

## MINUTES

<b>Attendees:</b>	Richard Freeman Cllr Jacob Taylor Sarah Springford Joanna Havers Gavin Stewart Vanessa Potter Razak Helalat Victoria King Demi Heath Liz Cadman	Always Possible [Chair] BHCC B&H Chamber of Commerce University of Brighton BHGB/Brighton BID SCTP BlackRock Restaurants Plus Accounting Hearth Sustainability/SIP BHCC
<b>Apologies:</b>	Kevan Smith Mohit Bajaj Ana Christie Mark Buchanan Smith Alison Turner Tom Willis James May Jessica Sumner	Brighton United Simplex Services Sussex Chamber of Commerce Ingka Centres/Churchill Square FSB Shoreham Port Sussex Cricket Community Works

### **1.0 Welcome, Apologies and minutes of last meeting**

Richard Freeman opened the meeting and welcomed attendees, noting that the board was operating with around half of its usual membership but retained strong energy and ambition. Members introduced themselves, with a particular welcome extended to Demi Heath, who attended as a new member and outlined her work in sustainable business and B Corp support across Sussex.

Apologies were noted.

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and accepted without amendment.

### **2.0 Conflicts of interest**

No declarations of interest or conflicts requiring anyone to leave the room were raised.

### **3.0 Chair Recruitment Update**

Gavin Stewart provided a brief update on the chair recruitment process. He thanked Demi Heath for her strong application and confirmed that the panel had responded positively. The recruitment process will reopen to widen the pool of applicants, with a closing date expected on Monday 6 July. A further panel will then review applications. Demi remains under consideration, and board members will be invited in due course to support the process through an executive committee or panel arrangement.

#### **4.0 Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation**

Cllr Jacob Taylor updated the board on devolution and local government reform. He confirmed that Sussex and Brighton now have devolved powers through the Sussex and Brighton Strategic Authority, which will manage decision-making and investment funding ahead of the election of a mayor in 2028. The authority is expected to oversee an investment fund of approximately £1.4 billion over 30 years, with around £30 million available over the first two years to support economic growth and jobs.

He explained that Brighton & Hove will need to put forward strong investment ideas because it will be competing with other parts of Sussex for funding. He also outlined the linked process of local government reorganisation, under which district and borough councils in Sussex are expected to be restructured into a smaller number of unitary councils. Under current proposals, Brighton & Hove City Council would remain largely unchanged but could absorb nearby eastern areas including Telscombe, Peacehaven, Falmer and East Saltdean. The rest of East Sussex could become a single unitary authority, while West Sussex could become two unitary authorities.

The board discussed local responses to the proposals, particularly concerns raised in Lewes and surrounding areas. Cllr Taylor noted that although some communities were sceptical, there were strong economic and transport links between those areas and Brighton & Hove. Members also highlighted the importance of ensuring broad engagement as the Strategic Authority develops. It was noted that new senior appointments had recently been made within the authority and that relevant presentation materials and slides from previous briefings would be shared with the board.

Consultation on the proposals ends on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2026.

#### **5.0 Workshop on Board Priorities**

Gavin Stewart summarised the findings from the board survey on priorities and opportunities. The presentation can be [viewed here](#). The four areas taken forward for workshop discussion were: quarterly sector spotlight campaigns, small business start-up grants, business support for underrepresented groups, and a business ambassador role. Members agreed that small business start-up grants were less immediately actionable because they depended on external funding, and workshop discussions focused mainly on the other three areas.

##### **5.1 Quarterly sector spotlight campaigns**

The group agreed that sector spotlight campaigns would be a practical and visible way for the board to start delivering activity. The campaigns would likely run quarterly, each focusing on a specific sector, with early candidates including technology and innovation, creative industries, retail, hospitality and the seafront economy.

Each campaign would need a clear target audience and objective. For some sectors, the aim might be consumer engagement and local footfall, while for others it might be external promotion, investment attraction or awareness of employment pathways. Members proposed assigning one or two board members to lead each spotlight, ideally combining sector knowledge with communications support. The campaigns could include press coverage, social media and LinkedIn activity, events, case studies, and profiles of businesses and individuals in the sector.

## 5.2 Support for underrepresented groups

The board discussed the need for more targeted and inclusive support for underrepresented founders and business owners. Potential audiences included early-stage founders, global majority entrepreneurs and women founders, although members stressed that this should be informed by evidence and local data.

It was agreed that support should be designed in partnership with community organisations and other trusted networks so that barriers to participation and growth are properly understood. Members highlighted the importance of ensuring that those delivering support reflect the communities they are serving. Existing initiatives already operating in the city should be mapped before any new programme is developed, with the board focusing on gaps, coordination and amplification rather than duplication.

## 5.3 Business ambassador or champion role

The workshop explored two related ideas: an inward-facing ambassador role to support businesses and an outward-facing champion role to promote Brighton & Hove's business story. Members felt that the strongest immediate opportunity was to develop a network of business champions who could advocate for the city, tell authentic growth stories and represent Brighton & Hove at conferences, events and investment forums.

Discussion highlighted the need to focus on the city's narrative, including why successful businesses choose to stay and grow in Brighton & Hove despite constraints, and how the city contributes to wider regional and national growth. Members suggested creating a directory of strong business stories, identifying credible and articulate figures who could represent the city, and providing practical support such as briefing materials, presentation decks, media preparation and potentially travel support for key events. It was also noted that many successful business leaders are time-poor and may need structured support to take on a championing role effectively.

## 6.0 Member Sector Feedback

**Universities and anchor institutions:** Jo Havers updated the board on the significant financial pressures facing universities and other anchor institutions. Brighton and Sussex universities are undergoing substantial change, including redundancy programmes and wider transformation work, which is expected to affect the city. Members noted that similar pressures are being seen in the NHS and other publicly funded organisations.

**Council representation:** Liz Cadman noted that Tom Cottam, interim Head of Cabinet would be attending future meetings. Cllr Jacob Taylor also updated the board on a new cabinet member, Cllr David McGregor, who will cover tourism, culture and aspects of the local economy.

**Meaningful Futures:** Demi Heath highlighted the work of [Meaningful Futures](#), which is exploring how young people can better access sustainable business opportunities and non-traditional routes into the labour market.

**Future agenda suggestion:** Vanessa Potter suggested that a future agenda item should include the Local Skills Improvement Plan and related local skills priorities.

**City centre and BID update:** Gavin Stewart reported that the new district goes live on 1 July, bringing additional businesses into the city-centre BID structure, including professional services. A new business engagement manager will also join the team, with a view to developing "mini-BIDs" in other areas of the city.

**Scale-up research event:** Richard Freeman shared details of an upcoming event on 9 July at Sussex Innovation on scale-up conditions in Brighton and Sussex, including research on the region as an “enablement economy”. He said a link would be shared with board members.

**Meeting venue:** Razak Helalat offered the use of the meeting venue for future sessions, including possible lunchtime meetings.

## 7.0 Date and Time of Next Meetings:

**Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2026 (5pm – 6:30/7pm)**

RF thanked everyone for their time and closed the meeting.

### **ACTIONS:**

#### **Agreed next steps and actions**

- Share slides and briefing materials related to the Strategic Authority, including previous presentations and relevant webinar content. **Owner:** Richard Freeman (**ACTIONED** see below):
  - Webinar on Sussex Devo with Institute for Government and Mark Rogers from S&B Strategic Authority - <https://youtu.be/xhhb8O8jLdY?si=uRxsTrKcEn6CD5dn>
  - A copy of the meeting slides can also be found [here](#).
- Develop initial proposals for quarterly sector spotlight campaigns, including possible first sectors and lead board members. **Owner:** GS with new council Local Growth & Visitor Economy Manager.
- Map existing support available to underrepresented founders and identify gaps or opportunities for board involvement. **Owner:** TBC
- Explore a business champion model for Brighton & Hove, including identifying potential champions, key messages and priority events or conferences. **Owner:** TBC
- Share details of the 9 July scale-up event at Sussex Innovation with board members. **Owner:** Richard Freeman. (**ACTIONED:** Details shared in email to board on 10.6.26)
- Consider adding the Local Skills Improvement Plan and related skills priorities to a future agenda. **Owner:** GS + Chair