

COMMUNITY



Brighton and Hove Council

Brighton and Hove Community Kitchen

What is the Brighton and Hove Community Kitchen?

The Community Kitchen (BHCK) was opened in May 2018 and delivers cookery courses and classes on a range of food-related and community-focused topics. In addition to running cookery classes and courses, the Community Kitchen is available to hire for events, private parties, and group/team building activities.

The Community Kitchen was set up by the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (BHFP). BHFP describes itself as a hub and network builder across the many community food projects in Brighton and Hove. It provides grant funding, training, networking opportunities, and advice for these groups.

BHCK is based on Queens Road in central Brighton, close to Brighton train station. The building is owned by Community Base, a charity that provides office space and meeting rooms for community and voluntary groups in Brighton. Although the focus on this report will be on the Community Kitchen, there will also be opportunities to evaluate the BHFP's longer-term history of delivering cookery courses and classes to the general public.

What does the Brighton and Hove Community Kitchen aim to achieve?

Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (BHFP), which runs the Community Kitchen, aims to help people learn to cook, grow food, eat a healthy diet, and waste less food. They prioritise work with vulnerable adults and people experiencing deprivation, isolation, poor health and other life challenges.

By the time the Community Kitchen was founded in 2018, BHFP had been running community-based cooking classes for 10 years. BHCK was established, presumably, to build on this strong track record. It also offers BHFP a permanent and visible base, thereby acting as a 'shop window' to promote the Partnership and give it clear visual identity.

How does it work?

There are two main elements to the Brighton and Hove Community Kitchen (BHCK): the cookery classes, and the community cookery courses.

Cookery classes are open to everyone, and cover a range of subjects including desserts, vegan menus, and healthy meals. There are also one-off 'MasterChef' classes, offered on an ad-hoc basis and led by guest chefs from some of Brighton's top restaurants. Any profits from these cookery classes are used to subsidise the BHCK's cookery courses. These courses are run over a number of weeks and are specifically tailored for certain vulnerable or hard-to reach groups. Current examples include a dementia-friendly group, cooking for people with learning disabilities, and cooking on a budget. These are offered at very low cost or are free.

To take part in a community cookery course, potential attendees need to complete an application form. The exact process differs from course to course, and there is no information given about what criteria BHFP use to select participants for courses. BHCK is also available to hire for private parties, events, product launches, team building activities, and the like. The profits from this also go towards the BHCK cookery courses.

How is it set up?

Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (BHFP) began as a joint venture initiated by the City Council's Sustainability Commission and the Primary Care Trust. Food Matters, who are one of the three organisations behind Sustainable Food Cities and are based in Brighton, facilitated early meetings of this loose food partnership.

In 2006 the food partnership became an Unincorporated Association. It established an Organising Committee, elected its first board members, and hired its first part-time staff member (paid for by Food Matters). In 2008, the shift was made to establish BHFP as a not-for-profit Limited Company by guarantee. Interestingly, they were turned down for charitable status because they "were deemed to promote certain businesses and to work with private enterprises". The BHFP made a conscious decision not to cease those activities and to pursue a different status for the Partnership. BHFP currently has 6 Directors and 12 employees; this is down from 26 employees in 2018.

Community Kitchen

BHCK opened in May 2018. Just over six months later, BHFP lost an important contract, which meant they had to downsize their team and re-evaluate their financial situation. It was therefore crucial that the Community Kitchen bring in revenue for BHFP, and that it be commercially viable from the outset.

There is not much information about how BHCK is managed day-to-day, except that there is a Community Kitchen Co-ordinator. Volunteers also play a big role in organising and supporting the activities that run.

The Community Kitchen and co-operative working (operational)

BHCK benefits from a range of co-operative relationships with local chefs. For example, the one-off Chef Masterclasses are led by chefs from some of Brighton's most well-known restaurants. However, it isn't clear whether the chefs are offering their time on a voluntary basis.

The Community Kitchen also relies heavily on volunteers, who help with everything from organising the stockrooms to doing washing up after the classes. This is fairly typical of local food projects of this sort. However, on their venue hire page BHCK stipulates that a kitchen assistant will be an additional cost. Presumably this is a way of BHFP increasing their revenue.

There is also no information about how the Community Kitchen sources its food. Although the BHFP website has information about where to buy organic and local food, it's not clear which of these businesses – if any – regularly supply the Community Kitchen with food.

The Community Kitchen and co-operative working (strategic)

Since BHCK was established, only a small number of strategic documents have been produced in relation to Brighton and Hove's food sector. This includes the Brighton and Hove Food Strategy Action Plan 2018-23, which BHFP produced in partnership with other local food stakeholders. The Community Kitchen is not featured.

Additionally, in Brighton and Hove's 2018 SFC Gold Award application, the Community Kitchen was mentioned only once, in reference to its social enterprise model. In the 2019 update of Brighton and Hove's Food Poverty Action Plan 2015-18, the Community Kitchen was not mentioned. Strategically, then, BHCK does not seem to have many strong links to Brighton and Hove's wider food policies.

However, the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (BHFP), who run the Community Kitchen, work very closely with a wide range of strategic partners on food policy and strategy. For example, their Brighton and Hove Food Strategy Action Plan 2018-23 lists over 100 partners who were involved in the development and delivery of the plan. BHFP explain that the Food Strategy, "is a huge partnership exercise, and is our primary tool for building our partnership. The recent action plan refresh means 100 organisational partners are involved in delivery, including 26 separate council departments."

Additionally, the BHFP is co-ordinating Brighton and Hove's 2020 SFC Gold Award application. BHFP also holds seats on several local boards and partnerships, including the Local Strategic Partnership, City Sustainability Partnership, Healthy Weight Programme Board, Adult Learning Group, and the Food & Drink Festival committee.

No doubt BHCK benefits from these links, and could be considered well connected and well placed within the Brighton and Hove food system as a result of being part of BHFP.

For further information contact:

James Mulvaney

Policy Manager – Oldham Council

James.Mulvaney@oldham.gov.uk | www.oldham.gov.uk