



Memorandum of Understanding

About Black Country Futures

We are a diverse partnership of Black Country based organisations working together to bring positive change to people's lives and local communities through a range of person-centred support and services. In May 2020, fifteen organisations worked together to create and deliver the Black Country Futures project.

Alongside delivering the BCF project, they wanted to develop partnership working and achieve sustainability well beyond that one project, and our Strategic Partnership grew out of this ambition. In December 2020, consultation sessions were run with these partners, and the priorities, aims and activities of the partnership were agreed. These form the Partnership's Strategic Plan for the period February 2021 – February 2023.

This memorandum of understanding is not a legally binding document. It is a statement of serious intent – agreed voluntarily by equal partners – of the commitment, resources, and other considerations that each of the parties will bring to Black Country Futures. It does not create legal obligations, but clearly defines the expectations of those organisations and individuals who sign up to being a partner.

It applies to those organisations who wish to participate in the partnership at Level 1, as a Strategic Partner, and is a mutual agreement between those organisations. If you are interested in joining the partnership as either a Level 2 or Level 3 partner this Memorandum of Understanding doesn't apply.

Our Priorities & Aims

Creating Change

Changing lives through holistic, person-centred support.

Championing the people we work with and our communities.

Raising our Profile

Increasing our profile and brand recognition.

Building relationships with key stakeholders and influencers.

Working Together

Building an effective collaborative partnership with shared goals and values.

Demonstrating the power of partnership and sharing best practice.

Growing Sustainably

Securing funding to enable future delivery of activities aligned to our purpose and aims.

Developing and growing the partnership to meet with the needs of people and communities.

Why join Black Country Futures?

We believe that working in partnership benefits us all - our organisations, our teams, our beneficiaries, and our communities.

By working with others, we can:

- Share skills, learning and knowledge, increasing organisational capacity, capability, and confidence.
- Combine resources, leading to time and cost savings.
- Have a bigger presence and be more influential, enabling our participants voices and stories to be heard by decision makers.
- Increase innovation and access new opportunities.
- Help more people across the Black Country, with a wider range of support and services.
- Access project funding collectively, offering a collaborative, multi-agency delivery approach.

“JST recognises the huge value of the wealth and knowledge of the partnership across the black country. The Black Country Futures partnership gives us the opportunity to be the voice of people that need it most. Strength in numbers is an asset and gives us a louder voice for us to champion people's needs.”

Kate Beale, Project Manager
Just Straight Talk

“Manor Farm Community Association has been with Black Country Futures since it began. We have found this collaborative approach to delivery and strategic planning across the Black Country to be hugely beneficial. Working together with like-minded and committed organisations, we share and find solutions through this varied network of expertise, enabling our organisation to grow from being a local delivery organisation to being involved in a Black Country wide offer.”

Sue Evans, Charity Manager
Manor Farm Community Association

“Being a member of Black Country Futures has enabled me to network with organisations that have a passion for delivering community services, share skills and develop new ideas and project proposals. I am excited about the future opportunities that membership offers.”

Peter Hoarle, Head of Business Development
Black Country Housing Group

“BRC have joined the Black Country Futures partnership because it is a way for us to connect and develop services across the Black Country working with partners. It is an opportunity to share good practice between organisations and be involved in projects that address the needs of the local people we serve.”

Adam Bhardwaj, Operations Manager
Bilston Resource Centre

Types of Partnership Working

Level 1: Strategic Partner

The Black Country Futures Strategic Partnership is focused specifically on strategic partnership working. To be a Strategic Partner you must agree to this Memorandum of Understanding, understand that there may be no direct financial benefit to being involved, and be:

- Committed to creating change – not just for their participants but across the sector, across communities, and for society overall.
- Passionate about the power of partnership working and operate on the principle that partnership adds value to their organisation.
- Able to drive the Partnership's reach, growth, activity and impact, taking responsibility for its successes and failures.
- Innovative, flexible, and proactive in adapting to meet with the needs of people and communities.

This cohort participates in Strategic Partnership meetings, takes responsibility for driving activity and meeting the aims outlined in the Strategic Partnership Plan, and are subject to the expectations and agreements outlined in this Memorandum of Understanding. This is in addition to any obligations they must meet as a Delivery Partner and they understand that projects are one part of the much larger picture of overall Partnership work.

Level 2: Delivery Partner

Delivery Partners focus specifically on delivering activities for funded projects. A Delivery Partner does not have to be a Strategic Partner, but they do have to work in partnership using joined up working approaches on Partnership projects, and be:

- Committed to delivering activities, support and benefits for their participants.
- Able to increase their impact through joint delivery across multiple partners and work with partners (where funding dictates or supports this) on specific delivery projects.
- Responsible for delivering specific activities and outputs that contribute to the Partnership's overall impact as outlined in their project funding.
- Not responsible for delivering the Black Country Futures Partnership Strategic Plan, although their work contributes towards it.
- May occasionally come together to collaborate more widely and bid for new funding.

Working in partnership only when there is a direct financial benefit (i.e., project funding), this cohort participates in project specific Partnership meetings whilst delivering project activities in support of the Strategic Partnership Plan.

Level 3: Service Provider

A service provider delivers services as and when required, which may include delivering services for Partnership led or Partnership delivered projects but has no wider involvement with partnership working. This may be funded by the project or may be services freely available to the Partnership or its beneficiaries.

Roles within the Strategic Partnership

The Black Country Futures Strategic Partnership committee

All Level 1 members commit to being an active participant in the Partnership - attending meetings, responding to requests and delivering activities that help the Partnership to achieve its aims.

There are regular meetings of the Strategic Partnership committee and members are expected to attend as many as possible.

Members must assign a 'Strategic Lead' or no more than two 'Strategic Leads' who will attend these meetings. These Leads will have the authority to make decisions in relation to the Partnership for their respective organisation.

'Strategic Leads' may nominate a representative from their organisation to attend a meeting on their behalf if they are unable to attend, but this should be by exception.

Exceptional meetings can be called at any time with no less than 5 working days' notice to enable us to respond to time-bound issues, activities or opportunities that may arise. 'Strategic Leads' must ensure a flow of information to and from their own organisation related to the Partnership and Partnership activity, and have a succession plan in place.

They must also provide updates to the committee on progress of their organisations individual action plans and comply with any reporting requirements or requests for information.

Committee meetings will be chaired by nominated members and the Chairperson will change on a quarterly basis. Chairs will be responsible for coordinating, administrating, managing and chairing meetings, ensuring meeting notes are taken and shared with the group.

They will be supported in creating the agenda and bringing together required content by the Black Country Futures Partnership Strategic Lead and Strategic Leads from partner organisations as appropriate.

Significant decisions for the Partnership will be made by majority agreement of two thirds or above of Strategic Partners.

The Black Country Futures Partnership Strategic Lead

The Black Country Futures Partnership Strategic Lead is a part-time role (20 hours per week) that is funded by the National Lottery community fund until 31st March 2023.

The specific purpose of this role is to provide expertise and specialist knowledge, and support to assist the Partnership in its creation, development and growth during this time period, and sustainability beyond.

They will work closely with the Black Country Futures Strategic Partnership committee providing leadership, advisory and support services to the Partnership.

Working Groups

Working Groups may be formed periodically to support and/or deliver specific activity. The Strategic Partnership Committee and Partnership Strategic Lead will identify the need for these and define the purpose of these groups and expected outcomes from them. Partners will be given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in Working Groups and where specific skills and knowledge are required, individuals that meet these needs will be actively targeted.

Projects

When an opportunity for the Partnership to work together to co-deliver a funded project arises, the Strategic Partnership Committee will discuss this and agree its suitability and viability. Projects must align with our Strategic Aims, and our proposal must meet with funders' requirements. A working group will create a project outline. This outline must be agreed by the Strategic Partnership Committee.

Partners can express an interest in being involved in delivery and/or as a lead organisation. The Strategic Partnership Committee will agree a lead organisation who will develop the project and bid, specifying the Delivery Partners and financial arrangements for the project. The most suitable Delivery Partners will be selected, based on project requirements and we may advertise the opportunity more widely if additional resource is required.

When creating funding bids as a Partnership, lead organisations must act in the best interest of the Partnership. They will be given support and guidance by the Partnership Strategic Lead.

Final bid content must be approved by the Strategic Partnership Committee prior to submission. If a Partnership bid is not approved by the committee the Individual Partner Organisations cannot use the name, identity or track record of the Partnership in a joint bid. Projects are the legal responsibility of the lead organisation, who must ensure the project meets its contractual obligations and ensure appropriate policies, procedures and controls exist.

Individual Partner Organisations

Each Strategic Partner is responsible for implementing and maintaining good governance on behalf of their own organisation, and for complying with contractual requirements for projects. Additionally, all Strategic Partners must fulfil the expectations and commitments outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding, which all partners must agree to prior to being permitted to join the Partnership.

Participant Feedback Forum

The Participant Feedback Forum enables participants to tell us what they need and want from us/service providers, and to influence and shape services. It enables us to consult with participants and gain information and data that will support us in our work. The Forum will take place monthly with individual partner organisations agreeing to coordinate and deliver a forum meeting on an equal and rolling basis. Whoever is coordinating and delivering the Forum is responsible for the administration of that forum, including providing feedback to the Strategic Partnership Committee.

Partner Commitments

The Partnership is an active body that is working together to achieve its strategic aims, and develop, improve and grow.

As a minimum commitment, we specify that all Strategic Partners make the following high-level commitments:

- Being an active participant in the Partnership - attending meetings, responding to requests and delivering activities that help the Partnership to achieve its aims
- Representing and promoting the Partnership in a positive way
- Operating and behaving in accordance with the Partnership's values
- Working in partnership to co-design, co-produce and co-deliver change
- Sharing appropriate knowledge and information that will aid the Partnership
- Hosting Participant Feedback Forums on a rolling basis

Whilst partners vary in size and services, partners are all equal. However, we recognise that each partner may not be able to contribute in the same way, and value the contribution of all partners and the diversity this brings to the Partnership.

With no 'lead' organisation for the Partnership, partners performance against any criteria or expectations outlined within this document will be monitored and assessed by self-assessment and by the members of the Black Country Futures Strategic Partnership Committee.

Whilst we work as a team and are jointly responsible for ensuring good governance, Strategic Leads are asked to take on specific active leadership roles related to governance. This is supported by the committee and committee meetings, and we have a governance strategy and tools in place to support this.

Strategic Partners also share skills and knowledge through membership of topic specific working groups, which are set up by the committee to focus in on specific areas of work that help us to meet our joint aims. Working groups are typically made up of subject specialists.

Any organisations behaving in a way that is not in accordance with our shared values will not be permitted to join the Partnership. Any partner failing to meet with the expectations that they have agreed to in this Memorandum of Understanding, and/or behaving in a manner likely to bring the Partnership into disrepute may be expelled from the Partnership (see section Withdrawal and Termination Process).



Our Values

Our shared values represent the unique culture and work ethic of our Partnership. They form part of our everyday working life and influence our behaviours at all levels through our interaction with participants, employers, strategic stakeholders and each other.

Respect
We respect others and recognise the value of their contributions

Sharing
We share information, knowledge and views openly

Flexibility
We are flexible, playing to our strengths and embracing differences

Commitment
We are committed to the Partnership and all play our part in its success

Quality
We ensure our Partnership work and everything we deliver is high quality

Fairness
We are fair and transparent, championing equality and diversity in all we do

All partners must commit to these values and proactively apply them, ensuring their behaviours are aligned to them, throughout their dealings with the Partnership and in the delivery of activity that is linked to Black Country Futures.

Raising Our Profile

The Partnership has its own clear visual identity and branding. We have branding guidelines which must be adhered to by all partners when promoting the Partnership.

There are clear messages about the Partnership which we wish to promote, and these are accessible to all partners with resources available to support this.

Partnership marketing needs to focus on those strategic stakeholders we wish to engage with or influence, and other agencies we would like to become partners or work with (mainly voluntary sector, but not limited to this).

Specific projects will also have their own unique identity and branding requirements, which will need to be met when promoting those projects. Each project will have its own clear marketing plan. The audience for project marketing is likely to be different from the audience for partnership messages.

All Strategic Partners are expected to:

- Create content for social media regularly
- Engage with social media posted by others that promotes the Partnership frequently
- Represent the Partnership at events as needed
- Participate in thought leadership and the sharing of best practice
- Take advantage of marketing and comms opportunities when presented
- Include details about the Partnership on their website and link to the BCF website
- Comply with branding guidelines
- Share planned press releases with the Strategic Partnership Committee for approval and include the notes to editors on all press releases
- Provide updates on their marketing activity/plans in Partnership meetings when requested

All partners will deliver activity that helps to raise the profile of the Partnership overall and their role within it.

The Partnership has the following channels for social media marketing:

- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/blackcountryfutures/>
- https://twitter.com/BC_Futures
- <https://www.linkedin.com/company/black-country-futures/>

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

All intellectual property rights belonging to each partner, whether created before or after the date of joining the Partnership shall remain vested in that partner. Each partner agrees not to infringe the intellectual property rights of another partner.

Partners must notify the Black Country Futures Partnership Strategic Lead of any intellectual property and an intellectual property register will be maintained.

Ideas and products produced through the collaborative work of the Partnership cannot be the intellectual property of any one partner.

Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest

Partners may be privy to, and may disclose, confidential information through Black Country Futures Strategic Partnership meetings, working group meetings, emails between partners and through shared resource repositories. For projects, specific confidentiality agreements will be in force.

Partners are expected to clearly indicate where any information shared is confidential and declare any conflicts of interest. Failure to respect confidentiality is a serious breach of trust and will lead to immediate expulsion from the Partnership. Where Conflicts of Interest arise the Strategic Partnership Committee will agree how these will be managed.

Fees

There is currently no fee to join the Partnership and we aspire to keep membership free. However, there are costs involved in supporting partnership working and resources are required to do this well. We will explore different ways in which we can meet these as a Partnership.

There may be requests for ad-hoc financial support for resources, without obligation (meaning no one is obligated to contribute but resources may not be able to be provided/ created/ purchased without this financial support). In line with our values, there will be full transparency of any potential costs, and these will be managed by the Strategic Partnership Committee.

Funding

Funding is provided by funders for delivery projects bought together through the Partnership. The Strategic Partnership Committee discuss potential funding bids and agree the format and structure of any bid.

Project finance is the responsibility of the lead organisation who must abide by any agreements made by the Strategic Partnership Committee when developing the bid and must have transparent and fair procedures for financial decisions.

Partners have joint responsibility for identifying and acting upon funding opportunities. All joint funding bids must be approved by the Partnership Strategic Committee. No partner can apply for funding for the Partnership or on behalf of the Partnership without approval from this committee.

How to join the Partnership

Application to the Partnership is open to all eligible organisations working for community benefit in the Black Country.

However, as part of our quality assurance there is a criterion for organisations wishing to join at Level 1 - Strategic Partnership, so that we can all work together in harmony, and minimise any risks associated with joint working.

Application to join is a three-stage process:

- Stage 1 - Online application form
- Stage 2 - Submit requested supporting documents
- Stage 3 - Interview by partners

Following this process, Prospective Partners applications to join will be reviewed at the next Strategic Partnership Committee meeting. The Strategic Partnership Committee will either approve or reject the application based on the information captured during the application process. Prospective Partners will be advised of the outcome of their application as soon as possible following Stage 3.

If the decision is to decline the application to the Partnership, feedback will be given on the reasons for this, and recommendations will be made for steps the Prospective Partner can take to enable them to make a successful application in future. Prospective Partners are asked not to reapply until these steps have been taken.

Prospective Partners can ask for a second review of their application if they strongly believe that the information provided in the feedback is not an accurate reflection of their application – however the Partnership reserves the right to reject any applications where this is agreed by over two thirds of the Strategic Partners and has no obligation to accept new partners.

The Partnership is a growing and evolving structure, and there are finite resources for supporting the expansion of the Partnership. We may close application processes at any time to suit the needs and demands of the Partnership.

Eligibility relates to:

- Your organisations approach and attitude towards partnership working
- Your organisational values and how you apply these
- How your organisation demonstrates and ensures persistent high-quality support and services to your beneficiaries
- How your organisation applies good governance
- Your understanding of, and willingness to commit, to the expectations outlined in this Memorandum of Understanding
- Your willingness to commit to, and ability to contribute towards the Partnership Strategic Plan

Withdrawal and Termination Process

Partners may withdraw from the Strategic Partnership at any time by submitting this notice in writing so that we can make any required amendments. You don't need to leave the Partnership altogether if you simply want to move into a less strategic role – you can become a Level 2 or 3 partner. There may be a variety of reasons for this.

Openness and transparency are key shared values for the Partnership, and we ask that partners who are thinking of withdrawing or changing the level of partner they are, discuss this with the Partnership Strategic Lead and/or the Strategic Partnership Committee and give feedback on their reasons for this.

We understand that there may be times when competing demands place a heavy workload on individuals and organisations, meaning they are unable to meet with some of their commitments. In these times another of our key values is flexibility.

We all work together to try to support one another. We will do what we can to retain our members and will speak with partners to try to resolve any issues that may lead to them withdrawing or being terminated from the Partnership.

Your Level 1 membership of the Strategic Partnership may be terminated if:

- Your attendance at meetings falls below 75% (on average)
- You no longer meet with the eligibility criteria
- You do not meet with your commitments as outlined in this Memorandum of Understanding

Please help us by letting us know if you face challenges meeting any of these expectations and we aim to be supportive and flexible.

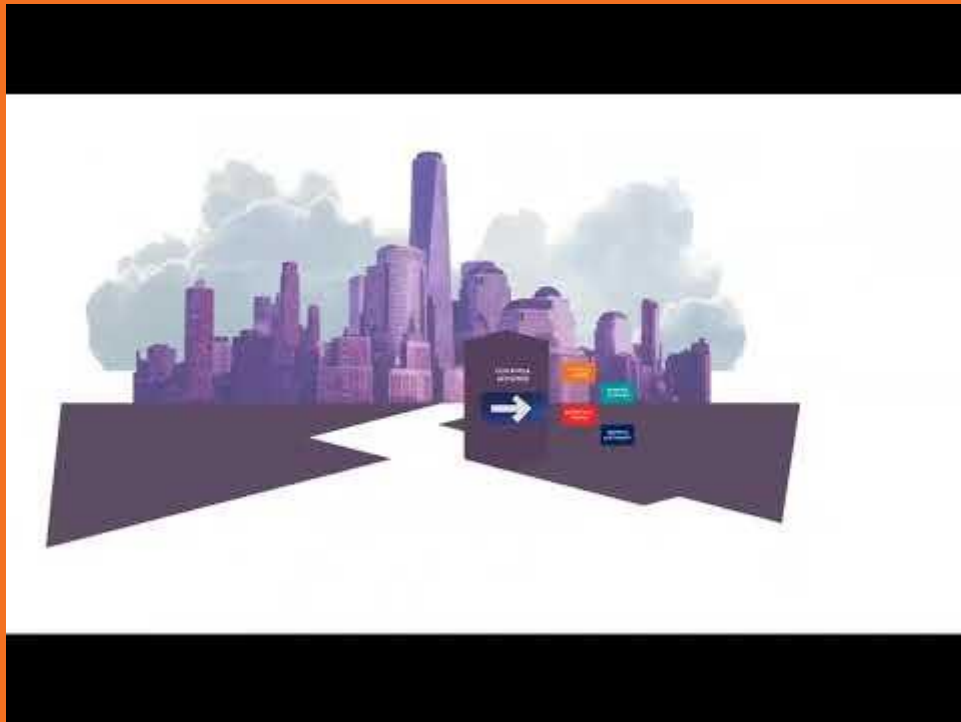
Your Level 1 membership of the Strategic Partnership will be terminated immediately and without notice if:

- You are abusive or discriminatory towards any other partner, member of the team or participant.
- Your membership poses a serious and significant risk to the reputation or life of the Partnership
- You breach confidentiality rules
- You consistently act in a manner that is not in accordance with our shared values

Your attendance at meetings and your meeting of the commitments outlined in this Memorandum of Understanding will be tracked and monitored by the Strategic Partnership Committee. The Committee or Partnership Strategic Lead will notify partners if they consistently fail to meet with the commitments in this Memorandum of Understanding and advise them of the next steps needed to address this. If partners fail to take this action then their Level 1 membership will be terminated.

More Information

Our Strategic Plan 2021-23



<https://youtu.be/eAR6zw57oK0>

Contact us

For more information or an informal conversation about the Black Country Futures Strategic Partnership and what it means to be a partner please contact:

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Phone: 07918 940172

Website: <https://www.blackcountryfutures.co.uk>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/blackcountryfutures/>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/BC_Futures

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/black-country-futures/>