)
Karen Tetley	Community Board member

In Attendance

Gill Hart	Funding Manager, National Lottery Community Fund (item 6 onwards)
Kerry Bennett	Assistant Programme Director, Better Start Bradford
Justine Bowman	Finance Manager, Better Start Bradford
Sola Onifade	Contract & Implementation Manager, Better Start Bradford
Guy Dove	Senior Programme Administrator, Better Start Bradford

Apologies for Absence:

Salma Nawaz	Lisa Brett	Ashraf Miah	Carlton Smith
Sarah Exall			

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Vipin welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies.

Vipin thanked everyone for agreeing to the earlier start time at short notice. This allowed those members who are fasting more time to attend the meeting.

Introductions were not needed as everyone knew each other.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 22 February 2024

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising actions table

There is an action about sharing the learning from the Personalised Midwifery project. Gill Thornton said we are coming to the end of this project and the Reducing Inequalities in Communities element of it is also finishing. The Contract & Implementation Officer (Sophie) is pulling together the learning with the Innovation Hub.

There will still be the continuity of care team of midwives at the BRI but the evaluation is ending as the model is changing slightly. Josie confirmed that randomisation has stopped and there are no new mums in the evaluation as the model has changed, but only one month has been missed. We are waiting for the women to have their babies so the post-natal part of the project can happen, which means that the evaluation will not be available until the end of 2024. In the interim, Josie said that there will be qualitative work about 'how,' and 'what' is needed to implement a continuity of care model. How this model can work is the biggest challenge for midwifery.

The 10-year (now 11-year) budget is on the agenda for this meeting (item 7).

There are still three updated register of interest forms outstanding. Vipin asked for the Partnership Board members concerned to be named in the meeting as a reminder.

Action: In the meantime, before the minutes are circulated, Guy shall send one more reminder email about the outstanding register of interest forms.

Gill Thornton confirmed that the paper about Community Board member recruitment was emailed out. She has asked all Community Board members and Vice Chairs about their future. All but one Community Board member confirmed in advance of this meeting that they wish to continue in the role until 31 December 2025. The other was Aroosa who confirmed during the meeting that she also wants to remain. Gill Thornton said she was pleased about the quick responses.

Action: Better Start Bradford to issue the Vice Chair role descriptions in time for the April 2024 Partnership Board to decide about selection.

Action: There is still one vacancy for a Community Board member – BSB to start recruitment during April 2024.

It was confirmed that the Innovation Hub shall give their annual update to a Partnership Board later this year.

Gill Thornton explained for the Bradford Doulas project, the sustainability work is for BSB's Implementation team to do and they are actioning that. There was a project leads meeting today with lots of discussion about sustainability. BSB will support projects with spreading their learning but future funding is the project's responsibility.

Gill Thornton shared the presentations from the Data Community of Practice with Vipin and Gwen.

4. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. 'Getting to know you' session

As time was limited in this meeting, Gill Thornton agreed to defer her session until our April 2024 meeting.

6. Programme Extension

Gill Thornton gave a PowerPoint presentation and explained it was updated from one given to the BSB staff team.

She explained that there are no detailed plans for the extension yet – working these plans out is ongoing and Gill Thornton is just giving a summary at this meeting.

There are still questions about the end of Start of Life and Gill Thornton said she was worried we will not get answers in time to make proper plans. There were delays in the decision about the legacy work contract and the plan for sharing learning and dissemination – BSB had no Workforce & Learning Manager for a time and have not recruited to the Knowledge Dissemination role.

A programme underspend is predicted, so BSB took a proposal to the Finance & Audit Sub-Committee and Partnership Board in December 2023 to extend for six or nine months. The Partnership Board agreed a nine-month programme extension, which the National Lottery Community Fund approved on 29 February.

Gill Thornton then outlined planned activities for the extended programme time. Start for Life projects are all expected to deliver until 31 March 2025. BSB's Implementation team shall be overseeing closedown and final reporting. If there is continued funding, there will be transition to new commissioning arrangements. Gill Thornton reiterated that we do not know what will happen with Start for Life, with a general election due in less than a year. There shall also be possible legacy arrangements with BSB to work on.

Other planned activities for the extension period are knowledge and dissemination. BSB shall be sharing learning from the programme and the outcome of the evaluation, publishing reports, presenting and telling stories. We will be helping to spread the voices of local families, parents and children. There will be external events and our own events. Learning should be crystallised this year.

Gill Thornton said we will be aligning our learning with things that are changing, influencing policy and system change, with the new Children and Families Trust and thinking about how schools work together in the early years system.

BSB are getting an expression of interest out for a consultant to work on our legacy, which has just been approved by the NLCF and will be issued next week. In the programme extension, we will implement and embed decisions / plans from the legacy work consultant. BSB shall be building ongoing relationships and Gill Thornton said we need to start now to build ongoing relations if we are to perhaps partner with another organisation.

Gill Thornton said there is a lot to do, and we also want to take part in City of Culture 2025 and promote our legacy. There will also be a Baby Week 2025 which will very much be a partnership.

Gill Thornton then went through what this will mean for the Partnership Board. Community Board members' terms of office can be extended through to December 2025. A redrafted Partnership Agreement will be shared, but BSB need discussions with all our statutory partners first, and she noted that none of them are present at this meeting. All of them are working in pressured situations, and BSB need to say why the programme extension will be of value to our statutory partners and these conversations are planned for next month.

The Partnership Board shall also have oversight of legacy planning. Gill Thornton observed that we have not had a Strategy Day for years, and one will be important at this point and is scheduled for May or June 2024. BSB shall need Partnership Board support for developing strategic relationships and for extending community relationships through wider networks. She mentioned sharing learning and creating legacy in the future, which are things Partnership Board support will be needed for.

Gill Thornton then outlined what this will mean for the BSB staff team. Year 11 will be a busy year but we will not need as big a team and the activities will be different. Staff could potentially work with the Innovation Hub if there is an extended evaluation. There will be legacy work and learning and events to share our messaging and influence with a wider footprint. We will need a team for activities, community networks and programme closure.

A skills audit is to be done of the BSB staff team, from which a workforce plan will be developed for Year 11. Gill Thornton wanted to reassure people that active planning is in place.

Josie commented that any legacy work needs to include key stakeholders, who are not attending this meeting. Legacy is urgent for BSB projects now whose funding is ending. Once a project is decommissioned, it is much harder to get it set back up again. Gill Thornton replied that we had a project leads meeting today, and all projects are continuing in some form, but not BSB funded in our area. For example, Forest Schools is continuing after our contract and we will work with them regarding legacy and relationships.

Josie observed that lots is happening in the district, but queried how much of it is for our age group. She gave an example of Incredible Years – the Start for Life offer is for older children than BSB's project was and Josie said we still need to be delivering early and should 'shout about it.'

Vipin said it is good to see the planning for the programme extension and after it. At the prep meeting two evenings ago, there was a wish to hold a community celebration event to show what has been delivered and to share it with our partners. He also thanked Gill Hart for speeding up work about the extension, the NLCF approving it, and we want the legacy of BSB to continue.

Vipin commented that lots of organisations fall apart after a few years and it is good that we are talking about Year 11.

7. Accounts to 31 December 2023 and Years 10 and 11 budget

Justine noted that all this information has recently been presented to, reviewed and approved by the Finance & Audit Sub-Committee.

The Management Accounts for the 9 months ending 31 December 2023 show an underspend of £665k against the budget of £5.5m for the same period. This equates to 12.2% of the budget.

There is an underspend in Management Revenue of £185.7k. Just over 50% of this relates to £97.1k of unused Contingency relating to project redundancies, increasing to 80% if the underspend in Salaries (£33.3k) and the Area Well Being Survey (£18.8k) are included. We are expecting some spend on project redundancies in Quarter 4 (January to March 2024).

The Salaries variance is due to an unfilled vacancy for the Knowledge and Dissemination Officer position; the decision not to replace the Activities Fund Co-Ordinator and timing differences of several positions which started in autumn 2023.

Justine noted a Marketing and Communications underspend of £11.8k year to date which includes Baby Week in November 2023, one of the busiest periods. With no large, planned events in the last quarter it is expected the underspend will increase.

There was an underspend in Other Project Costs - £10.3k was originally budgeted for the lease of a Better Place van. No costs have been incurred to date for the hire of a van resulting in a £7.7k underspend.

On Data Sharing, a long-awaited invoice has been received for nearly £26k for Cerner system costs. This is lower than estimated contributing to an underspend of £8.9k.

Remaining underspends are either due to the hybrid working post-Covid; because of unfilled posts e.g. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning or delays in recruitment e.g. Community Support / Engagement.

Justine turned to a couple of overspends due to the way the budget is profiled on a straight-line basis - £5.6k for Learning Together and £1.9k Professional, Legal & Consultancy fees. Both are expected to finish the year within budget.

There has been no expenditure on Recruitment in the quarter. The overspend relates to advertising and recruitment fees for the Finance Manager. These costs were incurred with the knowledge there would an offset in salary costs from unfilled vacancies, this remains the case. We are likely to end the year with a small overspend.

Justine proceeded to Projects. The budgets for the six Start for Life projects have been updated for the Start for Life funding. For all projects where a change is made mid-year, variances arise because the annual budget on the spreadsheet is evenly spread but the payment schedule then differs in the quarter for any changes. An example of this is Baby Steps where the project looks to have an underspend of £51.9k but in fact it is in line with the agreed quarterly schedule.

An underspend of £175k was noted for the Personalised Midwifery project which closes on 31 March 2024. Justine commented that their underspend is well-documented and they could only set up one of the two continuity teams of midwives that were budgeted for.

Justine noted slow mobilisation of the Start for Life projects due to recruitment challenges. Underspend will be carried forward to Year 10 to allow the projects to deliver in full.

The Innovation Hub have brought their financial returns up to date for the first time for a significant period. Gill Thornton noted that Josie is not responsible for the financial returns, it is the hospital. Justine wished to thank the staff member concerned.

Forest Schools has a £7.5k underspend, but Justine advised that the project is due to close on 31 March 2024 in budget as the final few months are seasonally busier. HENRY has an overspend of £25k as they have front loaded Start for Life spend in the quarter. Conversations are taking place about a further reprofiling of the budget / payment schedule to eliminate the overspend.

Cooking for A Better Start are unable to use their approved underspend as planned due to a member of staff leaving in November 2023. The project will finish later this month with an underspend.

Neighbourhoods Project - West Bowling has a small overspend of £4k and discussions are taking place in the run up to project closure on 31 March 2024 to use brought forward underspend to cover it.

On the Happy Early Years Fund, in the November 2023 round 7 projects were successfully funded out of 12 applications, to a total of £11.9k. The round in March 2024 was so successful that 19 applications were received and the decision panel meeting has had to be split over two days.

We predict an underspend of £30k on the HEY! Fund and so BSB propose another round of funding applications in June 2024, given the high level of interest and the programme extension.

Justine moved on to the forecast for January to March 2024, explaining that this is needed to support the Year 10 budget. Overall spend for the year is anticipated to be £7.5m against a budget of £8.1m. The underspend is forecast at £610k at the year end, less primarily because than for the 9 months to December 2023 because of redundancy costs to be expensed before year end of approx. £32k.

The main drivers for the Management Revenue underspend of £210k remain as for the nine-month period namely Salaries, lower Contingency i.e. for redundancy spend because of the Start for Life extension and not doing the Area Wellbeing study. Also, Marketing and Communications has had less activity than forecast.

For Projects, the forecast variance is just over £400k to budget. Justine said that she has taken a prudent and realistic approach based on the trends / track record of each project.

Justine turned to the Year 10 budget. The same format and assumptions have been used as in previous years for consistency.

A £6.7m budget is proposed for Year 10. The figures have been adjusted for inflation generally between 3 to 5 per cent. There is an exception for internet/broadband costs at 8 per cent, as rates in this sector seem more price sensitive and are quicker to rise.

BSB staff salaries have had a 4 per cent increase assumed as per last year which Carlton confirmed has been agreed at this level. Due to timing difficulties, the salaries are based on BSB's old leadership structure and not Gill Thornton and Kerry's new roles, nor the Programme Manager we will be recruiting. We have assumed that two-thirds of BSB staff will have left at the end of Year 10, excluding the Programme Director.

The Learning Together budget includes the sponsorship of the Bradford Literature Festival, Baby Week, and other learning together events and activities. A full plan is going to be put together by the Workforce and Learning Manager (Sarah Cartin).

The Contingency fund has been set at £261k for Year 10 and relates to the projects' redundancy payments for staff who have worked on BSB projects whose role is being made redundant during the 2024/25 financial year. There are discussions taking place as to what extent and with what criteria should we fund Start for Life redundancies where staff moved from BSB projects to Start for Life. An additional £50k has been added to this contingency pot until this is clarified and amounts confirmed.

The costs for Management Overheads are provided by Bradford Trident and are charges relating to payroll, audit, rent of offices, cleaning, utilities and IT support.

The costs for all projects are as per the amounts within their service level agreements. The spreadsheet in the meeting papers shows a summary of the overall contract value for each of the projects from the first contract until the end of their current contracts. The additional column shows how much of an underspend (or overspend) has been brought forward from previous years to the new financial year. Each quarter, projects only claim from us the actual amount they have spent.

Justine moved on to the Year 11 budget, which is only a 'high-level' budget at this stage. The Year 11 budget of £992,500 has been based on similar assumptions to those in Year 10 and are not yet 'firmed up.' The costs are based on a worst-case scenario for a 9-month period using actuals and year end forecast from year 9 as a base, adjusted for the reduced period and a factor for inflation.

BSB retention and redundancy costs are assumed as a third of the staff excluding the Programme Director ending December 2025. It is recognised that redundancies are likely to take place between June and September 2025 and therefore inflated.

There is no Contingency budgeted separately for Year 11 as we will probably have enough brought forward.

The overheads are at the same level as Year 10, just pro-rated for 9 months. There are plans to discuss overheads with Bradford Trident, once a workforce plan has been completed and this will include moving to smaller premises so we expect these costs to reduce. When a closure plan has been developed, this will be costed and a revised budget for Year 11 presented.

There is an intention to reduce costs in the final year as much as possible which have yet to be explored and costed. The overarching intention is that no money will be returned to the NLCF but used for the benefit of the community while fully working within the rules laid out by the NLCF.

Vipin thanked Justine for the presentation and the Finance & Audit Sub-Committee for their input at their meeting two weeks ago.

Decision: The Partnership Board approved one final round of the Happy Early Years Fund, scheduled for June 2024.

Decision: The Partnership Board notes and accepts:

- **The accounts for the 9-month period ending 31 December 2023**
- **The forecast for the year ending 31 March 2024**
- **The year 10 budget for 2024-25**

Vipin said for the HEY! Fund, that the continued funding of smaller community projects is appreciated.

8. Community Board Member recruitment and revised Partnership agreement

Gill Thornton said this had been covered already. For Gill Hart's benefit (who missed the start of the meeting), it was confirmed that BSB will aim to recruit to the one Community Board member vacancy and the two Vice Chairs.

We will talk to statutory partners about their commitment and the revised Partnership Agreement.

Vipin thanked the Community Board members for their commitment and said they had a good prep meeting two evenings ago.

9. Programme monthly report

Kerry wished to acknowledge that we said goodbye to Alex at an event on 13 February, before she left on 22 February. Gill Thornton took over as Programme Director and Kerry as Assistant Programme Director on 1 March.

Gill Thornton gave a presentation at a Public Policy Exchange Webinar on Improving Public Health Services for Children Aged 0-5. She spoke about our programme design and how that leads to service improvement using Little Minds Matter as an example.

Kerry mentioned that NLCF colleagues visited Bradford to share the Programme Data Dashboard with us to check accuracy and whether it made sense. It will subsequently be shared at Partnership Board. Kerry commented that this is an exciting time and it is good to see this work coming together.

Following the shared learning event with the Royal College of Midwives in November 2023, all five A Better Start sites have contributed to a report for wider dissemination and influence. Learning from the Bradford partnership is well reflected throughout the report. There was also the Workforce and Communities Community of Practice and Bradford was well-represented, with our parents contributing. One parent spoke about her journey of how she applied for the HEY! Fund and has been successfully running her own mother and toddler group for the last five years. Following on from that, she spoke about her journey in becoming a Community Board member.

Kerry shared that the Reducing Inequalities in Communities programme is finishing, but some funding streams are continuing as business as normal and we are seeking clarification of the communication about this.

Gill Thornton said BSB have used a recruitment agency to try to recruit a Programme Manager, but after three weeks this has been unsuccessful, so we are about to advertise the role. This could be a job, a secondment or a freelance consultant. She asked all to share the vacancy with anyone who may be appropriate for the post. Gwen asked for the Programme Manager job description to be emailed around.

Action: Gill Thornton to arrange for the Programme Manager job description to be emailed out to the Partnership Board.

As previously mentioned, The HEY! Fund has lots of applications and projects, which is putting our community engagement team under pressure. Gill Thornton shared that we will be using a freelancer (one of our former Neighbourhood workers) to help with paperwork, monitoring and training.

Kerry then went through the Project Monitoring and Evaluation. Better Place are part of a substantial bid Bradford Trident are making to the Heritage Lottery to do with outdoor play.

Better Start Imagine are continuing to sign up families to the book gifting scheme and the families will be informed of the May 2024 cut-off date. Volunteers are leading some of the wraparound sessions like storytelling, which Kerry said is evidence of embedding.

Cooking for A Better Start ends on 31 March 2024 and HENRY (who deliver the project) are looking at potential opportunities for facilitators to deliver in the future, providing them with recipe cards.

Forest Schools are also part of Bradford Trident's Heritage Lottery bid. The current Innovation Hub research fellow is planning to present the project's findings at the very first Forest Schools Conference - 2024 Research Symposium in Liverpool in June.

For HENRY, Kerry said lots of work is going on in developing the revised Start for Life offer. On the Personalised Midwifery project, there are ongoing discussions about embedding the continuity model after our funding ends. We will be continuing relationships with the hospital and two BSB staff members are attending the Royal College of Midwives conference in June.

Breastfeeding Support has been awarded additional Start for Life funding, which Kerry said demonstrates how the service is embedding. The project is looking at options about expanding into a wider reach.

Kerry said on Little Minds Matter, that clinical referrals have 'skyrocketed,' which shows a need for the service. There are discussions with mental health commissioners about the project. For the Perinatal Peer Support service, discussions are ongoing about Start for Life transition with BSB funding ending at the end of this month.

Kerry commented that it is good to see BSB's Virtual Live Learning sessions continuing, with the next programme starting in May, with different sessions to the previous offer in February. There will be collaboration with key partners and a focus on Prevention.

BSB staff have been delivering Play workshops from an Early Years viewpoint, most recently to students at Bradford New College, and some nice quotes and evaluation scores were received from our future workforce.

Kerry said that BSB are supporting our VCS colleagues with the council cuts and changes to the Infrastructure Support provision.

Kerry proceeded to Marketing and Communications and mentioned posters by the team designed for various events and the Student Workbook developed for our midwifery student placements. We hold internal Learning Lunches to contribute to staff CPD and training opportunities.

Kerry then referred to News and Impact stories from our ESOL project and a new volunteer Doula who did her training at Shine. Our Family and Community Engagement team has been very busy and Kerry mentioned the great work they have been doing.

10. Any other business

A Community Board member had written in the Chat about wishing to participate in the Incredible Years Start for Life offer, but after being told her child was eligible, nobody had got back to her.

Action: Sola agreed to contact the relevant Incredible Years team about this.

Vipin thanked all for attending, especially those who are fasting, and we will avoid holding an evening meeting during Ramadan next year.

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

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is on Thursday 18 April 2024, via Zoom, starting at 9.30 am.

The meeting closed at 6.20 pm.