

**Better Start Bradford Partnership Board Minutes**  
**Thursday 24 April 2025**  
**Via Zoom**

**Meeting Started:** 09:35

**Meeting Ended:** 11:20

**Present:**

Vipin Joshi	Community Board member (Chair)
Jo Howes	Reducing Inequalities Lead, Reducing Inequalities Alliance, Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnerships
Gill Thornton	Director, Better Start Bradford
Abbie Wild	Start for Life Family Hubs Project Manager, Children's Services, CBMDC
Humera Mahmood	Community Board member (Vice-Chair)
Samina Begum	Community Board member (Vice-Chair)
Becky McIlvenny	Community Board member
Karen Tetley	Community Board member

**In Attendance**

Gill Hart	Funding Manager, National Lottery Community Fund
Carlton Smith	CEO, Bradford Trident (in place of Sarah Hinton)
Kerry Bennett	Assistant Director, Better Start Bradford
Sara Ahern	Programme Manager, Innovation Hub (in place of Josie Dickerson, items 1 to 9 only)
Vikrant Bhatia	Programme Manager, Better Start Bradford
Shummel Uddin	Community Engagement Manager, Better Start Bradford (item 9 only)
Guy Dove	Senior Programme Administrator, Better Start Bradford

**Apologies for Absence:**

Ishaq Shafiq	Salma Nawaz	Lisa Brett	Matt Sandford
Richard Padwell	Susan Claydon	Marium Haque	Jo Medd
Ophelia Rix	Soo Nevison	Sarah Hinton	Gwen Balson
Gazala Taj			

**1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**

Vipin welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies.

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 – 20 March 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 this can be removed from the action table. We are intending to do a podcast focusing on locality work, which will encompass the Neighbourhood project. The podcasts planning is going ahead and we will be starting work on those quite soon. They will have a similar style to the previous podcasts, with two presenters, probably Kerry and Zakra (former BSB employee) presenting, then having other people to speak about whatever the theme is. There will be more information about the podcast topics at our next meeting.

The Innovation Hub's new contract has been signed but is at the Hospital Trust as somebody there needs to agree it is okay.

The other actions to ratify the approval of the accounts and the completion of the Talking Together and Better Place contracts have been completed. So has the decision to ask Community Action Bradford and District to proceed with Phase 2 of their legacy consultancy work.

Future governance arrangements are on the agenda for this meeting (item 6).

## **4. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

This was not covered in this meeting.

## **6. Future Governance arrangements - update**

Gill Thornton went through the introductory paper that was sent out with the meeting papers which contains a reminder of what was discussed and decided at our last meeting.

Gill Thornton explained that it was agreed in our March meeting that there is no longer a Commissioning Advisory Group – the remaining contracts will be reported directly to the Partnership Board.

The Strategic Reference Group's function and purpose will also be merged into the Partnership Board and Gill Thornton confirmed that we will work hard to encourage strategic partners to support the legacy work.

There shall only be Partnership Board meetings every two months, but she said Board members will be encouraged to attend legacy group meetings or event planning meetings.

**Action: Better Start Bradford will send out a list of all the legacy group and event planning meetings to the Partnership Board.**

Gill Thornton displayed the revised governance structure and confirmed that we need to comply with the NLCF's requirements as our funder.



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Governance Structure:

The new element of the governance structure is the legacy working groups which is primarily where the operational part of the team is working, instead of on contracts and delivery. Information from these shall be fed into the Partnership Board, and through to Bradford Trident as the accountable body. The Finance & Audit Sub-Committee will be retained as we need that accountability for the finances and risk management. The Finance & Audit Sub-Committee will have oversight of any changes to the structures if there is anything specific that needs to be looked at.

Gill Thornton went through the revised terms of reference and said the change to the main purpose is that all the programme stages are completed and reported on to the partners and the NLCF. The membership is the same as set out in the Partnership Agreement and we would need the NLCF's approval to change this document. Gill Thornton explained that she made some changes last year, but only to update the terminology, e.g. it still referred to 'Big Lottery'.

**Action: For nominated deputies, BSB will ask all partners to confirm that their two names on the Agreement are correct. Meeting invitations will sent be out to them both.**

The terms of the Chair and the three Vice Chairs are confirmed to the end of 2025, as are the other Community Board members. The frequency of meetings is up to the Partnership Board, every two months but varied as necessary.

The revised terms of reference suggest a quorum of 40 per cent, which is 8 Partnership Board members, and we are no longer specifying who those members should be. The decision-making protocol is in BSB's programme implementation document and Gill Thornton explained that this was not included in the meeting papers as it very long, but the decision-making protocol can be shared on request. The protocol defines who makes what decisions, between the Partnership Board, the Director and Bradford Trident.

Gill Thornton went through some of Bradford Trident's decision-making powers, such as the employment terms and conditions of the staff. She then went through the Partnership Board's remit. Some changes have been made including confirming and communicating the progress towards the BSB vision and ensuring impact and learning is shared now being more of the overriding responsibility.

The Partnership Board would have to take decisions about high level operational issues, such as if BSB were to move premises. At this point we are signing off the programme delivery,

even though there are a couple of projects that are ongoing, and agreeing we are on the legacy stage of the programme.

The main Partnership Board business this year will be implementing and embedding decisions and plans for legacy work, and if we are partnering or supporting any funding bids.

Gill Thornton then shared the draft meeting schedule. We propose that there is a Partnership Board meeting in May, with a finance report being a standing item, as well as the legacy work, programme monthly report and events. She mentioned that our Finance Manager Justine is leaving at the end of May, but her predecessor Shaista's return (for two days a month until the end of the programme, flexible based on what we need) has been agreed with the Children and Families Trust where Shaista now works.

There will be no more 'getting to know you' sessions (item 5). Gill Thornton explained that we are not expecting much turnover in members and there have not been many volunteers to deliver this recently.

The July meeting will include an item about our October event, which will be over two days and is our big dissemination and celebration event. The following Partnership Board meeting will be in September and will cover any budget issues, the end of two contracts (Better Place and HABIT), an Innovation Hub report and Baby Week.

Gill Thornton explained that we will need a final Partnership Board meeting in November or December 2025. BSB will be flexible about this and we may need to have an additional meeting. The final meeting will contain final reports to do with programme closure, the Innovation Hub and finance. There will also be formally passing any BSB responsibilities on, so there is a clear owner or responsible organisation for this.

Other potential agenda items for Partnership Board meetings later this year include the data dashboard, any potential funding bids (such as future funding for Better Place), and risk management will be covered in September. We would also discuss any significant strategic developments.

Guy noted that as things stand, the May and July meetings would be morning ones and the September meeting would be in the evening and he asked if that would be okay with everyone.

**Action: BSB will circulate the draft meeting schedule for comment and we will try to avoid clashes with any strategic partner meetings.**

Vipin noted that we have two strategic partners attending today. This meeting is inquorate (though only just). He said he does not want Partnership Board meetings that are only every other month to be inquorate. We should monitor attendance next month and maybe reduce the quorum size again.

Jo said we need to do some lobbying and encouraging of partners to attend. She thought that the forward plan that Gill Thornton outlined should be okay. Our meeting today clashed with the Prevention and Early Help Board, which was cancelled at very short notice. Carlton remarked that being inquorate is a risk and suggested we drop the threshold to 35 per cent now (7 members) and this was agreed.

**Decision: The Partnership Board (subject to the agreement of those members not present) agreed to reduce the quorum to a minimum of 35 per cent.**

Vipin commented that lots of work has been done on the future governance arrangements and he thanked everyone involved on the BSB team for this.

## **7. Embedding learning and principles from the BSB Partnership**

Kerry explained that Soo Nevison had sent apologies so she will cover this item.

An action was to go to the Commissioning Advisory Group to discuss its future, embedding its principles in a future district-wide structure, so we do not lose all its learning. Conversations about this have been going on for some time but the last Commissioning Advisory Group meeting was cancelled and we are combining its agendas with the Partnership Board's.

In the paper, CABAD are outlining Phase 2 of their legacy work, following all the interviews and the workshop at Park Lane, which includes them helping BSB with embedding learning.

Kerry said there is an appetite to have a district wide 'space,' which the Commissioning Advisory Group could fill, to include co-production, community members having a strong voice, influencing developments and co-design. Some strategic partners have confirmed that they would be interested and there is a meeting about it on 1 May. The district-wide Commissioning Advisory Group would need to complement, not duplicate other meetings that it would sit alongside and be clear about its purpose, adding value and answering the 'so what' question, while keeping its principles.

Kerry said CABAD's paper notes that there are models elsewhere with parents and community members as strong voices, of parent panels, NHS listening events, but we would not be duplicating other meetings and will work with our partners to shape that.

Kerry explained that today's briefing is to outline CABAD's legacy plans and proposals, a progress update. Soo will update the Partnership Board on progress in this next phase of the legacy contract.

Jo felt that this is starting to take shape and there are examples of where a district-wide 'space' would work, such as with 1,001 Days. We need to consult on the form and purpose but she said there is a need for a 'space' and it is obvious to Jo that there is nothing happening anywhere else to get a collective response.

Carlton asked who would 'own' a district-wide Commissioning Advisory Group after January 2026 and drive it forward. Kerry replied that this is the discussion we are having with Soo and strategic partners and the group must align with other established structures, strategic boards and have a strong community voice influencing and feeding in.

Carlton then enquired if this new group would be open to both strategic partners suggesting programmes, as well as community members and voluntary groups. Kerry confirmed that it would and the principle would be working as equal partners to have informed discussions, with the community involvement being embedded and not tokenistic. We have seen this work well in the Commissioning Advisory Group.

Gill Thornton added that commissioners and service users would be brought together, as done at the Commissioning Advisory Group for ten years. Expertise is needed to inform commissioning and service development decisions. She said that if Bradford gets this right, there would be a strong case for government investment. She also mentioned the new Dame Andrea Leadsom 1,001 Critical Days Foundation, which is looking for places to deliver the ambitions she is developing with an integrated approach and parent/child voice.

Vipin reflected that previously he had seen lots of people working in little silos, but now with BSB there is more collective working and embedding, influence over commissioning, and we have made a difference to what is happening in Bradford today and we need to remember that.

## **8. Innovation Hub annual update**

Sara gave a Powerpoint presentation and explained that the Innovation Hub have not updated the Partnership Board for a year. She will update us about what they have prioritised over the last 12 months, take stock of where they are, then their priorities for the BSB extension period.

Recruitment to the BiBBS cohort ended in July 2024 (not January 2024 as shown on the slide). 4,528 unique mums were recruited and 5,697 unique pregnancies (Sara explained that many of the women in the cohort had multiple pregnancies). 5,333 children were recruited and Sara said this was an amazing achievement. Her team have exceeded their 5,000 children milestone and are grateful to their community research team who did all the recruitment.

Sara said that linking the data is very complex and takes much work. Some BSB projects were good at collecting data and so Sara's team can link service users on their NHS number. Some projects were better than others at data collection and Sara described her data team's 'fuzzy matching' process. The process is now complete and Sara confirmed that the Innovation Hub can do key effectiveness evaluations for some BSB projects.

Sara informed that the baseline questionnaires completed by mums during pregnancy have all been linked and 'cleaned.' These can be used in evaluations and other things to understand more about the BiBBS population.

Routine data collection is an ongoing process and as children get older, the maternity and health visitor data are done and there is a link to education data, to feed into the evaluations.

The Innovation Hub have delivered 63 evaluation reports and 18 final project reports (many using more than 7 years of data) plus appendices. 11 articles have been published and 8 more are being prepared or they are planning to write them.

Sara then updated the meeting about five key evaluations (effectiveness and cost-effectiveness). Baby Steps and Personalised Midwifery's evaluations will be finalised in two months, though Breastfeeding Support's evaluation will not be ready until September 2025 as its data recording was more complicated than expected. For the HENRY and Incredible Years evaluations, Sara explained that enough children need to reach age 5, which will be in 2028.

Sara proceeded to community engagement work. 46 Community Research Advisory Group meetings have been held to date, with 6 during 2024/25. She said this is a well-established, confident group, helping to shape evaluations and research and is integral in the Innovation

Hub's plans. They will continue to facilitate the CRAG and she stated that it is an important part of BSB Innovation Hub work, with such a strong community voice shaping the research.

For sustainability, there is working with local key partners and embedding approaches that have been developed. An example is discussing theory of change with the infant feeding network in their planning for their next strategy for Bradford and supporting Start for Life evaluations. There is a plan to make toolkits more useable and relevant to other organisations.

On shared learning, 44 journal articles have been published so far (with more being prepared), and 3 non-journal articles, plus blogs published and evaluation reports. Three webinars were delivered last November about BSB key outcome themes to over 100 delegates, including to academic colleagues from across the UK. Very many conference presentations have been delivered and evidence and policy briefings have been produced.

Sara turned to funding commitments and there is the BSB extension, there is additional NLCF funding for the longer-term effectiveness evaluations, and the Wellcome Trust are funding BiBBS cohort research in primary schools to age 7-8, to understand more about middle childhood. Sara also mentioned a funding bid put into the National Institute for Health and Care Research about engagement in parenting programmes of more vulnerable groups.

For the BSB extension, the Innovation Hub will be working on legacy, impact and system change, working on the toolkit, sharing learning from evaluations, feeding in at a strategic level. On systems change, they will be evaluating BSB impact on the early years system in Bradford and will be interviewing key partners about it. The Innovation Hub will develop recommendations from this about maximising influence and impact.

Sara mentioned the NLCF funding to March 2028 which will cover key milestone periods for children's outcomes, so the Innovation Hub understand more about the longer-term impact. BiBBS Achieve starts in April 2025 and Sara said it will probably be the UK's most diverse cohort, the only UK birth cohort that recruited before, during and after Covid and the world's first interventional cohort. The Innovation Hub could go to the Wellcome Trust saying so much more could be done about learning.

The Innovation Hub will be able to link to routine data in middle childhood which Sara said is a 'blind spot' about understanding children's development. They will look at how systemic shocks such as the cost-of-living crisis and Covid impacted on children's development and school attainment. There will also be qualitative work done with parents and families.

The Innovation Hub will try to feed in at national and international level and be collaborative with international cohorts on BiBBS Achieve to look at how combinations of interventions may be optimal for children's development.

Sara said for the NIHR parenting intervention piece, a bid has gone in to use BSB project data to trial strategies, to see what works, what does not and who it works for.

Sara said all the above has only been possible because the Innovation Hub were BSB's evaluation partner and it is an amazing legacy.

Samina noted that Sara has mentioned CRAG and suggested a paper be published about how they were involved with decisions with Born in Bradford and BSB and a community model of public involvement. Sara said that this was an important point and there are logs of

decisions, and how CRAG have shaped those and she agreed there should be some way of reflecting that. Samina observed that communities would like feedback about the impact of their involvement and they often do not get the findings. Sara confirmed that the sharing of learning in the BSB extension period will include the community as well as at the strategic and academic level.

## 9. Community Engagement annual update

Shummel gave a Powerpoint presentation which is linked to here:



FACE team  
presentation for the B

He explained that BSB's Family and Community Engagement team now consists of himself and Sofia. Arian (who did a lot of dads' work) and Saira both left in March 2025 as their contracts came to an end.

Saira was a freelancer and managed all our Happy Early Years projects and Shummel said she did a fantastic job. A few HEY! Fund projects are still running for another couple of months. BSB worked with different under-represented groups such as African and Eastern Europeans and HEY! Fund groups were run by parents from these backgrounds.

Shummel turned to events and mentioned a dads' online live learning session which looked at how to interact, approaches and potential barriers such as language and dates and times of sessions and the importance of engaging with this audience. Having a dad or male figure involved helps the development of the child.

Shummel said there are some great BSB success stories from service users, showing powerful impact. He then mentioned the Neighbourhood Workers celebration event, and in the Neighbourhood project, BSB worked in partnership with established community groups. The Neighbourhood Workers were a first point of contact for local families and from 2019-2023, over 2,000 families were reached and over 900 referrals to BSB projects were made.

Shummel mentioned the Big Messy Play event, which was in partnership with Play Bradford at the Big Swing, which is outside of the BSB area. Over 30 of our families attended and some of them did not know that the Big Swing existed. He said that Play Bradford has now seen the importance of early years, and now there are weekly age 0-5 'Adventure Tots' sessions.

BSB hosted the final Workforce and Community Engagement community of practice, which included people from other A Better Start sites, the National Children's Bureau and the NLCF. They met some HEY! Fund groups, visited a Better Place outdoor session and some Better Place sites. Shummel said that there was some great feedback.

BSB helped local communities and parents to deliver Play Streets. This is when part of a street is closed to traffic for a few hours and creates a safe space for children to play outside. It is a good opportunity for neighbours to get together and it raises community spirit.

Shummel said that project summary posters for HEY! Fund projects were used at a HEY! Fund showcase event and a celebration event in February in the Life Centre. There was a panel discussion at the celebration event (which over 140 parents and children attended), at which

the future was discussed and we reassured the audience that we will be around until the end of 2025 and will be supporting families with any transition. Shummel shared some feedback, including from a parent about how grateful she was for BSB enabling her to lead a group.

Shummel then referred to *Insight* articles written about dads' work, the Neighbourhood project and the HEY! Fund which were published online.

For sustainability of the groups after 2025, CABAD have provided tailored support sessions about governance, fundraising, safeguarding and confidentiality. Five groups have been sustained so far and Shummel said it is good to see them continuing.

Shummel said BSB will 'shout about' what we have achieved over the last nine or ten years, the impact on communities and families. He then played a video from the HEY! Fund celebration event. Samina and Becky wrote in the Chat about the lovely feedback and how impactful the community engagement has been.

Gill Thornton noted that the HEY! Fund initiative came from the Partnership Board, to put trust in the parents on the HEY! Fund panel. Some of them have been on the panel for years and stuck with it and it was quite a demanding job and she wished to thank them. It was proven that we can trust people to do something as meaningful and important as this and she wished to thank the parents.

Jo shared that she tried to put this idea of parent-led groups forward at the Healthy Children and Families Board last week. Nagina at the Integrated Care Board is keen about what can be done, especially for SEND children. Jo suggested that Nagina talks to BSB about the service design, enabling parents to set up groups.

Jo also said that the ICB are focussing on men out of work and she suggested that their community involvement team speak to Shummel about engagement with harder to reach dads.

Vikrant said the impact report about the HEY! Fund will be sent to Jo when it is done and Gill Thornton added that this will contain the details that Nagina needs.

Vipin observed that it has been proven that if we give the community the opportunity, they will be able to deliver and it helps if the paperwork is made simpler. The HEY! Fund idea was something the Partnership Board came up with, it has been proven that it works and it is good to see there will be sustainability after our programme finishes.

## **10. Programme monthly report**

Vikrant explained that some items in the report had already been covered in this meeting.

A key highlight is that Bradford Teaching Hospitals are using the 'blueprint' from our Personalised Midwifery project for the new Jasmine team of continuity of care midwives.

Gill Thornton joined a meeting with Andrea Leadsom about the launch of her new early years foundation. She also spoke at an Exploring Play Sufficiency webinar with the Local Government Association about the importance of involving the community in decisions around early years play provision and gave Better Place as an example.

The A Better Start directors met with the Department for Health and Social Care about the national health visitor review. Gill Thornton spoke about the MECOSH project and the strengths of the prevention approach, empowering of practitioners and parents and the benefits around this.

Vikrant mentioned that the National Early Years Community of Practice came to Bradford for a study visit and looked at Bradford's early years eco-system.

BSB met the West Yorkshire Combined Authority about the early years workforce and how learning from BSB could feed into their planning.

Gill Thornton attended a local workshop about planning and joint commissioning of services and flagged up that prevention is an essential element and that the VCS and parent / youth voices needs to be included in this.

Vikrant mentioned that the BSB staff team attended an away day at Another World of Adventure in Halifax earlier this month and discussed the planning of the final stages of the programme. Handovers have taken place with staff who left BSB in March, and the new staffing structure is now in place.

Vikrant confirmed that our Start for Life projects ended on 31 March 2025 and we are looking at the Quarter 4 monitoring and providing SystemOne support with the end of project data and any transition work. Abbie noted that the Start for Life projects shall be continuing for another year, as they have another year's funding.

HABIT (our oral health project) is having a no cost extension to 30 September 2025 to allow a second academic paper to be published.

Vikrant mentioned the completion of our student midwife placements and the attendance of our Maternal and Early Years Specialist at a Women's Health conference. Our Director and Programme Co-ordinator also attended a Northern Race Equality conference.

We were able to support Family Action in applying for further funding for Maternity Circles.

Vikrant mentioned the marketing and publicity material designed by our Comms team which have been well received.

A joint article by all five ABS sites has been published in Children and Young People Now about collaborative projects laying strong foundations for the best start to life.

Vikrant then mentioned some of the events attended by our community engagement team, such as a community Iftar at a local school, events for World Book Day and International Women's Day.

Vikrant confirmed that our learning and legacy programme is in force and key milestones include legacy learning packages, learning toolkits, an end-of-programme video, podcasts, presentations, webinars and the two-day conference in October. Horizon-scanning continues, to find opportunities to share our learning, embedding our workforce and programme aims post-December 2025 and giving development opportunities to staff.

Our closure activity plan is being regularly reviewed. There is joint working with the Innovation Hub, who are attending many of our legacy group meetings and talking about data aggregation.

We are aligning the work of our legacy consultants with our legacy working groups and they are invited to all the meetings. Vikrant mentioned some of the activities planned, such as Social Venture Schools.

Planning is underway for a celebration event / conference in October as part of the learning plan and project impact reports are being written and reviewed by our senior leadership team.

Vipin commented that it has been a busy month.

#### **11. AOB**

There was no other business.

Vipin asked everyone if they had felt they had the opportunity to participate in this meeting and all agreed that they did. He thanked all for attending the meeting and Gill Hart for the NLCF funding.

#### **12. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is on Thursday 22 May 2025, via Zoom, starting at 9.30 am.

The meeting closed at 11.20 am.