

Further Detail on the Urban Design Framework

In 2007 the council adopted the Public Space Public Life Study. Written by Gehl Architects with input by officers from across Brighton & Hove City Council, the Study sets out strategic recommendations to improve the city's public realm network, along with guiding design principles that should be followed to ensure the recommendations are delivered in the most successful way.

The overall objective of the Public Space Public Life Study is for successful, well designed city spaces that maximize their potential for all the city's residents to use and enjoy. If the city works for residents it will also work for visitors. A city that works for everyone will be a city that everyone wants to spend time in. Greater numbers of people wanting to spend time in the city results in greater social, sustainability, economic and health benefits to complement the safety, financial and competitive benefits that properly designed city spaces provide.

The Public Space Public Life Study forms the basis of an emerging Public Realm Strategy. Where possible, delivery of the Strategy should be (and generally has been) achieved by the council's officers, working together across departments. There are four primary reasons for delivering as much work as possible using Council officers, rather than consultants. Firstly, consultants tend to be more expensive than Council officers. Secondly, consultants provide no guarantee of quality. Thirdly, use of various consultants carries the risk of an inconsistent approach to work in the city. Finally, if work is carried out by consultants, the skills and knowledge built during that work remain (and leave) with the consultant. If the work is carried out by Council officers, the city's skills base is retained and enhanced.

Development of high quality Urban Design skills, like any other professional discipline, requires specialist training. Following production of the Public Space Public Life Study, the Council has maintained a mentoring arrangement with Gehl Architects to support development of an internal skills base, and as a result Brighton & Hove is generally seen as being one of the better Local Authorities in this area.

However on occasion it is still beneficial to draw on expert external advice. This will generally be useful when a piece of work either requires greater resource than that available within the council, or will benefit from very specific expertise that is not currently available – or cost effective to retain – “in house”. In these instances, the most effective means of delivering the highest quality outcome will be to combine the best available external support skills with existing officer resource.

Such instances are relatively rare. However, an enhanced Brighton Station Gateway is the kind of project that, due to its scale and importance, has potential to benefit from support of external Urban Design support.

In order to ensure the Council has flexibility to draw on such skills as, when and if required within a process that is in line with procurement good practise, it is recommended that an Urban Design Term Support Framework Contract (UDTSC) be established.

The UDTSC will last for four years, and comprise four Urban Design organisations. The initial UDTSC tendering process will make clear that no work is guaranteed for those organisations who are accepted onto the Framework.

Successful organisations will be chosen based on their ability to demonstrate highest quality experience of:

- public realm design in various environments relevant to Brighton & Hove's context
- production of national best practise guidance
- proactive contribution to enhancing national knowledge and learning in the field of Urban Design, and
- delivery of Master Plans
- Bidders will also need to demonstrate sufficient capacity to provide the Council with the support it may require, and assurance that specific individuals allocated to any Council commission, and not just the wider bidding organisation, will possess the necessary skills and experience.

When the UDTSC is established, any work commissioned will be awarded through a simplified "mini tender" process amongst organisations on the UDTSC. The complexity of each "mini tender" process will be dependent on the scale of any commission: work to support the Council with a small piece of guidance, for example, is likely to be awarded based on a relatively simple written response to a brief, whilst a city-scale design project would require more detailed proposals, possibly supplemented by interviews.

The anticipated value of any individual or aggregated commission(s) awarded under the contract is unlikely to exceed levels at which European (OJEU) procurement processes must be followed.

Assuming the report's recommendation has Cabinet's support, work to establish the UDTSC will commence immediately. The tendering process will incorporate a pre qualification questionnaire to identify a shortlist of eight potential UDTSC members, from which a panel of four will be selected following a more detailed tender process. It is anticipated that the successful organisations will be in place within three months.

The process will consider potential links to work of other authorities through the SE7 process.