

**Better Start Bradford Partnership Board Minutes**  
**Thursday 27 February 2025**  
**Via Zoom**

**Meeting Started:** 17:30

**Meeting Ended:** 19:05

**Present:**

Vipin Joshi	Community Board member (Chair)
Sarah Hinton	Board Member, Bradford Trident (items 1 to 8 only)
Gill Thornton	Director, Better Start Bradford
Josie Dickerson	Programme Director, Born in Bradford Innovation Hub
Gwen Balson	Community Board member (Vice-Chair) (item 7 onwards)
Humera Mahmood	Community Board member (Vice-Chair)
Samina Begum	Community Board member (Vice-Chair) (item 6 onwards)
Becky McIlvenny	Community Board member
Karen Tetley	Community Board member (item 6 onwards)
Ludmila Novosjolova	Community Board member (items 1 to 8 only)

**In Attendance**

Gill Hart	Funding Manager, National Lottery Community Fund
Kerry Bennett	Assistant Director, Better Start Bradford
Vikrant Bhatia	Programme Manager, Better Start Bradford
Heather Fawcett-Jones	Contract & Implementation Officer, Better Start Bradford
Sophie Eveleigh	Contract & Implementation Officer, Better Start Bradford
Guy Dove	Senior Programme Administrator, Better Start Bradford
Soo Nevison	Chief Executive, Community Action Bradford & District (items 1 to 8 only)

**Apologies for Absence:**

Ishaq Shafiq	Salma Nawaz	Sara Ahern	Matt Sandford
Gazala Taj	Rizwana Jamil		

**1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**

Vipin welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies.

A round of introductions took place.

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 – 16 January 2025**

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. Gill Thornton said that now we have a Workforce and Learning Manager (Rachel Stanton) we are planning a learning programme and she has been talking to many people about how to do that, and this will include community engagement work and the Neighbourhoods work.

Next week, Gill Thornton is presenting at the Kings Fund conference and her presentation will focus on the Neighbourhoods work showing why locality work in neighbourhoods improves access to health.

The Innovation Hub's contract extension is being drafted and Gill Thornton said we are 'almost there' and we are corresponding with Josie and Sara to make sure it works for everybody.

The HENRY Innovation Hub report was sent out with the meeting papers.

## **4. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

This was not covered in this meeting.

## **6. Better Start Imagine contract completion**

Heather gave a Powerpoint presentation which is linked to here:



PB Contract  
completion presentati

Josie said the book gifting is highly impactful for the rest of the BSB programme. This is probably the project with the highest reach, the book gifting is tangible and seen as a benefit and it is highly recognisable as part of BSB.

Josie informed that evidence is still mixed about book gifting – wraparound activities are needed on top to help parents understand how to engage with the gifted books in age-appropriate ways. The activities also build parents' confidence in using and reading books with children at home, then it will have an impact. We do not know if book gifting on its own has a benefit and Josie heard feedback about parents waiting until their children can read to use the books. Both elements are needed for the project to work well.

Josie noted that there have been many challenges with the wraparound session. There was lots of learning with the team at BHT Early Education and Training about what they have done to improve uptake and engagement. Any future commissioning of book gifting needs the wraparound support right alongside it. The learning from this project is beneficial and is important.

The Innovation Hub are still looking at doing a study about the longer-term benefits if they can effectively track the engagement and participation in the wraparound activities. It has always been hard to know which children have been to more than one session for example as they are drop-in activities and not a formal intervention.

Two of the Community Board members wrote in the chat that the book gifting was amazing.

Vipin remarked that figures are phenomenal and the 87 per cent figure for Reach of eligible children was a great success. He said thanks are due to the project staff team and it is great to see figures like that. There is also the learning from the project to put out for everyone to share.

Gill Thornton agreed that the figures were phenomenal. 250,000 books were gifted and she would welcome Josie's proposed further work so we can draw on the way the project was delivered. BSB knew that the parents did not know what to do with the books with very young children, so that is why we did the wraparound activities and allowed the project to change those to respond to how they were working. There was also additional work with libraries.

Gill Thornton said the above would be the learning for our partners and for sharing our legacy. The infrastructure is all there and there is going to be a new 0-19 contract and a new contract for the pre-school 'stay and learn' project. There is also the work with libraries and museums and all those people could be part of the aim of getting parents and books together and supporting parents to share books with very small children.

The district will not be able to give a book a month to every family in the district but Gill Thornton said there are things the district can do, and there are things we would encourage them to do, using the learning from Better Start Imagine. She observed that it has been a great project and BHT have been a brilliant organisation to work with, in terms of their innovation and the way they drive forward what it is they are trying to do.

Gill Thornton said, replying to a query from Vipin, that the Imagination Library is still active in small pockets of the district like Canterbury, but mainstream funding is extremely unlikely as it would be very expensive (although not that expensive per family). Vipin asked about the Dolly Parton Imagination Library project continuing and Ludmila advised that some parts of it continue such as Canterbury Imagine. Josie suggested supporting places that are delivering this book gifting to do the add-on sessions so the children are getting the benefit from the books. It is 'hard to push' on its own but other areas have done it such as Wakefield, as part of their statutory services.

Vipin said we should try to spread the learning from the Better Start Imagine project if we cannot mainstream it and suggested mentioning the project at a Commissioning Advisory Group meeting to the new partners to see if they are willing to try this.

**Decision: The Partnership Board (subject to the consent of those members not present) approves that the funding period for the Better Start Imagine project has ended as scheduled on 30 September 2024.**

## **7. HIDVA contract completion**

Sophie gave a Powerpoint presentation about the Health Independent Domestic Violence Advocate project which is linked to here:



HIDVA contract  
completion.pptx

She noted that the HIDVA project was one of the Innovation Fund contracts which we held for three years. The contract was awarded to Staying Put who are part of the Survive and Thrive consortium. The main approach was to base the independent worker within the hospital Trust, to help build relationships with midwives and hospital staff, so they were able to refer to an early intervention. The HIDVA worker has also done some training sessions with other professionals, to give them the confidence to do early referrals.

Sophie explained that an early intervention would reduce the harm to the mother and the baby. The HIDVA worker based within the hospital would be visible to the midwives to make those referrals but would blend into the background and would not look like a different service.

Sophie explained that the HIDVA would mostly give the women short-term support and would refer them into longer-term support. They collaborate widely with all the different services that pregnant women would encounter including the police and solicitors.

The professionals that the HIDVA trained included midwives, nurses and social workers, all the people that we would expect to be involved at this time in the pregnancy and if the women are already known to other services.

30 per cent of the HIDVA's caseload are hospital staff – it was not just women in the district the project supported so it is a useful service that is based at the hospital.

The fact that 87 midwives made referrals confidently shows the value of the training the HIDVA gave about the referral criteria and so the midwives knew they were making the referrals at the right time.

Sophie said that the Director of Midwifery at the BRI noted our HIDVA project is an important service and staff have fed back how valuable it has been to have a HIDVA in the hospital with them. Unfortunately, the new contract awarded by Bradford Council to the Survive and Thrive partnership does not include the Maternity HIDVA specifically but there is positive hope for the role in the future.

Sophie explained that the Commissioning Advisory Group meeting last month was cancelled, so there is no recommendation from them, it is just a decision going forward.

Gill Thornton recalled that BSB were in conversation with the police for about two years before the project was set up and looked at many different options and ended up speaking to the

domestic violence co-ordinator for the district. Some of things they worked on included Operation Encompass which supports the child by contacting the people working with children and there was a gap in early years, but they were not ready to deal with this.

We chose the HIDVA model as the infrastructure was already there with Staying Put, there was a clear gap and there was a Maternity HIDVA at Airedale hospital already.

Gill Thornton recalled that the Partnership Board were very supportive of a domestic abuse project in the Innovation Fund. It responded to what the police was saying to us, it fitted in with the programme, and the HIDVA bid went into the final round of the Innovation Fund.

BSB have been part of the HIDVA discussions for the district. It is critically important as people are more likely to disclose domestic abuse if they are in a safe environment or with people looking after their wellbeing. The HIDVA worker is called 'independent' as they are entirely focused on the client and not working for their employer / other institution when they are looking after the client, so the client can have confidence that they are looking after their wellbeing.

Gill Thornton noted that three children were prevented from going into care by the project. They were potentially at risk from being removed from the home at birth due to the domestic violence. She used to sit on the Adoption Panel and has seen that happen many times, and the cost saved by the three children not going into care will pay for the HIDVA project and more over a period of time. She said it is a false economy to cut a service like this and the argument for Prevention must be made.

BSB will be supporting and talking about this work and even though it is not in the Public Health contract Gill Thornton is confident that the hospitals will pick it up. It is good to hear that another Innovation Fund project has made some major impact.

Sophie referred to the impact report from Staying Put that was emailed out with the meeting papers and she can arrange for a physical copy from the project if anyone requests one.

Vipin commented that funding a project like this was very important to the Partnership Board and there was 100 per cent approval when the idea was discussed as it was a much-needed service. Projects like this were funded by Bradford Trident but their funding ran out and it was good to see BSB took this project on, especially in the maternity wards and hopefully the hospitals will now take it on. We need to talk to Public Health about how this project has stopped children from going into care, which justifies the project itself.

Vipin said he always wanted this sort of project, as the people with the least voice are being made weak by people who think they are stronger than anybody else. It is important that we support projects like this, it made a difference and it should go into the mainstream and ensure it is sustainable for other organisations to pick up.

**Decision: The Partnership Board (subject to the consent of those members not present) approves that the HIDVA project comes to an end as scheduled by 31 March 2025.**

Vipin confirmed that the Partnership Board would write in favour of the project to external partners if required.

## **8. Update from Legacy Consultancy Stakeholder Event**

Soo explained that she is presenting the work done to date about the legacy consultancy, which Community Action Bradford and District were commissioned by us to do. They have done this work in partnership with an organisation called Participate, who are unable to attend this meeting.

Vipin asked Soo for a quick overview of the report that was sent out with the meeting papers.

Soo said the report is confidential but could be turned into a public document if the Partnership Board want after speaking to Gill, Kerry and Vikrant. The report is what BSB's Senior Leadership team have seen.

The report shows what the legacy consultants have done since September 2024. In three months, 189 interviews were done across all BSB stakeholders, including strategic engagement conversations, conversations with Board members and staff and with local families. An independent voluntary sector organisation from Calderdale was trained to ask the questions on behalf of CABAD with the families so this work would be seen as more independent.

The interviews explored involvement with the BSB programme, views on its impact, the legacy priorities and future beyond the programme. This included what is important to families with young children in the future. The findings are presented in the appendices to the report.

Soo said CABAD had seven recommendations, which were then reduced to four preferred options with BSB's senior leadership team and taken to the stakeholder workshop on 30 January 2025. At the workshop, the legacy contract process was presented with the feedback. One negative perception was that the legacy work started too late but it was explained at the workshop that in fact it started in 2022. It was a productive, positive workshop with lots of energy and people.

Three things have been identified to drive legacy forward. Ideas suggested at the workshop about the impactful closure theme should go to BSB's programme closure legacy group.

A celebration event should be held to mark all the good things have been done in the BSB programme. As much as possible of the positivity of the programme should be mainstreamed or should find another voluntary organisation or be picked up by an individual and run with.

CABAD have talked about mainstreaming, a consultancy organisation and a renewed partnership. They also picked out some key functions of BSB and have been reassured that the tables in the report that hold all the discussions would cover all the functions of BSB that its senior leadership team want to continue after December.

Phase 2 of the legacy contract would be around looking at the consultancy organisation. At the workshop there were lots of ideas about what people would like to see delivered through a social enterprise, but there were no natural entrepreneurs present.

Humera had asked about the proposal for a Social Venture School and Soo said this would a course for people who feel they have some entrepreneurial spirit to train them about setting up a social business or social enterprise. Some people on these would rather become a charity but if entrepreneurs are found, they could be given some individual coaching to help them take something forward.

Soo suggested opening the Social Venture School offer to the wider district with the BSB area a priority. A startup fund budget is also proposed and £500 might be enough for a social venture needing a small capital budget. There would also be some governance support including bid writing if someone wants to set up a charity.

For BSB's mainstreaming work, Soo said some nominal dates have been put in. CABAD would go into meetings as a neutral party if this is useful to BSB. Soo confirmed that Sam Keighley, CEO of the VCS Alliance, may be able to advocate for us in meetings where BSB are struggling to and Sam had been briefed about this.

Another recommendation is a renewed partnership. Soo remarked that we need to move on this quite quickly and explained that this would build on BSB's work about developing a 'thinking space' to be innovative and develop services. Soo said that at the workshop, some senior people and commissioners were keen on this, provided this partnership expanded to age 0-19 or age 25 for SEND, as we are in hard times and just focusing on a very narrow age group would be very difficult. This is about trying to persuade the system to look at the structure of the groups and Boards it has and freeing up people to put them into a 'thinking space'. This would prepare ideas so that when there are more resources, there would be something in place to run with. Soo stated that it would be something that would be exciting to develop and we should not put too many constraints on it.

Josie said she was on the supporting mainstreaming table at the stakeholder event, which identified what was already mainstreamed or could be quite easily. Some elements of the BSB programme are not mainstreamed nor 'anywhere' and reassurance is needed that is where the focus would be. There is buy-in and drive to move onwards into Prevention but she mentioned the strength of the community empowerment and the HEY! Fund as examples of things which are core and valuable but do not naturally 'sit' anywhere.

Soo said the above is correct and we would not need to interfere with things that are already mainstreamed and up and running. The HEY! Fund has had a big impact, but nobody wants to pick it up. To advocate for that on behalf of BSB, Sam Keighley is the sector leader running the VCS Alliance that gives out grants and CABAD hopes Sam can go to some of these forums (where BSB cannot) and say, 'you should build this into your funding every year'.

Some things overlap and some may never be mainstreamed, so maybe these could be turned into a social venture and an organisation could be set up to deliver them in the future.

Josie said this is less about the actual projects and more about core themes. We need to be clear about what is and what is not in there, so everyone understands the difference.

Gill Thornton said there was a broad collection of different perspectives in the report. There is lots we can pursue in terms of mainstreaming. The Partnership Board decided nearly a year ago to set up the legacy groups, which are doing their work now. We are having the right conversations so we can respond quickly to questions, and this is also about initiating and driving things. The support that has been offered by Soo will help us to do that more effectively and be more realistic. She feels more confident about having a BSB legacy that is more meaningful.

Vipin recalled that he and Gwen first discussed sustainability and closure in 2017/18. We do not want things to 'drop off a cliff' at the end of Year 10 as happens with some other community organisations. Soo said the 'external world' were not aware of these early discussions about

sustainability, so CABAD were clear at the stakeholder event about what is already happening. This helped the attendees to contribute rather than say it has started too late.

**Soo was then placed into the waiting room while the Partnership Board had a private discussion.**

Vipin asked if we wanted CABAD to proceed with Phase 2 of the legacy consultancy work and what BSB's thoughts are, as BSB had not done a paper about it.

Kerry said we need capacity to work with wider strategic partners to embed principles district wide, such as we have learned with the Commissioning Advisory Group's governance structure, with parents / carers as equal partners, which we are trying get as a core principle in the terms of reference for the Prevention and Early Help Board. It would be good to have influence and support through Sam Keighley who is on other influential boards and CABAD's. Kerry would fully support Phase 2 and the situation is time-critical and although some of the work is underway, there needs to be capacity to drive it through on a district level.

Vikrant confirmed that legacy group work has been happening already but Phase 2 would allow us to align that work with the further sustainability approach and allow a 'deep dive' into things such as a renewed partnership.

Vikrant said we must not miss out on Early Years as it might be diluted if we were to focus on age 0-19. Early Years must remain a key element.

Gill Thornton said that 'everything' is age 0-19, but the National Lottery Community Fund's new strategy focuses on early years due to the learning of the A Better Start programme. This is so important as everything that happens later in life is set then and if early years is not invested in, it is very easy to overlook it.

BSB have often argued for early years children to be included in the planning of services for young people and parents need to be there as the voices for early years children and babies not yet born. Our programme has demonstrated how important that is. Most people at our Board are parents and are involved in our programme and contribute at the same level as other partners. Parents can be trusted to make effective decisions as shown by our HEY! Fund in planning and delivering services. We need to continue to argue for this and this next Phase would allow us to do so more effectively, with some good support.

Gill Thornton said the other opportunity to develop the more business-like entrepreneurial work is also of value. She would support Phase 2 and observed that it would have been easy for a consultancy to just handover the findings but CABAD have put forward practical suggestions as to how they can support us with the next steps. Sam Keighley's suggested support is important and exactly what we need. Things have been lost in the past as the lots of people have changed and CABAD can help to get as many people as possible working on our side.

Josie commented that there is lots going on in the system and Prevention in early years (outside of nursery) is not entrenched. There is still a gap (though it is better than it was), which is why BSB was in that area.

Josie noted that we need our strategic partners here to decide about Phase 2 as it would involve them a lot and it is critical to have those conversations and have them on board before Phase 2 starts.



Gwen asked how we can get partners' buy-in. Gill Thornton said we are in a hurry and we will follow-up with a communication to the broader partnership. We need formal conversations with those people and CABAD will help with that. We will bring this matter to the next meeting and in the meantime, we will continue to do the legacy work.

Vipin agreed that we should see what the partners say before a final decision. Gwen said this was okay and leaving things at Phase 1 would be unfinished business.

Kerry wondered who the right person is to have those discussions with partners and Gill Thornton said we need to decide what we are going to say to partners and CABAD can help with that.

Vipin said we want to proceed with Phase 2, we need to decide who is the representation, talk to partners, find out their feedback and there should be these discussions before the next Partnership Board meeting.

**Soo returned to the meeting.**

**Decision: The Partnership Board agreed to proceed with Phase 2 of Community Action Bradford and District's legacy work (subject to the consent of our partners not at this meeting).**

**Action: BSB will continue with the discussions and keep us all updated and bring this matter to the next Partnership Board meeting.**

Soo said CABAD will need to get on with the renewed partnership work and need a quick decision. Gill Thornton mentioned that she hoped CABAD could help with the conversations with external partners that need to happen. Soo confirmed that CABAD have a list of people at external partners who want to support the legacy work.

## **9. Programme monthly report**

Vikrant went through the Key Highlights section of the report. He mentioned the HEY! Fund celebration event on 5 February. More than 162 groups were involved in the project since 2017.

There was a Family Hubs Start for Life event in Saltaire in January and he said the best part was the presentations by our projects, and BSB's support was acknowledged.

With the National Children's Bureau and other ABS sites, we have pressed the case for Start for Life and prioritisation of 1,001 Days. Other strategic work done included taking part in a national workshop to discuss the provisions in the Children's Wellbeing Bill.

Work is going on about our Commissioning Advisory Group becoming a district-wide forum.

There are handover conversations with our March leavers on the BSB staff team, including transition of work and handover of information. There are also handover meetings taking place with the Start for Life team, commissioners and project leads. These include information retention and future relationships and support needed after the BSB contract is closed.

Gill and Shummel presented at a joint ABS online annual conference. Vipin commented that this was a very good meeting.

Vikrant mentioned posters designed by our Comms team and their work on the legacy pages on our website. He also referred to our Family and Community Engagement team contributing towards a Health Event at the West Bowling Centre.

For our legacy group work, Vikrant mentioned that two of the groups have merged to better share our learning with the wider system.

Project Impact Reports are being finalised for all our projects.

Our Early Years Specialist collaborated with the Stronger Practice Hub at St Edmunds to deliver a webinar about the speech and language pathway.

Gwen asked for an update about the revised terms of reference for the Commissioning Advisory Group. Kerry replied that the system has changed direction about finding a home for the discussion and the commissioning of grant funds such as Start for Life and there has been pushback from other partners. However, the principles are not disputed, the issue is how it 'sits' within district-wide structures which are still developing. CABAD's work on a renewed partnership will help with this. Kerry feels positive that we will achieve what we originally said some time ago.

Gwen said we could highlight this if it is mainstreamed and Kerry mentioned the new terms of reference for the Prevention and Early Help Partnership Board. The Commissioning Advisory Group has allowed for such discussions about best practice and what we want to embed in our services.

Gill Thornton added that it is about ownership and location and BSB can make sure the Commissioning Advisory Group model is used. We need the voice of the service users to be in there effectively. We are negotiating where it 'sits' and are pursuing this with decision makers.

Vipin said we should make sure community engagement is in there. The last Commissioning Advisory Group meeting was cancelled as there were lots of apologies but the discussions can continue at their next meeting.

## **10. Any other business**

Kerry advised that this is the last Partnership Board meeting that Heather will be presenting to us (and Sophie's second to last). Vipin acknowledged the great support they had given to the Partnership Board and they have presented lots of reports to us and he thanked them on behalf of the Partnership Board and wished them well in the future.

Vipin asked everyone if they had felt able to participate in this meeting and all agreed that they did. He thanked all for taking the time to attend the meeting.

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

The next meeting is on Thursday 20 March 2025, via Zoom, starting at 9.30 am.

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm.