

Community Building Health Check Summary

This is a partnership project led by the Trust for Developing Communities (TDC) with support from the Hangleton and Knoll Project (HKP) on behalf of the Brighton and Hove Community Buildings Network (CBN). It is resourced by the Collaboration Fund from Brighton and Hove City Council and supported by Jonathan Best in the Community, Equality and Third Sector Team.

In 2018/19, TDC developed a health check tool for managers and trustees of community buildings to review the strengths and challenges of their building. Six community buildings were supported to complete the health check and it is now a resource for others to use independently.

Below we summarise the findings from the health checks and discussions with other building managers. In order to maximise the learning we have not identified the community buildings we worked with in this report to protect the confidentiality of their issues.

Strengths and Successes of Community Buildings

The health checks showed how community buildings are the back bone of community activity and key to the existence of many small groups. The impact of the buildings is far reaching offering space for low cost accessible activities on a community's door step. We found that community buildings: -

- have **committed volunteers or staff**, dedicated to running, managing and fundraising for their buildings
- offer **affordable room hire** to local residents
- well-placed to **support their local communities**
- support around 20 **weekly groups to meet** in each building
- enable up to **600 individuals to access weekly activities** in each building
- host a **wide range of low cost and peer support activities** including community/residents associations, fitness activities, band practice, dance groups for all ages, theatre groups, mindfulness classes, baby and toddler groups, church groups, various support groups, youth groups, stay and play, older people groups, uniform groups (brownies etc.), café, parties
- are a place where residents can find **information about other services** and projects
- **collaborate with service providers to offer support** to their local communities
- **support small community groups** to develop

Challenges for Community Building Managers

The health checks explored the range of challenges community building managers are facing. We identified 14 challenges which building managers tackle in order to continue to offer a safe, warm and welcoming environment for their communities.

Challenge 1 – Recruiting more volunteers and committee members

Existing staff and volunteers have little spare capacity to do this. Treasurer and IT skills are particularly needed. Building managers are keen to explore ways to sustain the committee and make succession plans.

‘Our committee isn’t very robust, we’re only a small core group’

Challenge 2 – Supporting staff, volunteers and committee members to gain skills

With support and training, staff, volunteers and committee members will feel more confident about taking on the responsibility of managing a building. Regular supervision for building managers could have a big impact on skill levels and feeling supported.

Challenge 3 – Resolving uncertainty around leases, business rates and governance arrangements

Many management committees are concerned about the implications of different lease arrangements, potential business rate liabilities or the most appropriate governance structure and more support and advice around this would be helpful.

Challenge 4 – Minimising energy costs

These are some of the largest outgoings of community buildings and most buildings would like an energy audit to look at ways of reducing their energy costs. Investment is needed to install better heating and double glazing. They would like support to find out where to go to access funding for capital costs and help to apply to funders.

Challenge 5 – Raising funding for community buildings

Building managers and committee members would like support and training around identifying funding streams and completing grant fund applications. All the managers would like their building to become more self-sufficient and not reliant on Council or other grant funding.

Challenge 6 – Setting a balanced budget

All the building managers interviewed would like support to set a balanced budget so they can plan for the future and work towards paid staff as well as volunteers. They recognise that the sustainability of a community building is more secure when there are paid managers. Managers would like to generate some reserves so that the building finances are at less risk.

‘Cleaning is only three hours per week which is not enough but there aren’t available finances to pay for more’

Challenge 7 – Taking a strategic view

Building managers would like to take a more strategic view and need support to free themselves from administration and the day to day running of the building.

Challenge 8 – Setting a repair budget

Most building managers would like to be able to set a budget for maintaining their buildings and do reactive maintenance and repairs. Most buildings don't have routine maintenance or programme of planned works and need significant capital works to make the building more efficient. Fundraising support would help with this and building condition surveys would help prioritise the needs.

Challenge 9 – Engaging users and potential users of the buildings more

Most building managers would like more engagement from their users and to develop active user groups. Ideally they would like to consult with users and local residents to see what people think about the building and its use.

Challenge 10 – Maximising the use of the buildings

Most building managers would like more groups to use their buildings as this meets the needs of the local community and brings revenue into the building. Events are key to bringing more people into the buildings and for fundraising, managers all find that there is very little capacity to hold them. Managers felt that more people were needed to develop new ideas.

'We need summer activities and a youth group and we need volunteers to organise these activities'

Challenge 11 – Adopting effective policies

Building managers would like support to bring their policies up to date.

Challenge 12 – Promoting the building

Building managers want to generate more bookings by promoting the building. They would like support to develop a promotional plan including online promotion, building relations with services, local schools and businesses and a clear what's on calendar.

Challenge 13 – Demonstrating impact

Building managers need a straight forward evaluation process so they can monitor their services and demonstrate the impact of the building.

Challenge 14 – Collaborating and learning from others

Many building managers would benefit from networking or share good practice but have very little capacity to attend events. They would like support from the community development worker to strengthen links and to involve a more diverse range of residents.

TDC on behalf of the Community Buildings Network have provided support around all these issues and the CBN will continue to bring people together to find joint solutions to these challenges.

Challenge	Activity so far
1 – Recruiting more volunteers and committee members	Workshop at <u>November CBN event</u> on recruiting volunteers. Information on website.
2 – Supporting staff, volunteers and committee members to gain skills	Application to the Council Resilience Fund to trial non-managerial supervision for building managers
3 – Resolving uncertainty around leases, business rates and governance arrangements	Specific support around lease and governance arrangements including discussions with the Council and a solicitor
4 – Minimising energy costs	Successful fundraising support around energy efficiency and application for renewable energy lighting (HKP)
5 – Raising funding for community buildings	Fundraising session at February CBN event and grant finder sessions with the Council for individual buildings
6 – Setting a balanced budget	Support to an individual building to review budget and recruit paid staff, support to develop a job description for sessional work (HKP)
7 – Taking a strategic view	Developed mini action plans following each health check. Supported one building to develop a full business plan (HKP)
8 – Setting a repair budget	Support to fundraise for building repairs and improvements (HKP)
9 – Engaging users and potential users of the buildings	Discussions with a management committee about setting up a user group
10 – Maximising the use of the buildings	Support for several buildings to encourage more people and groups to use the building. Dementia Friends session at <u>November CBN event</u> . TDC project to explore ways community buildings can be more accessible for young people.
11 – Adopting effective policies	CBN event session in November on policies and where to find templates. Information now on CBN website
12 – Promoting the building	Support for specific buildings to develop written publicity and their on-line presence e.g. Facebook (HKP) and website
13 – Demonstrating impact	Set up partnership with Community Works to apply for ‘Money Trail’ funding to explore the extent funding stays in the local economy
14 – Collaborating and learning from others	Hosted events and meetings, maintained CBN website to promote information sharing.