

Sheffield Strategic Partnership Working Group - Meeting Notes

Wednesday 1 November 2023, 1.00-3.00pm

Learn Sheffield (Albion House)

Attendees: Jonathan Crossley Holland (chair), Stephen Betts, Andrew Jones, Bob Cuff, Pat Butterell, Evelyn Abram, Martin Finch, Dave Trouche, Cathy Rowland, Nicola Shipman, Fiona Rigby, Linda Joseph, Thomas Edmonds (notes)

Apologies: Bev Matthews, Martin Fallon, Shelly Appleby

Introductions

JCH welcomed all to the meeting.

Note of previous meeting (14/07/23)

The notes from the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

Strategic Partnership Proposal

Sheffield City Council and Learn Sheffield are exploring some new approaches to developing an education strategy in the city and have jointly set up a working group to develop and make recommendations for a new approach to civic partnership.

The group will work together to produce a consultation that will be shared for all settings and stakeholders to become involved in.

As part of this Jonathan Crossley Holland produced a number of slides with discussion points and items to support the conversation. This included discussing a possible vision for the partnership, outlining key challenges, looking at establishing ways of working, membership of the board, the profile of the partnership and support and funding.

Initially the vision for the partnership was discussed and amendments were suggested that will be incorporated. This will be included in the consultation but will hopefully give a clear outline to settings and partners on what we are looking to put in place and achieve.

The Strategic Partnership will look to identify areas across the city and possibly wider to focus on and with the involvement of settings and wider stakeholders look to make improvements. This will be a city-wide approach to improvement and will look to make improvements across the whole community and not just in settings that are further behind others.

The group discussed key challenges that are apparent across the education community and could form areas of focus for the work of the partnership, these include: a lack of funding, recruitment and retention of staff and the increasing complexity of pupil needs and the sheer numbers as well as looking at areas to tackle post Covid.

Once established the Partnership Group could look to promote a vision of what can be achieved by building confidence by successfully tackling a small number of agreed priorities, the group could be legally established as a formal partnership providing the city and possibly wider with strategic leadership but not deliver services. JCH suggested that the group could meet three times a year, for example, with priority area sub-groups established as working groups for wider participation.

Colleagues discussed suggested membership and it was agreed that a smaller more succinct group should form the Partnership with the appointment of an independent chair to drive and steer the work outside of the meetings. The appointment of an independent chair is key, and the appointee would need the capacity to drive this forward and have the appropriate contacts and links to advocate for Sheffield in a more national picture.

The group discussed the make up of the Partnership and the group agreed that the members of this will need to accurately represent the city coming from a mix of settings and partner organisations. The appointments to the Partnership are key to its success and need to represent the diverse city in which we live, work and serve.

It was suggested by SB that the Partnership could build on and work with current structures that are in place across the city with established groups already in place and running in the education sector. There are primary, secondary and special partnership groups running and planned through the year and the work from the Partnership could feed up and down from these established groups. The groups are open to all settings giving all a voice and input to the key work on selecting and improving selected priorities.

SB shared a short presentation which included suggestions for some potential design principles:

- The Partnership would have an independent chair and membership based on existing structures
- The independent chair could co-opt additional members to ensure that the partnership was representative (by sector, geography, experience etc.) and carried the confidence of the wider sector
- It would receive an annual needs analysis (perhaps at the start of the calendar year)
- The Partnership could commission 'trails' to provide deeper analysis
- The Partnership could consult on suggested priorities, using modern techniques that enabled colleagues to comment on suggestions and the feedback from others in a timely way
- The work to address priorities would take place in task and finish groups so that the process was open and the right expertise (from within the city and beyond) was available to support the work

Colleagues noted that there is a requirement for the Partnership to be put together carefully with a clear rationale and designed to feel and be different to what there already is in place across the city. Priorities needs to be addressed and worked through calling on the wide range of expertise across the city via task and finish groups.

The group discussed the size of the Partnership and agreed that a small board with task and finish groups would be the best option for this operationally and the suggestion will made when the consultation with the wider community is out and live. An independent chair was also discussed, and exploratory discussions will take place to test what kind of candidates might be available to take on this role. This appointment will be key to the success of the Partnership and may take time for the correct person to be identified and appointed.

The group discussed the support and funding of this activity. JCH suggested that the independent chair role would carry the biggest cost (circa £20k for example) and the estimated cost of putting the Partnership in place including research and business capacity for the Partnership and support for task and finish groups would be approximately £50k. It was acknowledged that some of this could be 'in-kind' support.

The group discussed ways in which this could be funded but this is something that will need further discussion and consultation. Colleagues were very clear that funding will be extremely limited within the sector to support these costs, although it may be that specific funding to support specific beneficial activity relating to priorities may be more feasible.

Sheffield City Council have made a small amount available for the administration of the Board and wider working groups. AJ noted the funding pressures on SCC as well as recognising the pressures on the sector. Further discussion of this will take place outside the meeting so that further discussions can happen in future working groups.

It was suggested that the universities in the city could provide formative and summative feedback to the Partnership.

The group discussed the possibility of looking to cover the cost of this across the education sector in the Partnership. SB explained that this is difficult and creates a cliff edge as if some settings choose not to contribute the funding would they have the same access and voice.

Colleagues commented that, at present this would be a difficult thing to sell to settings across the city as only the handful of colleagues in attendance know the direction and what the aim of this is. If there is more detail and something to fund towards this may be easier to pitch to the wider community. There needs to be further thought and discussion on how this will be funded and how the costs of the chair will be covered.

Next steps

It was agreed that the next steps would be for the views from the meeting today to be pulled together and written up. There are clear views from the group around the engagement strategy and views on the size and the membership of the group.

This will be pulled together and shared with colleagues with further discussion at the next planned working group meeting.

Jonathan Crossley Holland shared a paper with the group on attendance as this gives an idea on how the focus on a specific priority could look like. This is work that has come from a similar pilot and is the findings from the first year with this focus.

It was agreed that Ben Bryant from ISOS would be invited to a future meeting to contribute or discuss the attendance findings and work to give the working group an idea on how this evolved and developed and help shape the consultation process and what the group is looking to achieve.

Colleagues discussed a report (from Public First) recently published that focuses on attendance and parental perception and the view that attendance in education is all about punishment. There is a need to change values and perceptions of education to parents back to the pre-Covid level and work needs to involve health professionals and other services to share and spread the same message about attendance and going to school.

In some communities that is a fourth or fifth generation issue that has been made worse by messaging linked to Covid and to stay away from school with illness to keep pupils safe. This needs to change and we could look at and learn from other areas of strategies used to tackle these problematic areas.

Good work is carried out in communities by settings across the city but there still remains issues to unpick and tackle and settings need more support and help in doing this to look to improve attendance figures and re-programme attitudes of parents/carers.

Learn Sheffield are carrying out a focused analysis of the data relating to attendance as part of their current ongoing evaluation. SB offered to bring that to support a discussion about attendance at the next working group, alongside an input from Ben Bryant (ISOS) and the Public First report.

Date and time of next meeting

23 November 2023, 11.00-1.00pm
Learn Sheffield Albion House