

BRIGHTON AND HOVE: PROMOTING A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Over many years Brighton and Hove council has led or supported an extensive range of partnerships.

As well as engaging with the local NHS bodies, the police, and the fire service, they also have close links with the local universities, further education college, arts organisations, voluntary organisations, and private sector organisations.

In addition they work with many partners beyond the city boundaries, such as the public and private organisations involved in the Greater Brighton Economic Board, as well as Surrey and East Sussex county councils.

The council's partnership ethos has meant that many cross organisational innovations have been achieved, some initiated and led by the council, and some led by other organisations, with support from the council.

ACHIEVEMENTS

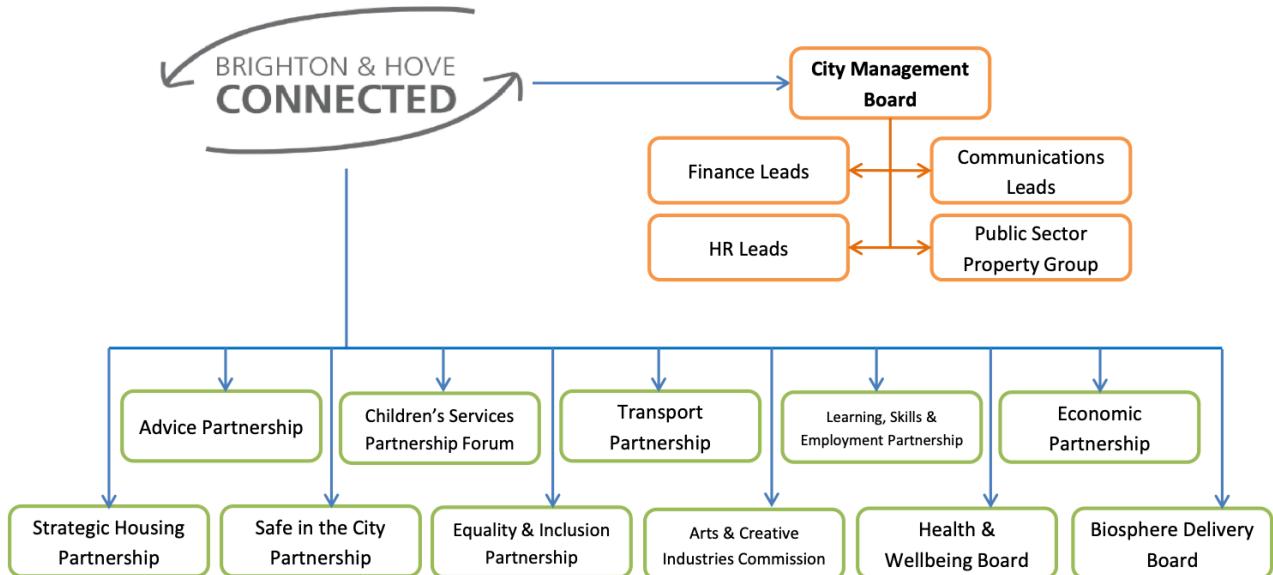
Some examples of the council's partnerships and their innovations are outlined below.

Brighton and Hove Connected

Brighton and Hove Connected (BHC) is a long standing partnership that involves the city's key public sector bodies as well as representatives from business and the voluntary sector. It's led by the 'city management board'.

As a senior council manager explained: "The city management board involves chief executives and senior people from the main public services in the city. It provides a focus for the executives to have private meetings to talk about what we should prioritise." And a partner commented: "The city management board is brilliant. There are lots of things we can do better but that is a really good mechanism. Every couple of months we sit down with the decision makers in the city and we talk about the really big issues."

Partnership Structure



BHC has many subgroups as shown in the diagram above. It agrees and implements strategies such as a local sustainable community strategy and a homelessness strategy. It also institutes practical changes, like establishing shared public sector office bases. “The one public estate programme brings together the wider public services across the Greater Brighton geography to look at land and property and links to the public service reform agenda.” And: “We are bringing other public sector partners into neighbourhoods, replicating what we have done in the town hall in bringing three of the city’s major advice services into the same building. It is the principle of co-location.”

Through the transport subgroup many changes have been made to the local transport system so that the city now has the highest usage of public transport per head in England outside London. Bus passengers have doubled over 20 years. ‘Floating bus stops’ have been introduced, catering for both cyclists’ and pedestrians’ safety. And Brighton and Hove led the way on low emission zones.

As a council senior manager explained: “The transport partnership has the bus company, the rail company, pedestrian groups, cycle groups, motorcycle groups. It has got a whole raft of people who are interested in transport issues. It allows a consensus to be formed around some difficult things. Or even if it can’t get you quite to consensus, it gets you greater understanding for example about, why do we charge so much for parking, or what do we use the parking revenues for.” And a partner: “Politically the importance of good public transport is not contentious. The bus company has supported things like introducing the 20mph limit across most of the city because there is a good partnership relationship.”

Another example of successful partnership innovation is the ‘age friendly city’ initiative. As a partner commented: “That brings all sorts of different people together. It means that we have been able to feed into all the different strategies. There is evidence and we look at it. That is a good piece of work.”

<https://www.bhconnected.org.uk>

The Greater Brighton Economic Board

The Greater Brighton Economic Board (GBEB) initiated by the council involves six local authorities, as well as businesses and education providers, such as the two universities and the local further education college. The area has 40,000 businesses, including Gatwick Airport, and an economy worth £21 billion a year. Its aim is to bring jobs and prosperity to the area and it has brought in more than £150 million of direct investment into the local economies so far.

As a council senior manager explained: “We have upped the city profile by establishing the GBEB. The city’s economic functional area is bigger than the administrative boundaries. Its housing market is bigger, its transport system is bigger. Therefore its political geography needs to be thought about. GBEB brings together the leaders from the authorities that form that economic geography and also the business partners in that locality.”

Another added: “The GBEB is a significant innovation over the last few years, in that it is both cross boundary and cross sector. It required us to really work at those relationships over a period of time, to be able to bring people together. But it needed us to be able to say that there is some practical reality behind this.” And a third: “If you go back a few years people used to

flinch when you talked about 'Greater Brighton' but not any more. Now that is an established and understood term.”

And a partner confirmed: “The Greater Brighton thing has been really interesting. To get behind a Brighton banner. Outside the small towns all hate Brighton so it’s impressive that the council have managed to draw everyone together collectively.”

<https://greaterbrighton.com>

Orbis

Orbis is the largest local government shared service partnership of its kind in the UK. It was established by Brighton and Hove council, with East Sussex county council, and Surrey county council in 2015.

Orbis’s services include procurement, property, finance, business operations, human resources and organisational development, information technology and digital activities. Its purpose is to deliver greater value for the three founding councils by generating efficiencies and exploiting the benefits of sharing people, resources and technology.

As a council senior manager explained: “Orbis was the best option for us to keep these services viable, because if you continue to take 10% out year on year, ultimate the services will fall over. Lots of public sector bodies have tried to do shared services over the years with very mixed results. Many of the government’s attempts at this have been nothing short of appalling—it was all about a race to the bottom on costs, implemented by force.”

Another added: “There are other benefits beyond saving money. We have got 150 lawyers so if we have any questions you are bound to find somebody who has the answer: there’s lots of different expertise to draw on. It saves to cost of buying in the private sector.”

The Community Banking Partnership

The community banking partnership is an example of a partnership the council supported, rather than led. One of those involved described what the partnership does and how council officers supported them planning how best to tackle poverty and debt.

“In the community banking partnership you have advice around debt and benefit and case work, with the credit union and local banks involved. We encourage people to save and plan ahead. We work with community centres around the town, so going to the heart of communities to provide support around becoming more employable and trying to address digital exclusion.”

“It is one of those ‘you come in at any door’ services. So you might go to a community hub saying ‘I need help with my CV and by the way I’ve got a big debt’, then they’d send you off to another partner. And that has been working really well.”

“The council commissioned a report from Toynbee Hall which recommended this as a way to make the best use of scarce resources. And to make sure we had a coherent approach to dealing with poverty in the city. And that brought about some interesting research about the city and the issues, really drilling down and finding out about what the specific problems people are facing, why people get into debt. They are not all ‘ne’re do wells’. It has brought about some really good work.”

“The council officers made a massive effort to understand things like the nature of advice – like pinning jelly to a wall. They really did their homework, got as knowledgeable as they could about the subject, in order to broker these arrangements.”

<https://www.moneyadviceplus.org.uk>

The Dome

The Dome is an arts and cultural charity which runs something like 650 events a year including the Brighton Festival, the second largest festival in the UK.

The charity has a 'lease and revenue' agreement with the council, which used to run the building and still owns it. As one of the Dome's senior managers explained: "Our fates are tied, and our partnership with the council has been strong."

The council is supporting the Dome's £20 million redevelopment project. As one of the Dome's senior manager described: "It is a good example of the courage of the local authority. They have taken a leap of faith to improve their assets, to protect their future liabilities, to invest to save. But in order to do that they are having to take some risks, while we are out in the world trying to raise the money, to reduce the council's risk as much as possible. They are helping with capacity and resource. We compliment each other really well. We couldn't do it without the council."

<https://brightondome.org//>

KEY LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

Building mutual trust by:

Putting huge effort into building positive relationships with partners Partners praised the tremendous effort the council's executive team put into building effective relationships with them. For example: "The chief executive does relationships with partners very well", "They are fantastic colleagues to work with", and: "He has an enormous brief but he's an outward focussed partner. He's a relationship person. He's very available, takes calls and makes calls, finds a way."

Being open and honest Partners commended the council's senior managers' integrity and frankness. For example: "They are open and transparent", "They were honest and straightforward from the start", and: "To take a big breathe and understand the breadth of the changes that they are implementing, and to be human is quite an achievement in itself."

Agreeing shared strategies by:

Listening to creative ideas As one partner commented: "The senior council officers are very open to suggestions, because there are real issues and problems, and financial and physical

constraints, so it takes a bit of creative thinking to make progress.” And another: “The officers are very open to innovative suggestions.”

Investigating issues to fully understand them before planning action The most successful projects have started by fully investigating the issues before deciding the best course of action. As a council senior manager remarked: “Use of evidence and informed decision making is strong here.” And another: “You have to try to understand the bones of an idea before you launch it.” A partner stressed the benefits of having sufficient time to understand underlying issues in order to work out the best way to address them. He commended the way the Fairness Commission ran. “It allowed time for more in-depth discussions for solutions to emerge. It operated for nine months. That gave huge depth to a lot of issues. It gathered lots of evidence and there was lots of hugely positive thinking.”

Making clear and realistic priorities As a council senior manager explained: “We have to be really careful that we don’t just focus on the shiny new things.” And another: “The council used to have more pilots than Gatwick Airport”. And a partner observed: “The council needs to have a limited number of strategic priorities or strategic problem areas and give them the depth, really dig into them. And get people together over a realisable period of time so that you can get real actions that can be delivered. We can all come up with actions that cost money. Coming up with realistic actions without money takes more time.”

Delivering Results by

Being resilience and determined Many partners praised the council senior managers’ resilience. Comments included: “There is so much fire fighting and need to roll with next political punch that comes that they show remarkable resilience and ability to just get on”, “They bust a gut doing the best they can”, and: “Before Christmas there were big legal issues and we needed to sign the contract. He went above and beyond. He battled through each of these. He sorted them out and we signed at 10 to 5 on 23rd December.”

Engaging with the public As a senior manager explained: “In Brighton, we cannot sneeze without someone noticing it. We have a very wired, very connected city, with a newspaper focused on us. Public engagement is a key part of your strategy.” And another: “Although it is a

city, it is quite a small place. So people do really take an interest in a way that wouldn't happen in a large county. So you have to be out there all the time."

Implementing major changes gradually In relations to Orbis, a senior manager explained: "We have done it piece by piece, acknowledging that people have savings targets to hit, but actually there has got to be some cultural join up as well as delivering economies of scale." And another: "Staff have been involved throughout the process so we haven't had any resistance, any opposition from staff."

Supporting managers leading integration Partners singled out the contribution that middle managers' determination made to achieving integration, and the difference that senior leaders' support and expectations made to that. "There is support for the managers who want to bring in change." And: "One of the officers there has stuck with the vision and still pursuing that with us. That comes down to individual with a real clear vision and an understanding of the potential of the partnership to deliver differently, and being dogged, and seeing that through." "Social workers have committed time to do things that they might not have otherwise been released to do, and they are doing that because they want to help along the integration programme. So there are different levels of leadership really committed to that."

Tracking progress A council senior manager explained: "We have performance information. Having that, and holding people to account for the outcomes that they should be achieving is important. This is what the data is saying, and this bit doesn't work, so we need to do something about it. And I know that doesn't work because of this. That is really important."

CHALLENGES

Several interviewees described the difficulty of getting agreement and implementing significant changes in a vibrant city where residents have a range of diverse, passionately held, opinions. As one interviewee put it: "This is a city where everyone has an opinion". And another: "This is the fourth best educated city in the UK. People are questioning and rebellious."

Central government budget cuts, and the increasing demand for social care, have had a profound effect on the council's resources and capacity. As one partner observed: "There is a limit to the council's bandwidth. They are having to lose budget and staff. So no matter how cre-

actively they think—and they are really willing to do that—there is just a fundamental limit to their capacity.” Financial pressures have forced the council to reduce their middle managers, who are often key to cross public sector innovations implementation.

Other public sector partners are also suffering from severe financial pressures which has an impact on partnership working and the quality of relationships. As one voluntary organisation leader observed: “The spaces and opportunities for partnerships to come together and operate has reduced massively. When we were first involved in the local strategic partnership structure there were lots of opportunities, when money was around.”

And there are other significant local challenges and constraints. “The city is a very challenging place: issues like housing and other basic things the council has to deal with everyday. It is like London but without the money.” And: “The geography of the city means we physically don’t have the space to expand in terms of building more homes, or building those big retail or industrial places that bring in lots of business rates.”

In addition, the council’s political leadership tends to alter at every election, making it more difficult to secure the long term members’ commitment required to fully implement major radical cross public sector innovations.

This case study was developed from interviews with council senior managers and their partners in early 2017 and late 2019.