

Summary: Form Follow Function Workshop B

The workshop discussed 4 models for Food Partnerships and their pros and cons.

Model 1: Food Partnerships housed in the Third Sector – (Example -Middlesbrough Food Partnership)

- Middlesbrough Environment City (MEC) is a company limited by guarantee, a charity and has its own board of directors.
- MEC covers a broad environmental agenda – linked to One Planet Living concept
- MEC employs approx. 30 staff and has turnover of approx. £1Million
- MEC is funded by public health to provide support and Chair the Middlesbrough Food Partnership.
- The Food Partnership itself is unconstituted.
- The Food Partnership benefits from MECs links and partners. The Food Partnership links into Financial Inclusion Group; One Planet Living Group; Fairtrade etc.

Pros

- Enables good deal of flexibility
- Can have a strategic impact
- Uses existing organisation rather than setting up a new one

Cons

- There could be issues of trust – e.g. partners round the table have to trust the lead org not to take unfair benefit from their position.
- Fear of Voluntary and Community Sector becoming delivery agent – and that the public sector can then take a step back from the agenda.
- Requires strong public sector support

Model 2: Food Partnership set up independently with voting members – (Example - Brighton and Hove Food Partnership)

- Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (BHFP) employs 20 staff to deliver a range of services e.g. weight management, cookery, food growing, schools work)
- Also leads and coordinates the food strategy.
- Set up as Company Ltd by Guarantee
- Memorandum sets out not for profit approach
- Members elect the Board of Directors at the AGM
- 9 Directors including 1 elected Councillor, 1 council officer, 1 health rep, 1 rep from Food Matters (founding organisation)
- Board both govern the organisation and lead food partnership responsible for delivery.
- In the future BHFP are looking to separate out these two functions to create separate organisations.

Pros

- Can apply for funding
- Can pick their own commitments
- Can get more people involved – through individual membership structure
- Used to being 'lean'
- Political neutrality

Cons

- Have to govern yourself

Model 3: Food Partnership set up independently with no members (Example – Food Plymouth)

- Food Plymouth Partnership Network
 - Develops and Delivers Sustainable Food City Action Plan
 - SFC Themed Leads
 - No Formal Membership Structure
 - Informed, supported and enabled by Food Plymouth CIC
- Food Plymouth CIC
 - Social Enterprise, business focus
 - Directors appointed internally
 - No formal membership structure

Pros

- Can trade and also bid for (some) funding. Including some funds that local authorities can't go for
- Independent of public sector
- Business / enterprise mind set and skills can push the boundaries

Cons

- Cannot get some charity funding
- Liable for corporation tax
- Public sector / traditional voluntary and community sector partners do not always 'get' enterprise.

Model 4: Food partnership housed by the public sector (Example Bath and North East Somerset)

- Coordinator post based in Sustainability Team at council
- Funded by public health
- Chair – local authority Sustainability Manager
- Multi-stakeholder group e.g. council reps, Bath District Farmers, Bath Tourism, Transition Bath, Virgin Care (Health)
- Stakeholder Partnership – 1 event per annum, aimed at organisations
- No formal membership structure
- Tends to focus on what the council can do and its influence on other public sector orgs
- Strong links into strategic partnerships e.g. Health and Wellbeing Board, Environment Sustainability Partnership, Climate Change Plan.

Pros and Cons

- Very well embedded into strategic level, but also vulnerable to public sector changes
- Strongly positioned to engage strategically – knows the local authority system well and can identify the right person / opportunity to act.
- The Partnership does focus on third sector / private sector and does involve businesses (mainly local food businesses) but (due to large local authority membership) tends to focus more on public sector leadership / action as a priority.
- Other stakeholders may perceive the partnership to be a public sector initiative
- In spite of cross party support the partnership is still vulnerable to withdrawal of fixed term funding.

General Points made on Food Partnership Structure

- There is no one size fits all model – different places will need different models depending on resources, culture, those involved, existing organisations etc. SFC needs to accept difference.
- Food Partnerships need to be flexible and able to grow – they may need to change legal form and structure as they develop.
- Importance of getting the right ‘individuals’ on board – no matter what their ‘roles’ are.
- The importance of having a strong chair of the partnership (whatever the model)
- Partners need to sign up with the interests of the partnership in mind, rather than their own organisational interests.
- As local authority’s role is changing, they are able to support partnerships less and less.
- Accepting uncertainty of the structure is required in the early days.
- Could SFC provide ‘top tips’ e.g. ‘how to take a food partnership out of the public sector’
- The potential to use existing organisations is important in the current economic climate.
- Strong links to public sector bodies are important to maintain.
- Discussion on the recent applications by SFCs to Charity Commission could have been supported by SFC – at the moment each food partnership is researching it, making an application, getting rejected etc.