

**Better Start Bradford Partnership Board Minutes  
Monday 27 October 2025  
Via Zoom**

**Meeting Started:** 10:05

**Meeting Ended:** 11:40

**Present:**

Vipin Joshi	Community Board member (Chair)
Gill Thornton	Director, Better Start Bradford
Josie Dickerson	Programme Director, Born in Bradford Innovation Hub
Rizwana Jamil	Ward Councillor, CBMDC
Abbie Wild	Project Manager, Family Hubs Start for Life, CBMDC
Gwen Balson	Community Board member (Vice Chair)
Humera Mahmood	Community Board member (Vice Chair)
Samina Begum	Community Board member (Vice Chair)
Gazala Taj	Community Board member
Karen Tetley	Community Board member
Ludmila Novosjolova	Community Board member (items 1 to 5 only)

**In Attendance**

Carlton Smith	CEO, Bradford Trident (in place of Sarah Hinton)
Gill Hart	Funding Manager, National Lottery Community Fund
Vikrant Bhatia	Programme Manager, Better Start Bradford
Soo Nevison	CEO, Community Action Bradford & District (items 1 to 6 only)
Sarah Wilson	Consultant, 54 Degrees (Observer)
Guy Dove	Senior Programme Administrator, Better Start Bradford

**Apologies for Absence:**

Kerry Bennett	Lisa Brett	Sarah Hinton	Matt Sandford
Richard Crane	Jo Medd	Susan Claydon	Phillippa Degnan
Becky McIlvenny	Salma Nawaz	Ishaq Shafiq	

**1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**

Vipin welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies.

A round of introductions took place. Sarah Wilson is a consultant who is assisting Better Start Bradford and is attending this meeting as an observer.

It was agreed that the meeting could be recorded.

## **2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 18 September 2025**

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

## **3. Matters Arising actions table**

Gill Thornton said there was only one action and a letter went out to BSB's partners about extending the Partnership to 31 March 2026. This included a request to confirm their details on the Partnership Agreement were correct and that they were happy with the 3-month extension. Gill Thornton confirmed that she had received 12 responses so far, all positive, which is more than half of the Partnership Board.

Most of the 'no replies' are from system partners. Gill Thornton suggested she could ask them again, noting that some of the people named on the Partnership Agreement have moved to different roles, such as within Public Health. She said it would be useful to have some of the system partners more involved in the Partnership Board and we will have some quite complicated decisions to make.

Josie observed that buy-in from system partners is needed for BSB's legacy and to drive things forward, and she could raise this at a Prevention and Early Help Systems Board meeting which several of our system partners attend. Josie could mention that BSB has not finished and is trying to 'maintain'. Gill Thornton and Vipin asked Josie to please do so and Josie thought a major issue for the BSB programme is a lack of buy-in from our full partnership.

**Action: Josie to arrange to raise the need for more involvement of system partners in BSB at a Prevention and Early Help System Board meeting.**

Vipin expressed his disappointment about the lack of effort and support for a community-led organisation trying for the betterment for Bradford and suggested a strongly worded letter be sent to system partners about this. We need to see them at our meetings and if they do not respond despite all our requests, he thought they should be publicly shamed. He said he would help to write the letter if needed and that the Community Board members are doing all the work of the Partnership. Gwen and Samina indicated in the Chat that they agreed with Vipin's sentiment.

Josie thought that a letter directly from the Community Board members might have more impact. She suggested that some system partners might not fully understand what their involvement with us going forwards is and the goals of the Partnership. Vipin noted the £250k budgeted for the First 1,001 Days Innovation Partnership going forward and that he would not authorise its use if there is no system partner involvement.

Gill Thornton said the change of people at system partners has affected the situation. Abbie is present today and Susan Claydon has indicated she is happy to continue and has attended some of our meetings. We do have named people and she approved of Josie's suggestion of the Community Board members sending something to them saying we need their support.

**Action: BSB / the Community Board members to send a letter to the named people on the Partnership Agreement reminding them that we are here and why we need their support.**

#### **4. Declarations of interest**

Carlton declared that Bradford Trident are the deliverers of Better Place.

Vipin noted that Carlton has seen the options paper and recommendation for item 6 (Better Place contract variation). It was agreed that Carlton would be allowed to speak about item 6 but then would be placed in the 'waiting room' for the decision-making part of the discussion.

#### **5. Transition to First 1,001 Days Innovation Partnership (FDIP) discussion**

Gill Thornton explained that Josie presented on the theory of change around the early years system at the recent BSB conference. She has asked Josie to cover some of this again as it included some things we possibly have not addressed in the thoughts about the FDIP partnership and for collaboration in the system.

Josie presented a Powerpoint slide which was shared by her colleague Sharon Goldfeld in Australia about what we can take from the learning from BSB to make an impact in the system. The slide said there are three elements needed to make policy changes; to understand and recognise the problem (using data), identify the solution (using evidence) and get political buy-in and funded policies. Josie mentioned the forthcoming Best Start funding from government. Although we do not yet know what that it will look like, the funding is focused on early years and improving school readiness. There is also the NHS 10-year plan which has a focus on children. All the learning and data from the BSB programme and BiBBS has come at almost a perfect point in policy time, which is rare.

Josie said she is working with Dawn Lee at the NHS Care Trust and Kerry on 'Principle 1,' which is between the NHS, local authority and Children's Services about how we take BSB learning and the wider context of Bradford to drive and improve school readiness.

Josie then mentioned how early years are critical. Children born into poverty and disadvantaged areas are a greater risk of poor school outcomes, poorer health and development and this impacts on services later in life like the criminal justice system and social care system and leads to an inter-generational cycle of disadvantage. In areas of high deprivation, she noted more maternal depression during pregnancy, less take-up of nursery places and more risk of late child development and language delay.

On another slide, Josie illustrated the large scale of the problem, with 4,000 children born every year in the more deprived areas of the district and 2,000 of these will not be school ready. There has also been a 46 per cent drop in early years funding over the last 10 years, with cuts to Sure Start and to health visiting. Josie noted an increase in spending in 'late interventions' such as in youth justice and social care and suggested local authorities are being trapped in a reactive spending cycle. There is also a lack of capacity in early years staffing and services to meet the high levels of demand and local authorities do not have the money to spend on Prevention.

Josie agreed to send out her slides. Humera wrote in the Chat about schools being under pressure and children being left behind after Covid and Samina mentioned the impact of the two-child cap on benefits adding to the problem.

Josie said that co-production of the early years eco-system is currently underway with the Prevention and Early Help System Board and families and the workforce can join in. This

process involves thinking about what works well, what the ideal solution would be and then designing something that can be done in reality.

Josie suggested that for 3,000 children a year in Bradford, the existing universal offer is probably enough. However, what is needed for 4,000 more children is an additional 'stack' for disadvantaged families, which would be very expensive. This would include (looking at evidence from the BSB programme) midwifery continuity of care, MECSH, Baby Steps and some other services, and community empowerment alongside that, supporting families to engage in services, and a skilled and knowledgeable workforce.

Gill Thornton remarked that it would be useful to know the timeline for the next steps, as the government's new Best Start offer begins next year. Ideally, this should align with the First 1,001 Days Innovation Partnership and we should see how we could put the two things together.

Soo said that Community Action Bradford and District have had a busy summer. They have brought in wider eco-system partners such as Public Health and the voluntary sector and wanted to ensure the Partnership Board are happy with the situation and there was buy-in from system partners before launching community engagement.

There is lots of community engagement in Bradford but it does not 'join up' very well and it is a complicated picture. CABAD need to pull out the commitment to 1,001 Days of the people involved and supplement where the community voice is missing.

Soo will write this work up. She mentioned the link of 1,001 Days to economics and a 'hierarchy of needs'. The new partnership would work with the system to see what money can be spent, wider gaps and what the community feel they also need outside of programmes that come through government.

Soo noted that Start for Life is targeted and misses some wider community needs. The new partnership needs to work with the system but also needs to be independent so it can find its own funding and deliver things. It is important that the work done is data driven.

Soo said there is a debate going on now about sufficient oversight governance for the FDIP. Governance is needed but she does not want it to 'get in the way' by being too rigorous, putting off some of the people they want to talk to.

Gwen asked how the community voice being missing in some areas would be addressed. Soo answered that they are not missing, but the system is so busy asking people things, the issue is about how to bring those voices in so they are engaged, respected and not 'overloaded' by other engagement that is going on.

Soo explained that we need to resolve the governance issue, then 'active asks' will be going out. Some groups, such as at the Family Hubs, are meeting and maybe ours could meet them or join them. We will need to be clear about expectations.

Gwen remarked that the system has a way of labelling communities such as 'hard to reach' and hoped that the language used could be changed to be more inclusive. Soo agreed and said that she does not like labelling. It is about going out and listening to people, rather than taking lists of things to ask them. She noted that the Start for Life community engagement was very prescriptive.

Gwen observed that she still feels there is a division in the wider community between the grassroots level and the system partners and that the link is still not quite there. Soo agreed and said the new partnership needs to try and have a 'double life'. There are things that the system wants from the partnership but it also needs to have the freedom to do what it wants and balancing of this is needed.

Soo explained there have been difficulties with CABAD's work as the NHS has just had a restructure and needs to 'settle,' the situation is changing and CABAD will need to 're-plot' some things.

Gill Thornton noted that the Partnership Board have agreed a BSB staff team from January to March 2026 to help set up the new partnership up. One of the staff roles is the community engagement lead of the new partnership. The community and system partners should both help to design the new eco-system and ensure that the equity element of it is addressed, including all people who need to be heard. This will be the responsibility of the whole team, not just the community engagement person. She noted, for example, that there are several Happy Early Years Fund lead parents we are still in touch with and remarked that parents of very small children are hardly ever included in discussions about local services.

Josie described the Prevention and Early Help System Board as very 'secure' with all the services involved in the early years being on it, but there is not one community member on it. There is a drive for this but community empowerment is what may be lost, not community engagement. Josie has never seen anything work like this Partnership Board in being community driven. The new partnership will have to hold on to this and see how learning from the BSB programme can be integrated and aim to put this community empowerment in all decision-making boards.

Josie said the Health Determinants Research Collaborative has a very strong co-production arm and we could double its strength by working with them. There is a co-production and peer research group within Born in Bradford, training up community members to go out and do the research, which is also about empowerment. We will need to make sure that other people are not doing the same thing as the new partnership.

Samina said that community members have been brought in because BSB has given that 'space' but this is difficult in other organisations and the local authority, who do not see the benefits of or understand this model. We should look at these organisations with CABAD to see where people can be brought in and developed if needed.

Soo said that the HDRC have a public contributor's cohort and CABAD are working with them and Public Health are keen that we work with them. Susan Claydon does see our partnership as a model of how community input comes in and we need to resolve the governance. Soo remarked that she would like to meet our Community Board members and have this discussion about the 'balance'. Soo noted that this Board is very mature (in terms of community engagement) and the new FDIP partnership will be district-wide which is quite a big journey.

Gill Thornton noted that there will be some challenges with going district wide. We will need to respond to these and it will not be right first time and it must be gone through and it is not a reason to not do it. Soo said that this Board has a ten-year maturity and we need to bring in everyone else, remembering the maturity in the background.

Vipin recalled that Michael Jameson, our previous Chair, wanted community involvement from day one. Michael stepped away from the Chair at the first opportunity so there could be a community Chair but it did take a couple of years for the community to feel ready for this. His gravitas did bring in system partners at the beginning of the BSB programme.

Vipin said that this Partnership Board is the only organisation that gives community members the opportunity to speak to statutory leaders on the same level. It is a good model for other organisations to follow and he gave an example of three partners all wanting to do surveys being able to combine them into one by working together.

Carlton wrote in the Chat that Bradford Trident have a partnership service called Family Support and he would be happy to work with the team to see how that could be scaled up.

Gill Thornton clarified that we do not need to make a decision today but needed a discussion about the work being done and to understand what the next steps will be. Whatever new partnership arrangement is set up, she would like some or all our Community Board members to be part of it.

Vipin agreed that we should try to keep the community involvement and we do not want to lose ten years of work because our organisation is coming to an end.

## **6. Better Place contract variation**

Gill Thornton noted that the Better Place contract has been extended to the end of March 2027 and BSB are doing the paperwork that will confirm that.

There are two possible options for the future of the Better Place project – becoming a subsidiary of Bradford Trident or becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Looking at what the Better Place project wants to do, it would not be suitable to become a Community Interest Company.

BSB are working with CABAD and once we have made the decision, we will put together the objectives of the new organisation.

Gill Thornton went through the advantages of Better Place becoming an independent subsidiary of Bradford Trident. It is a recognised local organisation with a track record of funding. There would be possible access to capacity across the wider organisation such as community engagement. Back-office services and accommodation would potentially be provided, but would need to be paid for, as they are now.

She then went through the disadvantages. Most of the examples of independent subsidiaries are trading arms of existing charities and that is not the intention of Better Place so those models do not apply. Usually, it is much bigger charities that have a single purpose that set up these, when they diversify into another area of work. There would be issues around the governance and relationships that would need to be resolved in advance and this typically takes a long time. If Better Place cannot show independence, it cannot benefit from being a separate organisation and the relationship with the parent charity needs to be clearly outlined.

Gill Thornton noted that Bradford Trident's turnover debars some Better Place funding bids, with some funders having a maximum turnover limit which Bradford Trident exceeds. There are constraints such as the Bradford Trident CEO having to approve all funding bids. There

are also geographical constraints, as the operation of Bradford Trident must benefit the Little Horton area and it is not always possible to show that when scaling up and moving to other areas.

The other option is for Better Place to become a standalone charity. Gill Thornton outlined the advantages of this, such as being able to set its own objectives, set its own area that it wants to cover and its target group. Better Place already has a long track record of delivery.

It can set its own Trustee Board / management committee with appropriate experts who are primarily interested in this project and its work. This would mean that the decision-makers are there because of their interest in the objectives of the charity instead of representing a geographical area, which Gill Thornton thought was an advantage. Expertise on the Board could also help to fill any gaps in team capacity.

A new charity would also be able to independently develop its partnerships and Better Place does work a lot with other organisations, so that freedom is important. It can also develop its own profile in its policy influencing role.

Disadvantages include the need to secure funding for all project functions and develop an independent financial track record, so it would need to become financially viable quite quickly. However, that will be the case if Better Place remains with Bradford Trident or not.

A standalone charity would need to be responsible for its HR, finance, legal and communications elements and its own accommodation, but those could be rolled into some of the functions of the Board and is common for new charities.

It would need to develop its own independent 3–5-year business plan. Gill Thornton said Better Place already has a business plan, which includes a business plan for growth but this would need working on with a new Board.

A new Better Place charity would need sufficient staff capacity to combine delivery and growth at the same time, so some strong skills would be needed in the staff team to do both.

Gill Thornton confirmed that BSB are asking the Partnership Board to look at the two options, and decide which is the better option for Better Place, based on the Board's knowledge and understanding of the project.

The BSB staff team and the Better Place team have discussed this and think that Option 2 – the Charitable Incorporated Organisation – is the better option, with more freedom and scope in planning its own future.

Carlton clarified that Bradford Trident's mission is to develop Little Horton and the surrounding area. This is interpreted as the neighbouring wards and Bradford Trident have delivered successful projects in Little Horton and other wards, and their Board have always been happy with that. He noted that the ambitions for Better Place are, rightly, to work consistently across the district and possibly West Yorkshire, and replicate the good work done.

Better Place does need independence and there are some ways it could be done. Better Place needs to be a charity and its back-office functions need to be done and paid for and being a subsidiary of Bradford Trident would bring economies of scale and would avoid set-up of these things (which takes much time and effort). Carlton said for a subsidiary charity's

independence, it would depend on how the governing document is written and a subsidiary would have its own Board, mission and resources. Subsidiaries are their own legal entity and do have their own Board and independence.

Carlton said he is authorised by Bradford Trident's Board to apply for funds on their behalf. That could be changed, though applying for funds would need co-ordinating with the rest of Bradford Trident as each project cannot apply for the same funds. A Better Place subsidiary would be a separate entity so would have its own Board that could apply for funding independently.

Carlton thought that all the disadvantages of being a subsidiary could be resolved. Bradford Trident has a good 25-year track record which gives a level of assurance if there are difficulties. It could offer support with HR, legal issues and Comms and bring economies of scale as a collaboration. He suggested Better Place becoming a subsidiary charity of Bradford Trident, perhaps just for the first 5 years, to get Better Place established and this would give more reassurance to funding bodies. Carlton suggested that the £1 million turnover limit for funders would not take long to reach if Better Place was independent, especially with capital projects. He said that whatever happens, he wished Better Place every success.

Soo observed that it is unusual for a charity to be a subsidiary of another charity. Trading bodies as subsidiaries are usually not allowed to register and would also not have the all the exemptions of a charity such as for tax and business rates.

Carlton was then placed in the 'waiting room' for the decision-making part of this agenda item.

Soo went through the timescales for set up of the CIO option. Better Place would need its Trustees in place first (hopefully some of the initial Trustees would be our Community Board members), then the time to register a CIO varies from 3 weeks to 6 months. The average set-up time to register a CIO is 47 days and Better Place would need the governing documents to be correct (there are models we could use) and if the Charity Commission are happy with the governing documents, we are looking at 47 days for registration, or a few more. Soo said there is an expert in her team at setting up new CIOs and writing governing documents. As Better Place is already extended in its current form to 2027, an independent version should be set up and generating income before then.

Soo said that once Better Place is constituted, with its track record, it can apply for some funding, such as from Reaching Communities. This is a different part of the Lottery but Gill Hart confirmed they will look at the track record of Board members and key staff members. Gill Thornton added that Better Place has already levered in significant additional funding on top of the existing BSB funding and there is already a five-year business plan.

Vipin asked how much money would have to be invested into a new Better Place CIO to be able to start and run its costs and pay for itself from day 1. Gill Thornton replied that it should be nothing, as hopefully there would be a year to generate enough funding for it to run after March 2027. If we go with the other option, the subsidiary will have to find the funding. She mentioned that BSB are already looking at partnership funding bids with Adele.

Better Place will need help from CABAD with writing the objectives of the charity and perhaps considering how Bradford Trident's objectives fall into the new charity. New funding goes through BSB at the moment, not Bradford Trident.

Soo said the two options could relate to two triangles, with the current funding tapering its work off to March 2027. The new CIO would be a triangle that starts small and grows and tapers up and one should be trading down while the other is trading up. There may be staff switching from one organisation to another to unpick, and CABAD have been discussing other funding with Adele. Better Place is not leading any funding bids as it is not independent but is looking at partnership funding.

Josie queried if having a charity within a charity is even a viable option, or if Better Place could instead just be a project within Bradford Trident. Gill Thornton said those are realistically the only options, unless Better Place became a separate trading arm, but there is nothing to trade.

Vipin shared that at the community prep meeting a few days ago, there were concerns about funding although it is now confirmed we will be okay until 2027. It was felt there would be more say for the community members if Better Place became an independent organisation about how it is delivered in our areas. Our Community Board members would already have the history and knowledge of what Better Place was set up for and could be some of the initial Trustees.

Soo clarified that a Better Place CIO would be a district-wide organisation.

Gwen noted the geographical restrictions if Better Place is a subsidiary of Bradford Trident and having the wider remit of a CIO to cover Bradford district is important. She also suggested that the back-office service could be bought in from Bradford Trident or from elsewhere in a competitive way. She thought there are more disadvantages to being a subsidiary than advantages and going for a CIO is the better option.

**Decision: The Partnership Board decided that the Better Place project should become a standalone charity and not be a subsidiary of another organisation.**

Vipin felt we have made the right decision for the betterment of the project and we want it to be a charity if it is affordable. We will be seeking the specialist support from CABAD to set this up.

Carlton was returned to the meeting and was informed of the decision. Vipin explained that the Partnership Board were concerned about a charity within a charity and the legalities of this. We will be working closely with Bradford Trident but we thought for the community involvement and being district-wide, being a standalone charity was the better vehicle to be used. He thanked Carlton for putting his case across.

## **7. Programme Status Report**

Vikrant went through the Key Highlights and Impacts section of the report. One was the successful delivery of the conference. Over 200 delegates attended and there were over 50 speakers and there has been good feedback. We will shortly be sharing slides and information from the conference and reports will be included on our website.

Vikrant confirmed that the extension of the BSB programme to 31 March 2026 has been approved by the National Lottery Community Fund. The transition projects have also been agreed.

A Family Celebration event took place at the Mayfield Centre on 24 September attended by 215 partners and children.

A new Better Place sculpture 'Big Hugs' has been unveiled at a junction on Leeds Road.

The workplans of BSB's three legacy groups are being reviewed and we want to ensure they are aligned. We are having regular conversations with Bradford Trident about the full handover, such as to do with contracts and utilities and end of programme work. Office 365, IT and utilities contracts have been extended to the end of March 2026 and handover notes will be shared. There will be varying of contracts for Better Place and other contracts that are continuing into 2026.

The remaining project impact reports are with the designers and some copies were distributed at the conference.

Our Public Health Evidence Lead is working with stakeholders to ensure messaging of the BSB programme is shared. There are discussions around running collaborative workshops with the Innovation Hub and the HDRC to disseminate BSB learning.

A meeting has been arranged about incorporating our programme's learning into the district's Early Help and Prevention strategy.

Our Public Health Evidence Lead is also delivering an overview of our approach to Public Health senior officers to ensure that BSB learning can be shared and embedded at all levels.

Vikrant then mentioned the production of podcasts and toolkits that is ongoing and some of these are now being finalised.

The campaign for Baby Week 2025 has been launched and its webpage is live. Events are collating on the Baby Week UK site and Vikrant and Kerry are working with Public Health on a memorandum of understanding for Baby Week post-March 2026.

Two BSB staff members have held Play workshops at Byron Primary School. Other colleagues have attended a Kings Fund Prevention conference, an Early Help conference and an A Better Start national evaluation webinar.

The ESOL for Pregnancy project was highlighted in a government report as an example of good practice in maternity care.

Vikrant confirmed that BSB's programme budget has been revised to run to March 2026. Underspend has been allocated to cover the extension period.

Consultations are underway with staff who are leaving in December 2025 and appropriate support is being offered to them. The staff structure from January to March 2026 has been agreed and a workplan is being developed.

The Innovation Hub contract ends at the end of December 2025 and the final project review meeting should take place at the beginning of December. HABIT's (oral health project) contract closed on 30 September 2025. The final contract meeting is tomorrow and the academic paper we were waiting for (Small teeth, big opportunities) has been published. BSB are acknowledged in the paper as a key funder.

CABAD's legacy consultant contract is being reviewed to support us with FDIP and funding support for Better Place and will be extended to 31 March 2026.

Finally, Vikrant said there are no emerging risks or issues, but the risk register is regularly reviewed.

Vipin commented that there is lots of work going on even though we are coming to the end of the programme and there is still a fair bit left to do.

#### **8. 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 everyone for attending the meeting.

#### **9. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is on Thursday 11 December 2025, in person at the Mayfield Centre, starting at 9.30 am.

The meeting closed at 11.40am.