

IGNITING A SPARK: Evaluation of the Birmingham Cultural Pilots programme Executive Summary

The Birmingham Cultural Pilots programme ran between December 2012 and March 2014 and was funded by Arts Council England (ACE) and Birmingham City Council (BCC).

Aims for the Cultural Pilot

- To research, design and pilot new ways of delivering locally based cultural and arts activities using the Positively Local C2 methodology.
- To involve and support local community groups to select a range of cultural activities in line with the agreed priorities for each area.
- To pilot a range of arts activities that maximise opportunities for arts and cultural engagement including the brokering of new partnerships.

Background

The Cultural Pilots programme was part of BCC's **Culture on Your Doorstep** objective to provide opportunities for residents to participate in high quality arts activities in local neighbourhoods. It was embedded in the Local Arts Fora network with access to support from Arts Champions.

Cultural Pilots delivery was aligned with themes of the DCLG¹-funded **Neighbourhood Community Budget** pilot areas in Balsall Heath (environment), Castle Vale (health and wellbeing) and Shard End (worklessness and families with complex needs).

Cultural Pilot outcomes

- Increased levels of local resident participation in arts and cultural activity.
- Residents involved in co-design and production of local arts and cultural activity.
- Local infrastructure for arts and culture strengthened.
- Capacity of local residents to engage in neighbourhood activities developed.

The programme was designed in response to research into the barriers to participation in arts and cultural activity in Birmingham². The **Positively Local C2 methodology**³ has seven steps to achieving change in a community. The change sought by the Cultural Pilots was set out in the programme outcomes.

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which Cultural Pilots were able to achieve against the programme outcomes. A bespoke evaluation framework was designed to gather data against specific indicators. Research activity focused on the delivery period July – December 2013 and the report interprets evidence gathered during that period. There were

¹ Department of Communities & Local Government

² Vector Research: *P1473 Cultural participation* BCP (2011)

³ John Gillespie, Susanne Hughes: *Positively Local: C2 a model for community change* CfWR & University of Birmingham (2011)

limitations on the quantitative data available and therefore the figures presented are indicative rather than the full picture.

Cultural Pilots delivery schedule

Phase 1	December 2012 January – March 2013	Open Tender to local Arts consultants Positively Local C2 research
Phase 2	May – September 2013	Large event delivery
Phase 3	October 2013 – February 2014 March 2014	Smaller project delivery Outcomes-focused evaluation Presentations at Cultivating Culture Symposium

Overview of artistic activity

The Cultural Pilots offered a variety of ways for people to be involved, and where possible engaged people who had never participated in arts or cultural activity before. The focus was on raising awareness of arts and culture by providing enjoyable high quality activities and opportunities to join in and build local skills.

Range of ways for people to participate



- As performers in high quality productions
- As event managers and technicians
- As event promoters
- As makers and creatives
- As co-designers and co-producers
- Targeted activity to reach isolated or particular groups in the community
- Bringing artistic activity into other arenas such as health services
- Through engagement with Arts Champions and other professional companies

People participated in a wide range of arts activities including singing, dancing, photography, public performances, lantern making, stone masonry, prop making, knitting, storytelling, shadow puppetry, craft making, visual arts and design.

Evidence against outcomes

Increased participation

There is evidence in survey and interview data from all Cultural Pilot areas which indicates that Cultural Pilot activities and events did attract people for the first time, both local residents and visitors from other areas of Birmingham and beyond.

Participation in Cultural Pilots July 2013 – February 2014

Cultural Pilot area	Participants	Volunteers	Audience
Balsall Heath	407	135	5782*
Castle Vale	680	39	4135*
Shard End	243	28	202
TOTAL	1,330	202	10,119

Source: Figures provided by Cultural Pilot co-ordinators

* Includes estimates for large-scale events

There was difficulty in establishing accurately the increases in participation as limited baseline data on previous numbers of people engaging in arts and cultural activity in the Cultural Pilot areas existed.

Participation in Castle Vale: Community Games 2012/Castle Vale Festival 2013

	2012	2013
Participants	423	680
Audience	1675	4108

Source: Figures provided by Cultural Pilot co-ordinator

Co-production of local arts and cultural activity

The involvement of residents in the co-design and co-production of activity could be considered a challenging outcome to achieve for a programme designed as a primary intervention to engage non-participants in arts and culture, however examples of co-production have been identified during the evaluation. There were variations in how 'co-design' and 'co-production' are interpreted across the three Cultural Pilots and there is evidence of the following:

- Projects where the ideas originated with residents and the co-ordinator worked with the groups to make them happen
- Residents taking responsibility for elements of event management or production
- Residents or groups choosing an artist or professional company to work with
- Residents or groups designing a brief for an artist
- Residents co-designing elements of performance with artists

- Local residents who are artists directly commissioned to deliver activity in the neighbourhood

There was an expectation that resident-led groups would be able to directly commission artists through the Cultural Pilots programme and there is some evidence that the necessary skills to do this are being developed but residents do not yet have enough experience to lead a commissioning process unsupported. Evidence from the Cultural Pilots showed that involving residents and partners on Steering Groups to manage events and arts activities was a successful mechanism for engaging local people and supporting them to gain experience of co-production .

The seven stages of the Positively Local C2 model set out different levels for involvement in co-design and co-production. The evaluation found evidence that people felt they had been listened to and their ideas taken on board, especially during the Festival visioning process in Castle Vale which was a good example of co-design. It was planned by a steering group of residents and local agencies, supported by the co-ordinator. Local people took on responsibility for leading elements of the Festival programme and reporting back to the main group. There was also significant co-production during the delivery of the two-day event.

Planning structure for Castle Vale Festival



“People took ownership of it”

“Everyone was part of it and that for me has been the outstanding memory”

“Everybody feels that their contribution was valued”

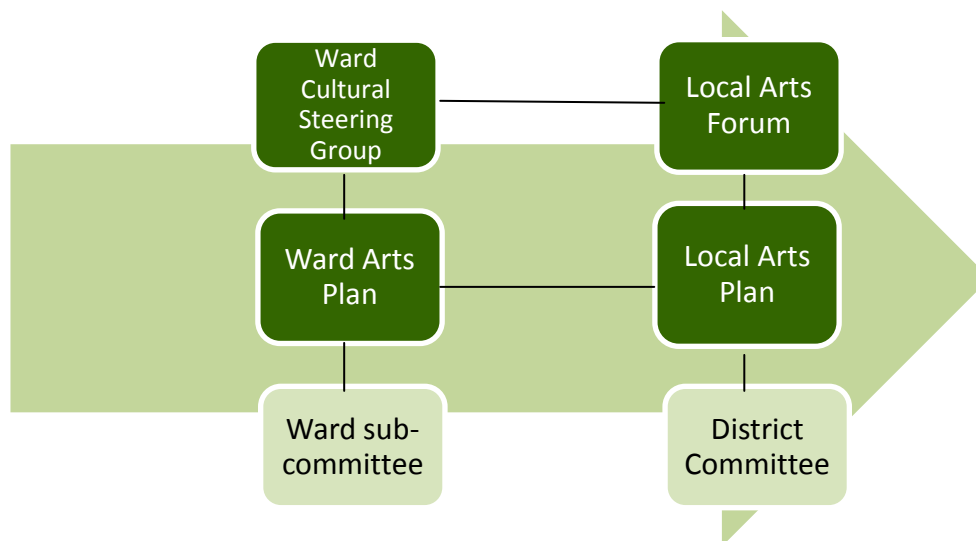
Residents Castle Vale

Stronger local infrastructure

A key finding of the evaluation is that people are more likely to respond to suggestions to build an infrastructure for arts and culture once they have experienced some artistic activity in their neighbourhood and have begun to develop an understanding of the benefits arts and culture can bring for local residents. Where co-ordinators took the approach of ‘learning from doing’, residents gained skills, knowledge and experience and became more informed. There are now groups planning a calendar of activities for the year ahead with opportunities for these groups to feed into their District-wide Local Arts Fora to influence policy and share experience.

Overall, there has been progress on developing infrastructure for arts and culture in the Cultural Pilot neighbourhoods however they are not robust enough structures at this stage to ensure sustainability without the ongoing support and more developed links to the Local Arts Fora.

Possible model for local arts and cultural infrastructure



Capacity building of residents

Previous research identified that the Cultural Pilots would need to *"build on confidence and cohesion at neighbourhood level before participation momentum is attained"*. The evaluation evidence suggests that momentum has been achieved in Castle Vale where the contribution from the Cultural Pilot was to increase the capacity of young people to engage in neighbourhood activity. It is far too early in the engagement process to expect residents in Shard End to be ready engage in other neighbourhood activities as a result of the Cultural Pilot. The process to engage them with arts and culture has only just begun and there is considerable work required to build on the start that has been made.

Balsall Heath is an area with a long history of resident engagement in neighbourhood activities but there is no evidence that this capacity has been enhanced specifically by the Cultural Pilot.

Synergy has been identified with other city-wide policy areas, specifically the Healthy Villages Programme and the Active Parks policy. Healthy Villages aims to focus on specific groups of people to understand their holistic needs, maximise opportunities for them to engage with community networks and improve their experience of services, in an approach similar to C2. It has been developed in connection with the Neighbourhood Community Budget pilot areas and has a good fit with Cultural Pilots. Phase 3 of the Cultural Pilot in Castle Vale, outside the scope of the evaluation, was part of a Social Prescribing project designed to enhance mental health and wellbeing. The Active Parks policy is rolling out to all parks in Birmingham in 2014 and learning from the Cultural Pilot in Shard End offers opportunities for partnership work to deliver more exciting artistic activity in parks.

Learning from the Cultural Pilots

What works

Positively Local C2 model: The Cultural Pilots set out to test the usefulness of the C2 model in engaging residents in arts and cultural activity and the result has been a positive one. C2 is a transformative model designed to achieve lasting change. It is too early to say if the change achieved is lasting but in Castle Vale and Shard End step changes have occurred. A key element of the model is to identify a theme pertinent to the neighbourhood that resonates with local people and creates a rallying effect.

Co-ordinator role: The co-ordinator role has been pivotal where the Cultural Pilots have been successful. A good co-ordinator acts as a catalyst to get things going, is prepared to take risks to achieve the vision of local people and provides reassurance and stability. The evidence strongly suggests that the role of the co-ordinator is most effective when held by someone with an arts background as a producer/creator balanced with knowledge and experience of community development processes and techniques.

Strong communication: The Cultural Pilots were most successful where there was effective and regular communication between co-ordinators and the funder/programme commissioner. This facilitated flexible investment in Cultural Pilot delivery to reflect the ideas of local people.

Building participation: The learning from the Cultural Pilots is that before people can be interested in building arts and culture infrastructure they need to develop a passion for arts and culture in their neighbourhood and learn to value it for the difference it makes to the quality of life and wellbeing, for them individually and for the community as a whole. Experiencing arts or cultural activity, as participants or audience members, is often people's first step to engagement. Through the Cultural Pilots people experienced a range of activities finding inspiration and a shared sense of achievement at different levels.

Working with professional artists: The artists' role within Cultural Pilots helped to raise the bar, to bring a creative perspective, inject high quality skills and polish into the events and performances – to help provide the 'wow' factor. They had to do this without taking over but by working with the co-ordinators to nurture and extend local talent, skills and knowledge. For this approach to be successful, artists must not only excel in their particular field but be confident and able to work in collaboration with people from a range of backgrounds. They must be able to listen to and develop local ideas and then add a boost of creativity that helps take the event or activity somewhere exceptional and unexpected.

Local partnerships: Across all three Cultural Pilot sites partnership working with local groups and organisations was essential for successful delivery of arts and cultural activity.

Neighbourhood locations: Taking cultural activity to spaces people can easily access or are familiar with locates the work of the Cultural Pilots in their communities and provides an opportunity to reach new audiences. Using local spaces opened up new locations for arts and cultural activity and challenged negative perceptions of Cultural Pilot areas.

Community marketing: The Cultural Pilots found that a developing range of methods for promoting activities and events was most effective. When people received the same message from different sources the message was reinforced, and even more so when some of the mechanisms were quirky or unusual as this inspired curiosity and stimulated anticipation in the lead-up to events.

Learning points

High expectations: High expectations were placed on co-ordinators to deliver the outcomes of the Cultural Pilots programme with communities at different points of readiness and capacity to engage. The time and support requirements to do this effectively were under-estimated. There is a need for flexibility on the part of the funder/programme commissioner to respond to local circumstances, agree aspirational but realistic goals for each area and to invest in developing the capacity of community organisations to manage artistic activities themselves.

Building co-production: A key learning point is that the journey to effective co-production takes time and requires a paradigm shift from funding specific outcomes to investing in creating appropriate scaffolding that enables people to grow and develop within local networks that are set up to create and sustain local arts and community engagement.

Poor communication: Good communication between co-ordinators and the funder/commissioner is essential for the successful delivery of a programme like Cultural Pilots. Poor communication results in an inability to deliver effectively on the ground and where this happened it was mostly due to the lack of capacity of individuals who had full-time commitments elsewhere.

Evaluation constraints: The data monitoring requirements were not agreed at the inception of the programme so co-ordinators were collecting different information. A monitoring template was subsequently produced but could not be fully completed as the data had not been collected at the time of delivery. This meant consistent data sets were unavailable for the evaluation. The evaluation team were not appointed until after two of the main events to be evaluated had happened. In addition, delivery of Phase 3 was delayed and not completed by the end of the data capture period so the report does not cover the full programme.

Did Cultural Pilots generate greater awareness of and appreciation for arts and culture?

There is evidence that even people who had been involved with community arts for a long time experienced the 'wow' factor with some of the performances and activities that have been staged through the Cultural Pilots. People attending for the first time provided positive feedback and asked for more activities. There have been expressions of increased pride and wellbeing following successful Cultural Pilot events and a realisation that people do not have to travel to experience high quality arts and culture which makes them feel good. High quality productions in neighbourhoods have been particularly effective in raising awareness, especially when the media has been involved. Where an anticipatory buzz was created it stimulated curiosity and increased attendance and participation.

At this time it is not possible to measure any sustainable impact of the Cultural Pilots, they were still delivering at the time data capture was closed, however there are indications of a step change in engagement in Castle Vale and of 'seedling growth' in Shard End. In Balsall Heath the foundations for a more co-ordinated and collaborative approach to developing arts and cultural activity have been laid.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to inform the proposed rollout of the Cultural Pilots through Local Arts Fora.

1. Adopt Positively Local C2 model

The Positively Local C2 model is appropriate and effective for initiating and developing neighbourhood-level participation in arts and culture, subject to the appointment of a skilled and experienced Co-ordinator, and its continued use is recommended.

2. Appoint skilled arts-based co-ordinators

Develop a job description from the attributes identified in the full report to appoint skilled arts producers with experience of community development and, if possible, local knowledge.

3. Evidence-based commissioning

Each neighbourhood will have a different starting point in terms of levels of non-participation, resources and facilities. Avoid preconceptions of what will be delivered in each neighbourhood until after the initial research phase of the C2 approach. Allow co-ordinators to work with residents to develop a vision for arts and cultural activity before agreeing what might be achieved and by when. Investment decisions should be based on evidence of community engagement and co-design. Where possible, scope for co-production should be built in. Funders/commissioners should recognise that plans might change if circumstances change on the ground and strong communication is essential to be able to respond to changes effectively.

4. Share the learning from the Cultural Pilots

New co-ordinators should be offered opportunities to learn from the Cultural Pilots by meeting existing co-ordinators and local groups and having access to relevant reports.

The findings could also be shared more widely to contribute to the knowledge base on the implementation of asset-based community development approaches and on the engagement of non-participants in arts and culture.

5. Develop monitoring tools and improve data capture

The monitoring of Cultural Pilots activity should be reviewed to clarify what information should be captured consistently across all neighbourhoods. Appropriate tools should be designed to facilitate the regular capture and input of monitoring data on participation levels and other key criteria, including initial data capture to set baselines. Data capture should also include audience feedback mechanisms. Co-ordinators should be clearly informed of expectations on data capture, including the collection timetable, and given appropriate training and support to meet the requirements.

6. Build sustainability through policy alignment

The outcomes of the Social Prescribing project in Castle Vale should be evaluated to evidence the impact of the arts and cultural activities on the mental health and wellbeing of participants. Future arts and cultural activities in parks should be aligned, where possible, with the desired outcomes of the Active Parks programme⁴. Links with wider strategic objectives such as health, physical activity and wellbeing may support the sustainability of Cultural Pilots rollout work by opening it up to a broader range of partnership and funding opportunities.



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⁴ Part of 'Transforming Place' working together for better neighbourhoods BCC Strategy 2014