

Fairness Commission – BSL video (Part 1)

Introduction

This video is about the Brighton & Hove Fairness Commission and will give you a message from the Commission, tell you what residents said about how to make Brighton & Hove a fairer and more equal place and summarise the recommendations that the Commission is making to the city council and its partners.

A message from the Fairness Commission

Brighton & Hove is a vibrant and diverse city. It is also an economically and culturally thriving place to live - it has one of the fastest growing economies in the country, relatively low unemployment and about eleven million visitors come to the city each year. But, like all cities in the country, there are many people who are not sharing in this success because of poverty, inequality and unfairness.

Many people cannot afford to live in the city because housing and living costs are high and many jobs are low paid. Many people cannot get work because they don't have the right skills or have poor physical or mental health.

In some parts of the city life expectancy is low and over a third of children are growing up in poverty - their chances of doing well at school, growing up to be healthy and getting the skills to find a good job are not good. Rent on a 1 bedroom flat now requires an income of £48,000 to be affordable. 130 people in the city died in 2013 of winter cold. There are now fifteen food banks in the city.

As the city's economy grows, more people will want to come and live here. At the same time less money will be available for public services and to individuals, in the form of welfare. From 2016 to 2020, the grant to the city council will reduce by £68m but the demand and cost of adult social care and health services will go up.

We need to change the way citizens relate to public services so that vulnerable people don't get left behind.

This is why the Fairness Commission was established. We are an independent commission of 12 individuals appointed to bring local and national expertise, insight and independent enquiry. We looked at data, plans and strategies, but our main task was to meet with local residents, groups, businesses and experts and make recommendations to the city council and its partners on actions they could take to address poverty, inequality and issues of fairness in the city.

We particularly looked at areas we thought were important to residents as well as those that offered the greatest potential for the council, with partners, to influence the best and fairest outcomes for citizens:

- Strengthening Communities,
- Housing,
- Improving the Life Chances of Children and Young People,
- Ageing and Living Well, and
- Employment and Skills.

Call for Evidence

We started our work in September 2015 with a Call for Evidence. We promoted widely different ways that people could contact us to tell us about their experiences, give us their thoughts on what was fair or unfair about living in this city, and to suggest solutions on how to make the city a fairer place for everyone. We met with groups, workers and residents and read hundreds of submissions sent to us. We looked at the work of other Fairness Commissions where they have the same problems that we have in Brighton & Hove.

We hope that this is the start of a city-wide discussion on fairness that can be built on, so that fairness is considered by all the agencies and partners when they commission services and decide on their budget priorities.

We thank every resident and group in the city who took the time to tell us their personal stories, give us their comments and suggestions or gave up their time to attend open sessions, focus groups and workshops. We thank DeafCOG for organising a meeting for us to hear the views of the deaf community and to all of you who came to the meeting.

Where we live

All the residents who contacted us said that the 3 most important things to make better were: supporting our communities, travel around the city and Housing.

Residents told us that more support for communities by the city council and its partners could make the city a fairer place. People told us that community and voluntary organisations were really important because:

- they could reach people and groups who needed support
- they had a better understanding of people's needs
- they could support people to get involved and volunteer
- they could help people learn the skills they needed to get a job

People told us of many small groups that were helping to support people and stop them feeling isolated and alone. This was helping to reduce the demand on public services and saving public money.

Residents told us they wanted more opportunities of 'coming together' through shared spaces, groups and activities. Community centres, spaces and facilities were very important.

Residents said they wanted to be supported to do things for themselves. They said they understood their problems and knew the best solutions. They wanted the council to support their ideas but thought that the council didn't always listen to them.

Many residents said that we are not making the most of the city's many assets - such as public buildings, mini buses and community spaces - and all partners should think if their assets could be better used and shared.

Recommendations

We ask partners to prioritise the following recommendations.

Firstly, we want the council and partners to invest more in community development and build on the skills, knowledge and networks that exist in communities.

Secondly, we want to make sure that every neighbourhood has a community space where residents can get together and go to activities. We think every community needs somewhere for people to meet and have access to wi-fi.

Thirdly, we are asking the council to develop an asset transfer policy and to let residents come together and develop publicly-owned buildings that are not well used.

Fourthly, we think that small community groups are very important and help keep residents happy and healthy and need to be supported by small grants. We are asking the city council to keep a small grants fund that supports this community activity.

And finally, we are asking the council and its partners to work with communities and share power equally.

We make more recommendations in our full report.