



Local Partnership Group Meeting 9

Tuesday, 23 September 2025
11:00am to 12:00pm (MS Teams online only)

Attendees

Adrian Davies (AD) Department of Work and Pensions
Chris Mansfield (CM) Bracknell Forest Council
Cllr Paul Bidwell (PB) Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration
Nancy Lalor (NL) Learning to Work
Nikki Burns (NB) Federation of Small Businesses and Bracknell Forest Skills Hub Lead
Sean Griffin (SG) Bracknell Business Improvement District
Chloe Smith (CS) Constituency Support Officer for Peter Swallow MP
Heidi Berry (HB) Craft Coop Director
Andrea McCombie (AM) The Ark Trust Chief Executive Officer

Apologies

Ben Jokiel (BJ) Activate Learning
Jo Gosling (JG) Bracknell Forest Council

Minute	Item
1	Welcome CM opened the meeting by thanking all for attending the meeting. CM apologised for the delay in the distribution of the agenda and report update in preparation for the meeting.

2	Project updates The Ark Community Transport Scheme – Update from Andrea McCombie AM provided an update on the transport service, highlighting increased demand from younger adults with learning disabilities and neurodivergence due to continued issues with the (BFC) R bus, and is in discussions with CM regarding the critical impact of the UK Share Prosperity Fund ending in March 2026. AM explained ongoing efforts to recruit volunteers, including participation in an upcoming volunteer fair. Two new younger volunteers have been recruited to support some evening social events, although capacity remains a challenge. CM and AM discussed the approaching end of the UK Share Prosperity Fund, recognising that without new funding, the transport service—especially for people with dementia and younger people with disabilities—will be significantly reduced or discontinued. Action – AM is gathering case studies to demonstrate the service's impact, and CM emphasised the urgency of exploring alternative funding sources or adapting the service model to ensure continuity beyond March 2026. Craft Coop – Update from Heidi Berry HM announced that sadly the Bracknell Craft Coop shop will close at the end of the month due to unsustainable footfall and financial challenges, however the significant community contributions was highlighted and ongoing efforts to secure charitable status and future opportunities. HB detailed the shop's achievements, including supporting over 130 makers, running workshops and outreach with various community groups, organising Remembrance poppy displays, and facilitating projects like The Longest Yarn and Mini Coopers for children. HB mentioned ongoing discussions with Tom Henderson from the Lexicon about possible pop-up events before Christmas, and efforts to obtain charitable status to access more funding and continue the ongoing commitments such as the forthcoming RBL Poppy display. CM and the LPG members acknowledged the Craft Coop's positive impact in Bracknell. A warm and welcoming safe space for all. CM noted that the council will continue the conversation with Craft Coop, public health and other relevant parties, to address gaps left by the closure and explore future opportunities.
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	Bracknell Forest Borough Vision CM described the vision's creation through consultation with residents and stakeholders, culminating in its unanimous adoption by the council earlier in the month. The vision outlines aspirations for Bracknell Forest over the next 25 years, focusing on health, economy, well-being, and the physical environment, building on existing community strengths. CM invited the LPG members to an event on October 16th to pledge support for the vision, clarifying that it is a community initiative rather than a traditional council strategy. CM noted that while the vision's development phase is complete, there will likely be annual reviews to monitor progress and ensure continued relevance. Bracknell Forest vision 2050 Bracknell Forest Council Action – JG to ensure all Local Partnership Group members are invited to the upcoming launch event on 16.10.25. Berkshire Prosperity Board CM updated the group on the Berkshire Prosperity Board's ongoing work, including the development of skills and employment initiatives like Connect to Work and Get Berkshire Working, in collaboration with DWP and other partners. CM explained that the Connect to Work and Get Berkshire Working programmes are in development, aiming to support residents into employment, particularly those facing barriers related to health and mobility. The initiatives are being developed in partnership with DWP and other stakeholders, with updates to be provided at future meetings as objectives and delivery plans are finalised. CM and NB discussed the possibility of scaling successful local initiatives, such as the Skills Hub, across Berkshire through the Prosperity Board framework. Cultural Programme CM summarised the summer events in Bracknell, including the Culture & Community Day, Bracknell Forest Pride and the South Hill Park Food and Music event, noting their growth and the involvement of The Lexicon and other local organisations. CM highlighted these events are now established parts of the local calendar. Upcoming events include the School Christmas Carol concert and the White Ribbon vigil event in November, with ongoing efforts to broaden participation and link with additional partners. Learn about White Ribbon Day — White Ribbon UK AD asked if there are any planned Town Centre activities for the England Women's Rugby World Cup final; Chris confirmed there were no current plans.
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	Bracknell Forest Skills Hub – update from Nikki Burns NB reported the Bracknell Forest Skills Hub’s ongoing success in engaging career seekers and businesses, delivering bespoke training, and promoting boot camps, while raising concerns about the impact of funding uncertainty on long-term support and programme continuity. The Skills Hub is delivering and developing bespoke training courses, including a large-scale hospitality sector programme and a facilities management upskilling pathway, designed to address specific business needs and create internal career progression opportunities. NB emphasised the efforts to encourage career seekers to participate in free bootcamps, which offer direct pathways to interviews and employment. NB and CM discussed the challenge of supporting long-term vocational training outcomes given the uncertainty of future funding, and the need to manage expectations with businesses and users of the service. Career Seekers: • 261 new career seekers engaged with the service, with increasing demand. Business & Training Provider Engagement: • 108 Businesses engaged • 3 Bespoke training courses created • 33 Senior managers in training • 300 Employees in training Bracknell Forest Skills Hub Careers, Training & Skills
3	UKSPF Reporting and Forecast Update CM provided a financial update, confirming that programme expenditure is on track and reiterating the need to fully utilise the UK Share Prosperity Fund transition year allocations, before the end of March 2026. We will be focused within the next six months on identifying the opportunities for projects to continue, adapt, or conclude as appropriate. CM reported that spending across programmes is broadly in line with expectations, with any underspend to be reallocated, to ensure full use of available funds. CM emphasised the importance of the Local Partnership Group in providing input, and we welcome any comments or questions that arise. CM thanked everyone for their time and continued support.

4	Proposed Next Meeting Dates: • Tues 9 December 2025 11:00am – 12:00pm • Tues 17 March 2026 11:00am – 12:00pm
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