

Better Start Bradford Partnership Board Minutes
Thursday 22 May 2025
Via Zoom

Meeting Started: 09:30

Meeting Ended: 10:40

Present:

Humera Mahmood	Community Board member (Vice-Chair, Chairing this meeting)
Sarah Hinton	Board Member, Bradford Trident (item 5 onwards)
Jo Howes	Reducing Inequalities Lead, Reducing Inequalities Alliance, Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnerships
Gill Thornton	Director, Better Start Bradford
Jo Medd	Service Manager Joint Commissioning, Children's Services, CBMDC
Gwen Balson	Community Board member (Vice-Chair) item 4 onwards
Samina Begum	Community Board member (Vice-Chair) items 1 to 4, and 6 only
Becky McIlvenny	Community Board member
Karen Tetley	Community Board member

In Attendance

Gill Hart	Funding Manager, National Lottery Community Fund
Kerry Bennett	Assistant Director, Better Start Bradford
Sara Ahern	Programme Manager, Innovation Hub (in place of Josie Dickerson)
Vikrant Bhatia	Programme Manager, Better Start Bradford
Guy Dove	Senior Programme Administrator, Better Start Bradford

Apologies for Absence:

Vipin Joshi	Salma Nawaz	Lisa Brett	Matt Sandford
Carlton Smith	Susan Claydon	Marium Haque	Rach Stanton
Josie Dickerson			

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Humera agreed to act as Chair as Vipin had sent apologies. She welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted all the apologies.

Introductions were not needed as everyone knew each other.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 24 April 2025

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising actions table

The Innovation Hub's new contract has been signed but still is at the Hospital Trust as somebody there needs to agree it is okay. Sara Ahern confirmed that she is chasing this.

Gill Thornton confirmed that a list of Better Start Bradford legacy group meetings has been sent out. Some Board members have attended some of the meetings and they are very welcome.

Gill Thornton wrote out to all BSB's partners asking them to confirm the Partnership Agreement and to provide updates for this meeting. She has had one response, from Children's Services, and Richard Crane, Assistant Director, will be their representative on the Board. She noted that the request only went out recently and this work is ongoing.

The draft meeting schedule for the Partnership Board was circulated and the decision to reduce the quorum to 35 per cent was ratified.

4. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Events and Learning Update

Vikrant explained he is presenting this update on behalf of BSB's Workforce and Learning Manager, who could not attend today.

BSB's Embedding Learning and System Change legacy group meet every two weeks. Vikrant then went through its purpose and objectives and its milestones/actions between now and December.

Vikrant confirmed that BSB shall send out full details of the learning sessions we are planning.

Gill Thornton noted that all the Partnership Board have had the update Vikrant just presented sent through to them previously and this will be an ongoing area to be reported on. Several items were rated as 'Red' which she felt was incorrect – these items are not expected to happen yet and are not 'behind', they have just not started yet. Gill Thornton confirmed that BSB are on target with embedding learning and our legacy groups.

Kerry added that BSB's staff are a reduced team to what it was and there is lots of work going on, including in the sub-groups of the workstreams that Vikrant outlined and she would ask that the Partnership Board recognise that. Gill Thornton noted that we have had two unexpected staff leavers and BSB have asked for some support from Sarah Wilson, a consultant who the Partnership Board have met, to look at where the gaps are and the key pressures and how to mitigate those.

6. Strategic Update

Gill Thornton gave a PowerPoint presentation which is saved here:



Strategy Update.pptx

She shared that BSB have done an audit of our strategic work and there are a lot of things that we are involved in, locally and to some extent, nationally. Gill Thornton gave a reminder of our strategic objectives, to look at how much progress we have made and to understand where we still need to do some work.

Gill Thornton explained that she has highlighted the first strategic objective, 'We will maintain an effective and committed partnership of community and public system representatives,' and we inserted the word 'committed.' This is because BSB need to make sure that strategic partners are still contributing to (and hopefully, benefitting from) our programme. We recognise there are challenges with getting people to these meetings and this is something we still need to work on.

The next three strategic objectives, such as to deliver a comprehensive system of community engagement are all things that BSB have delivered and are continuing to deliver to some extent.

The objective about establishing an effectiveness evaluation for the programme and every project (in partnership with the Innovation Hub) already includes ten years of work and will continue until the end of this year for us and for another eight years for Born in Bradford. Gill Thornton explained that this is highlighted on the slides as it is work that is not finished.

The next objective about leading a change in practice at all levels, by championing an evidence-based approach and disseminating learning is also highlighted as this will be important work for BSB this year.

The next four objectives all relate to work we have done and are continuing to do. Gill Thornton noted that there is some pressure on capacity in the BSB staff team and we are having another look at this and are getting some external support, making sure we have the right people in the right places and are addressing gaps.

Gill Thornton proceeded to a slide about local partnerships and said it only shows a 'small snapshot' and she has 1½ pages of things BSB are involved in locally, working with partners to help deliver the local objectives and make sure our work is included in those.

Kerry noted that some people attending this meeting are involved in some of the groups. The overarching group is the Principle 1 (covering early years and outcomes) Operations Group, which has many partners. BSB are trying to influence the workstream, using the data and the evidence available, to understand what it is telling us, to be able to use it across systems, to build on work already done and make it fit for purpose. This is for the systems we are working in, to drive commissioning, service design and delivery.

This working group is built on a partnership approach, is using data to inform service delivery and keeps the principles of Prevention and makes sure it is not diluted.

Kerry shared that BSB are hoping to take a presentation to the Healthy Children and Families Partnership Board at their August meeting, with the Innovation Hub, about theory of change and solutions and update them, feed in BSB learning and align with wider strategic ambitions.

Gill Thornton noted lots of 'crossover' with the Prevention and Early Help System Board and that is where some of the discussions about the renewed partnership will happen.

Gill Thornton said we are also trying to get learning from our projects to the Start for Life Steering Group and the Start for Life national processes, which we can feed into.

There are other sub-groups of Best 1,001 Days that BSB is involved with, such as the Breastfeeding Network and Every Baby Matters. BSB are adding our learning and capacity to some groups through staff time and some funding. We are involved in the development of the new Children's Plan and the Child Friendly District, including their 'Play Group' sub-group.

Gill Thornton noted that it is not just Kerry and herself who are involved with these strategic groups, there is our Community Engagement lead and our early childhood specialists.

She mentioned the Education Alliance for Life Chances, whose focus is building health hubs in schools, but we are supporting developing some of their Act Locally work, with our experience of doing co-production in a place-based way. Other groups we are involved with include Community Partnerships and other steering groups in the district, developing strategic discussions about the commissioning of age 0-19 and breastfeeding services, and there is also our MECSH (enhanced health visiting programme) experience.

Gill Thornton said that Better Place (for which we are helping to try to secure more funding), are at the top of the list for supporting system change. This is because external partners state it is a good example of how to do urban environmental improvements with local people and bringing them into green spaces. It is being used as an exemplar, mentioned in regional and national reports and conferences. Adele has spoken at some places and Gill Thornton is speaking at a Nature Town and Cities conference in two weeks' time. Nature Town and Cities also involves a funding bid in which Bradford has reached the next round. This is not led by Better Place (it is the Landscapes Division) but Better Place will support it.

Gill Thornton said how important the work we are doing with Better Place is and how she wants to make the most of it while we can and leave a strong legacy behind.

Samina wrote in the Chat about the important impact the environment has on health and wellbeing.

Kerry mentioned the Talking Bradford Pathway and said BSB are still committed to embedding this. It is on the FYI (Families and Young Persons Information) website and demonstrates the offer across the system. There needs to be confirmation about how we continue to support the pathway and secure its sustainability and we need buy-in from partners and we will continue to try to influence that. Gill Thornton remarked that hopefully, speech and language will be added to the Start for Life programme and that will align with what we have done locally.

Jo Medd asked if Talking Bradford is in the Healthy Children and Families Board's Principle 1 and Kerry confirmed that it is. A business case has been submitted for support or funding capacity and Gill Thornton added that this funding will hopefully happen.

Kerry said for Baby Week, BSB are working with Public Health, who have a significant gap relating to early years in their campaigns. Some staff who worked at BSB have gone over to Public Health or to other key partners. Hopefully, BSB will co-chair the Baby Week 2025

steering group and look at a sustainable model for Baby Week with a partnership approach, and Baby Week shall be a key early years campaign for the district.

Gill Thornton proceeded to regional strategic influence and noted that BSB worked with the Integrated Care System from its beginning. She mentioned the fellowship schemes at the ICS which BSB have supported, and some of our staff have been part of these schemes and one has been a mentor.

We are also working with the Stronger Practice Hub which supports the early years workforce and providers, including bringing childminders together into the workforce.

The National Children's Bureau is still bringing A Better Start directors together to respond to requests for learning from the ABS programme. Gill Thornton mentioned a recent meeting with Department for Education Ministers who asked for more information about speech and language and community involvement.

BSB are looking to speak at some conferences and have already done so at some, such as Kings Fund, and have participated in some workshops.

Jo Howes said the Integrated Care Board are going through a period of change. They do not yet know which personnel will remain and what the ICB's focus will be, though she knows that they will be turning into a strategic commissioner. A consultation period starts in mid-June and what is decided may affect participation with partnerships such as with BSB, when they are able to see what their core functions will be.

Jo Howes mentioned that some things will be moving out into provider collaboratives, some of which will be neighbourhood providers and a shift from providing services at the hospital into communities. She said there is some 'hope,' as well as it being a period of change and asked partners to bear with the ICB. She suggested looking at the West Yorkshire ICB website where there is a statement about what they think they will look like.

Jo Howes then mentioned other work going on, such as on Black women's maternal health, which BSB's Maternal and Early Years Specialist is supporting. There are also Maternity Circles enhancements, which is part of BSB's learning, and Jo Howes said she is hoping for these to be sustainable and to start including clinical input.

New ICB work includes pregnancy notifications into Family Hubs which Kerry will be asked to support, supporting Family Hubs to know where pregnant women are. Obstetricians will hopefully help with this though Jo Howes said their focus is on the big rise in gestational diabetes and BSB learning about diet and nutrition could help with this.

Jo Howes then gave an update on behalf of Public Health and said the infant nutrition strategy (formerly breastfeeding strategy) is up for renewal. Learning from Sara Ahern's team is being used and they are hoping to include Starting Solids, Healthy Start vouchers and vitamin D into the strategy. She confirmed that breastfeeding will be included.

Public Health have noted a gap in provision in speech and language and Jo Howes said conversations are going on about it and options have been put forward. She also shared that a Play and Learn contract has been awarded to a provider but this is not public yet.

Jo Medd shared that there are two reviews going on in Children's Services. One is of the Public Health Nursing service. Jo Medd said we need to see how the government's commitment to early years 'plays out,' her team are consulting the workforce and stakeholders about health visiting and school nursing, then her team will work on a specification for the Public Health Nursing 0-19 service.

The second review is the commissioning of early help services, which are under review. Jo Medd said this has a broad remit and includes family support contracts and how to deliver within the new early help transformation that has happened over the last year. Children's Services are also looking into additional contracts around emotional resilience and some targeted specialist services. They will try to have an overarching consistent approach to how family support is delivered through the Family Hubs. She mentioned an outcome-based accountability approach that is being taken.

Jo Medd turned to Start for Life and referred to the slowness of government indications about how it will all fit together and future funding decisions. Senior leaders in the district are looking at children's commissioning closely in a monthly meeting and keep up to date with national developments.

The Little Minds Matter project is now with the ICB and want to secure longer-term funding.

Jo Medd hopes that the first draft of the 'data snapshot' exercise that is going on will come today, to support the two reviews and the wider work that is going on around the outcomes framework.

Jo Medd said she hoped to strategically keep the 'join-up' between the various Boards, which is challenging with the ICB changes that are going on, trying to embed things across the system.

Gill Thornton mentioned the monthly commissioning group that Jo Medd referred to and will contact her separately about this and about allowing us to comment and feed in. Jo Medd clarified that this group is more about practical things, such as who is funding which work but it needs a strategic picture and insight and she would be happy to feed Gill Thornton's thoughts in.

7. Programme Status Report

Vikrant noted the key work going on about legacy learning groups and attending events locally and nationally, to ensure our learning is shared across the system.

Gill Thornton attended an NCB summit which brought together representatives from across the early years' sector, to help shape the 'vision' for babies. Gill Thornton referred to the NCB's report on the conference on their website, and here is the first photo on it, talking to the chief executive of the Parent-Infant Foundation. She said it was a very good conference and there is some follow-up from it.

Gill Thornton also attended a 'Woman of the North' summit, to contribute learning from the BSB programme for discussions about women's health and inequality in public systems. Kerry went to the Institute of Health Visiting conference to promote excellence in practice around health visiting and to spread learning from the BSB programme.

Vikrant said there are three legacy groups. The programme closure legacy group's key activities over the last month include the reviewing of the closure risk register. There is a contract log and the aim is that when we close, all our contractual documents are held in one place should anyone want to access them in the future. Work is going on to contact our projects and giving them some guidance about retention of paperwork and where the Data Controller's responsibilities lie.

Project Impact Reports are being written and reviewed and should be finalised by June 2025. We are supporting projects that are using SystemOne with anything they need as they transition to Start for Life's system.

There are regular discussions going on with Bradford Trident as lead organisation to clarify any named and legal responsibilities post December 2025.

Vikrant noted for the Stakeholder Engagement legacy group, we try to ensure there is alignment of our learning with wider system priorities and that BSB build the case for investment in Prevention across the system. There was a development session with partners on 1 May led by our legacy consultants. He mentioned the discussions about forming a 'collective space' for staff, commissioners and stakeholders including the community. Kerry said we are committed to embedding the principles we have learned and how these influence future arrangements in the district. We should be clear of the purpose and not duplicating other things that are going on in the system and we need buy-in from partners to develop that.

Gill Thornton noted that the Social Venture School referred to in the report was held on 29 and 30 April, not during May as said in the report. The next Social Venture School is on 17 and 18 June and we hope that some Happy Early Years Fund leaders will attend it.

Our Finance Manager will be leaving us at the end of May, but we have agreed a secondment with Bradford Children and Families Trust for our previous Finance Manager to support us up to December 2025. Vikrant also mentioned that two colleagues will be returning from maternity leave over the coming months.

As well as the Innovation Hub and Better Place, we still have a contract with HABIT (oral health project) which is a no-cost extension up to 30 September 2025, and a contract with Crawley Communications and Social Media.

8. AOB

Humera was thanked for agreeing to Chair the meeting.

Humera asked everyone if they had felt they had the opportunity to participate in this meeting and all agreed that they did.

9. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is on Thursday 17 July 2025, via Zoom, starting at 9.30 am.

The meeting closed at 10.40 am.