

Effective Partnerships

Gravesham has a strong record on partnership working across a wide spectrum of community life, which not only enables the development of innovative joint ventures but also influences and is influenced, by the work of other partners. This is beneficial for opening fresh channels of communication between the council and the local community.

Gravesham has built significant and effective partnerships on a wide scale both locally with tenants, hard to reach groups and the North West Kent Racial Equality Council and beyond the Borough. Within the Kent Thameside growth area, Gravesham has established strategic partnerships across political and geographical boundaries to ensure that new and existing communities are involved in the decision making processes that will affect their quality of life and life chances.

Gravesham's effective partnership work is informed by extensive community involvement and consultation, engaging with local communities in ways designed to build understanding, trust and support.

These effective partnerships do not stop at information sharing. With its partners Gravesham is also striving to re-profile services in order to achieve a better fit with the needs and aspirations of local communities, including those voices which may not previously have been heard, in an incremental approach to service planning.

The Community Safety Partnership has the council, Kent Police and REC as core members and is a further example of a strong partnership at work. This partnership has a key role in monitoring racist incidents and coordinating community safety initiatives.



Effective Partnerships

Top Tip	Purpose
Aim for a long-term relationship	Many organisations are looking for lasting ways to improve their communities. The council can reach out to these interested groups by establishing a foundation with an advisory group comprising of key officers, community and political representatives and decision makers. The advisory group could conduct a needs assessment and set priorities. The key to initiating a partnership is to get the major stakeholders involved in the decision-making process
Top-level commitment	The approval of all parties involved is critical if a partnership is to get off the ground. Similarly, commitment at a corporate level is essential to the development of a partnership. It is necessary to be mindful that all those involved will have an agenda which is commonly referred to as 'what's in it for them.' The priorities established by the local authority need to match the priorities of the community group or voluntary organisation if the partnership is to be successful.
Decide on goals	The focus should be on ways the partnership can work together to meet mutually desirable goals. Ensure that promoting community cohesion is an integral part of strategy and operations and that from the outset the relationship is equally balanced with realistic expectations on both sides.
Make sure that the partnership is appropriate and relevant	Look for partners from sectors, areas or groups that are currently under represented and those that will benefit equally from the partnership. Small or isolated groups can join with other groups in order to maximise the potential for partners. Sometimes partnerships can be identified through simply communicating with others or through consultations etc where there have been gaps in service provision identified.
Be flexible	Local authorities and community groups/voluntary organisations essentially represent two different cultures. Language, time, capacity constraints and the needs of those involved often vary considerably between the two groups. Local authorities often focus on the 'bottom line' and may not fully understand the myriad of pressures that community groups and voluntary organisations face and visa versa. The development of mutual trust and respect is essential if a partnership is to be sustained over any length of time.
Build on successes and publicise efforts	It is important to plan activities on a small scale that will yield positive results. Publicising your partnership through the local newspaper or council newsletter or website will serve to highlight your efforts and will also give visibility to the partnership as a contributing member of the local community. Somewhere down the line funding may be available to expand and sustain a partnership.
Provide adequate time for planning	A series of meetings will probably be required to assess needs, prioritise goals, and map out specific activities which will help to ensure consultation runs smoothly and options are considered.
Goals, objectives, projects, timelines	Having a clear, well-articulated set of benchmarks, strategies and outcomes will keep the partnership focused and on task. Always put these important issues including boundaries etc in writing and be prepared to regularly revisit goals and redesign where and when appropriate.
Assign a person or coordinator to develop partnerships	Release time for an officer to work on partnerships between the authority and outside organisations. Partnerships that become good models with good practice guidelines should be shared and replicated in other departments throughout the authority and extended throughout the district.
Make evaluation a part of the plan	Periodic evaluations are beneficial to determining the effectiveness of partnerships and in identifying problem areas, and will assist in future planning and refining programs.
Maintain a positive attitude	There will always be doomsayers who complain that partnerships are too labour intensive and will not work. Ignore those who predict failure before a partnership even has an opportunity to get off the ground. Learn from other people's mistakes so that you can avoid making them when developing your own partnership. Keep an open mind regarding diverse views. In the final analysis, a positive mental attitude, hard work and perseverance will determine a partnership's success.