

**Better Start Bradford Partnership Board Minutes**  
**Thursday 12 December 2024**  
**Via Zoom**

**Meeting Started:** 17:30

**Meeting Ended:** 18:25

**Present:**

Samina Begum	Community Board member (Vice Chair, Chair for this meeting)
Vipin Joshi	Community Board member (Chair)
Sarah Hinton	Board Member, Bradford Trident
Gwen Balson	Community Board member (Vice Chair)
Becky McIlvenny	Community Board member
Gazala Taj	Community Board member
Ishaq Shafiq	Community Board member

**In Attendance**

Gill Hart	Funding Manager, National Lottery Community Fund
Justine Bowman	Finance Manager, Better Start Bradford
Vikrant Bhatia	Programme Manager, Better Start Bradford
Sophie Eveleigh	Contract & Implementation Officer, Better Start Bradford
Guy Dove	Senior Programme Administrator, Better Start Bradford

**Apologies for Absence:**

Josie Dickerson	Sara Ahern	Gill Thornton	Zakra Yasin
Kerry Bennett	Lisa Brett	Matt Sandford	Rizwana Jamil
Karen Tetley			

**1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**

Samina welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies. She explained that she will be chairing this meeting to give her the experience, then Gwen shall chair the January 2025 meeting.

Introductions were not needed as everyone knew each other.

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.

**2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 21 November 2024**

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

### 3. Matters Arising actions table

There is an action for Better Start Bradford to put on a Learning Together session about the Neighbourhood project, including co-production. Vikrant confirmed that our final programme event in March 2025 will focus on why co-production has been such a strong feature of the BSB programme and it will include learning from the Neighbourhood project. A draft event plan has been drawn up and a planning group has been established and will be meeting soon.

Vikrant said that progress is being made on the action to chase up our statutory partners about Partnership Board representation. We are expecting to have a Public Health representative and Gill Thornton has spoken to the Care Trust about them sending a representative and they are committed to this.

BSB have met with the Innovation Hub about their contract extension and a contract variation should be issued quite soon.

The HENRY Innovation Hub report is awaited (and needs to be sent out to the Partnership Board when it is available), but the Home-Start report was sent out with these meeting papers.

A link was included in the November meeting's minutes for the pledge to support the work of the Healthier Together Alliance in their work to support child health.

### 4. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

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

This was not covered in this meeting.

### 6. April – September 2024 accounts

Justine presented a report about the April to September accounts, which is saved here:



2024 11 18 Draft  
Finance report for Par

Justine said the underspend is close to the previous quarter's level of around 7.4 per cent of the budget. It was at 3 per cent, but we then received all the updated project reports.

Justine said for Management Revenue, we reviewed the previously discussed budget and improved it, which is why the underspend has dropped to 4.9 per cent.

Marketing and Community Engagement spend is expected to increase after 30 September 2024, due to items such as Baby Week and the celebration event at Bradford Cathedral.

Justine pointed out that Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning spend is zero – it was intended for the activities of the Workforce and Learning Manager but unfortunately, she resigned on appointment and the position is out for advert again.

Some projects have not reported yet – we are expecting the Innovation Hub to before Christmas, a Christmas deadline has been set for Bradford Douglas to report by or their budgeted monies will be reallocated, and we await one quarterly report from HENRY.

Justine commented that a general theme of recruitment and staffing issues applies to project underspend.

A contract extension for Little Minds Matter to April 2025 has been agreed, using brought forward monies, to allow the waiting lists to continue while discussions take place for a month. BSB await the business plan for Better Place's extension and Talking Together's final return as, after discussions, that project is unfortunately not being extended.

**Decision: The Partnership Board (subject to the consent of those members not present) notes and accepts the accounts for the period ending 30 September 2024.**

## **7. Update on Year 11 Finances**

Justine explained that at the next Finance Audit Sub-Committee meeting and the subsequent Partnership Board, she will present a projected position year end close and updated Year 11 budget. We are still finalising some staff positions and the most significant cost line in Year 11 is salaries.

Ishaq asked what our intention is for any project underspend identified. Justine confirmed that she has a running track of the level of unallocated funds at any time and is currently doing a reconciliation with the National Lottery Community Fund. This is why we do not want to give an updated Year 11 Budget today, and she has not yet finalised the Year 11 staffing position, which is a significant cost. The closure of the Talking Together project is also quite significant. Justine said she should be in a good position at the next Partnership Board to advise about underspend, what we are doing with it and is anything unallocated.

Ishaq noted the £250k underspend so far and suggested this could rise as there are lots of 'loose ends.' Justine said that part of the underspend is waiting for Better Place and there are various conversations between Gill Thornton and Kerry about use of any underspend. Ishaq asked at the next meeting for there to be an underspend agenda item for us with a more definitive underspend figure, to discuss with any intentions for it instead of just going through sub-groups. Justine confirmed that everything comes back to the Partnership Board

Vipin noted that the Finance & Audit Sub-Committee has asked for a breakdown of what the underspends are and a lot of it has already been allocated to projects that are continuing and there are some gaps between BSB and Start for Life funding and some of this is being funded by BSB. The Finance & Audit Sub-Committee do not have the final say, it is the Partnership Board. He noted that we will not be returning any money to the NLCF at the end of the programme and a lot of underspend will be used up during the extension. Guy wrote in the Chat that the next Finance & Audit meeting is in February.

## **8. ESOL for Pregnancy/ Infants contract completion**

Sophie gave a Powerpoint presentation which is linked to here:



Contract completion  
presentation ESOL.ppt

The project ran from 1 November 2016 to 30 June 2024 across three different contracts, and the final contract was amended to include ESOL for Infants.

Sophie said she can send out the ESOL manual on request that the course attendees used.

There were never as many participants as we wanted due to referral issues in the beginning and she mentioned 'gatekeeping' of the women and referrers changing jobs and locations frequently. The project is continuing without BSB funding, through Shipley College, in the BSB area and outside of it.

Gwen observed that looking at the Innovation Hub report, there were difficulties with collecting some of the data. She asked who was responsible for data collection, the tutor or somebody else. She recalled data collection issues in the Doulas project and wondered if it is a capacity or a capability issue.

Sophie replied that her understanding from project review meetings is that the women on the course did not complete the data collection sheets correctly, possibly due to the language barrier. Only two Shipley College staff were ever involved in the project – one staff member involved with the project left in April, and the other went on a very early maternity leave in May and there was not enough capacity in their team to follow-up data collection. It is a small value contract for Shipley College. Gwen remarked that a theme of the project is about collecting evidence and if we cannot do this, it makes us feel doubtful. Ishaq asked that as a data collection issue has arisen in different ways, we need to refresh or strengthen the monitoring procedures, so additional checks take place. There has always been issues about collecting ethnicity data for example and it is important to have a good rich overview which is comprehensive.

Vikrant said he will ensure this issue is picked up with the Innovation Hub and that the right approach is used to collect data. Samina commented that data collection is also down to partners and in the NHS and other partners, problems with data collection are flagged up anyway. This needs to come from the learning about how we invest, how we look at systems and how data is collected and projects need to put in enough capacity to do this. For qualitative and quantitative data, many policy makers want to see figures and data, not reflections, so it is very important we can get that. We will hopefully get some learning from that and see where the systems do not meet up.

Gwen said it is about who is responsible for data collection, who is monitoring it, there should be checks and balances to see if mistakes are coming through and she felt something is missing in the process.

**Decision: The Partnership Board (subject to the consent of those members not present) acknowledges that the funding period for the project has ended.**

## 9. Programme monthly report

Vikrant said there has been a successful start to the legacy contract, it is on track with its deliverables and a stakeholder event will be hosted by them on 30 January 2025 where they will give their views on the legacy options.

The seventh annual Baby Week has been hosted and over 30 free events were held aimed families with children aged from 0-3. At least 1,750 people engaged.

The A Better Start directors met with members of the early years funders' group, who are large charitable trusts and foundations who are interested in supporting early childhood projects. We shared our experience of delivering a big strategic programme in five different areas and discussed how the NLCF funding relationships worked. The joint aims included a vision of improving outcomes for children and families and a common outcomes collaboration going forward.

Little Minds Matter were highly commended at the recent Health Service Journal awards and BSB's Assistant Director attended the ceremony.

We met Dawn Lee of the Care Trust about the Talking Bradford pathway and how it can be moved forward. Vikrant said that BSB are an active partner of City of Culture, he attended a partnership meeting and discussed how there will be engagement with BSB groups, the importance of creative play and connecting with Baby Week 2025.

Vikrant mentioned the legacy consultancy provided by Community Action Bradford and District, engagement with stakeholders is on track and they have aligned with BSB's internal legacy groups and the consultants attended some of their meetings.

Vikrant referred to the recent Better Place quarterly review meeting and said the project has been a success, and the pop-up farms boosted regular attendance and use of Bowling Park, which is where they were held at. He reported on how the Home-Start project staff have made a positive link with antenatal education services at the BRI. The Happy Early Years fund is in its final round and a celebration event is being held at the Life Centre on 29 January. Over 200 groups were funded and will be invited – the project was originally Parents in the Lead from 2018.

The Innovation Hub have been successful in their bid to the Wellcome Trust, and they can follow-up the children in the BiBBS cohort for another eight years, through school readiness and into middle childhood. This will also allow them assess the longer-term impacts of the BSB programme, cost-of-living pressures on families and the impact of Covid. BSB took part in three Innovation Hub webinars last month.

BSB's Early Years Facilitator has received an award with a HEY! Fund Group (Wonder Tots) for their work with Rhyme Time and Stories and their support for Bradford Libraries and speech, language and communication.

Vikrant mentioned the posters and publicity produced by our Comms team, to publicise the webinars, International Men's Day and Winter Wonderland. We have continued workforce development by publicising the autumn Virtual Live Learning sessions. We have also worked with Better Place to produce publicity for their events.

There was a lot of media coverage of Baby Week, with Gill Thornton and Chloe interviewed separately on radio, which also covered the Baby Week event at Sedbergh and there was BBC coverage of the Holding Time breastfeeding sculpture in Bowling Park.

Vikrant moved on to key themes and messages and mentioned Baby Week and creating our website's dedicated pages on Play, press releases, and content for the big screen in City Park.

Our community engagement events included Play Streets, an oral health event at Communityworks and engaging with dads and male carers for a virtual live session.

Vikrant proceeded to Emerging Risks and Issues – Start for Life now has further funding awarded but there are discussions at a strategic level about how the budget is allocated locally for different projects. There will be an update at the next Partnership Board meeting.

Gwen mentioned the Workforce and Learning Manager role and that two people have left the role this year and Gwen was on both interview panels. She knows we are in difficult times and as the BSB programme is ending, people will be probably looking elsewhere for jobs and she wondered if BSB know why people are leaving the role.

Vikrant responded that staff movements are affecting BSB and we are working to ensure that the Workforce and Learning Manager vacancy is filled. BSB is finishing so staff will be looking for alternative employment with long-term job security. Our current Workforce and Learning Manager is also a midwife and is taking up a role as Learning Manager at Bradford Teaching Hospitals.

Justine agreed that people want the certainty of having permanent employment, there is the difficulty that charities face through funding challenges and people need a permanent position for mortgage applications.

Vipin commented that at most projects, when they are coming to an end, the staff will look for that certainty, to pay their bills and mortgages. As mitigation we have put in a retention payment, but this is outweighed by permanent employment at partners like the NHS, Public Health and the council.

Gwen suggested that as we get nearer the end of the programme and more staff might leave, there will be more underspend and how we would cope with ending the programme with the skeleton staff that might be left. Vipin said that Vikrant is working on the closure of the programme now and there is a plan about how many staff are needed to get to the end of the programme

Vikrant confirmed that BSB's senior leadership team are regularly reviewing staffing capacity and how to meet the requirements of the final stage of the programme. They try to address staffing issues on an ongoing basis and are working on a closure plan which will hopefully see us through until December 2025 without any problems.

Samina acknowledged the uncertainty around people looking for secure employment. It is good to see that the matter is being addressed for Year 11.

## **10. Any other business**

Vipin said it is good to see that Start for Life will be continue in some form, dependent on how much funding is allocated. Lots of staff and projects were concerned about Start for Life ending on 31 March 2025. BSB were supporting some of those projects and he hopes to hear of the actual amounts of funding.

Vipin thanked Samina for chairing the meeting. He reiterated that we are now letting the Vice Chairs chair the next few meetings, and Gwen will chair our next meeting.

Finally, Vipin asked if all felt they could participate in the meeting and all agreed that they could. He wished everyone a wonderful Christmas and looks forward to seeing them in the new year.

**11. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is on Thursday 16 January 2025, via Zoom, starting at 9.30 am.

The meeting closed at 6.25pm.