Creative People and Places

Governance and consortium working:

A research project by Catherine Bunting and Tom Fleming

Final report – October 2015

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1. Introduction

This Paper sets out an overview of research into the consortia models of the Creative People and Places programme. It is written as a snapshot analysis of the development journey for consortia and it sets out some headline learning points and reflections. It is **written at a specific moment in time**, with consortia on development journey and thus constantly changing. It s also shaped by the perspectives of consultees – mainly consortia members. Not all members were available for interview, so the Paper inevitably presents a partial perspective. It is to this extent illustrative and designed to give the reader an insight into the consortium experience as it unfolds.

Creative People and Places (CPP) is a major programme run by Arts Council England to enable more people to experience and be inspired by the arts, with investment focused in parts of the country where arts engagement is significantly below the national average. Over three funding rounds a total of £37m has been awarded to 21 places to run three-year programmes that build and sustain local audiences for the arts.

Consortium working is the cornerstone of the CPP programme. The Arts Council was keen to encourage long-term collaborations between local communities, arts and cultural organisations and other partners, and specified that applications to the fund could only be made *by 'an organisation which will lead a consortium…representing the public, artists and arts organisations, presenting and promoting the arts in new and inspiring ways'.*

The Arts Council was looking to explore different approaches to local arts development and hoped that by bringing together organisations with diverse skills and perspectives, the consortium model would encourage new forms of audience engagement and give local communities real influence over and ownership of the design and delivery of CPP projects.

There is a strong emphasis on evaluation within the CPP programme and the Arts Council and the 21 CPP places are keen to learn as much as possible about how best to build new audiences for the arts in community contexts. Recognising that effective consortium working is key to the success of CPP projects – and that it can take considerable time, effort and skill to establish and manage a consortium – the CPP Network Steering Group commissioned Catherine Bunting and Tom Fleming to research experiences of consortium working across the CPP programme.

The aim of our research is to support and improve the practice of consortium working in CPP places by:

- understanding the **formation, development and day-to-day running** of CPP consortia
- mapping the **governance and partnership models** being used by CPP places, and exploring the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches
- identifying the key factors that enable CPP consortia to thrive – a **checklist of effective governance** for arts and community partnerships
- acting as **learning partners** for the CPP network – creating points of reflection and exchange and a neutral space in which research participants can talk through emergent issues, concerns and ideas

At a time of significant public sector cuts – and related challenges of social and economic inequality – we hope that this research will help to reveal the structures, relationships and commitments embedded within CPP consortia as valuable local assets, and to demonstrate how effective partnerships can enable culture and creativity to play a transformational role for local communities.

1.1 Our approach to the research

We carried out the research in two main stages. We began by undertaking **desk research** in which we:

- analysed CPP documents such as business plans and monitoring reports to gain a basic understanding of how the 21 consortia are operating
- reviewed wider literature on project governance and consortium working including cultural sector research, central and local government guidance and community and voluntary sector resources

We then worked with the CPP Network Steering Group to identify eight CPP consortia to research in more depth, selected on the basis of:

- representation – ensuring geographic spread and a mix of partnership models and organisation types
- pragmatics – which consortia were willing and able to take part in the research

The second **fieldwork** stage involved 1:1 interviews and group discussions with consortium members in our sample of eight places: **Barking & Dagenham, Corby, East Durham, Hull, Slough, St. Helen's, Stoke-on-Trent** and **Swale & Medway**.

In April 2015 we produced an interim paper to reflect on the findings emerging from the early stages of the fieldwork. This paper was shared with CPP places through Basecamp, the programme intranet, and via project leads in each CPP place. We invited people to give their feedback on the interim paper, and included some specific questions for them to consider.

We also ran a breakout session on consortium working at the CPP conference in June 2015, where we discussed the main themes of the interim paper with around 15 delegates and encouraged discussion focused on some key questions. In addition, the CPP Network Steering Group gave us detailed feedback on the interim paper.

This final report presents our analysis of the experiences and outcomes of consortium working within the CPP programme, drawing on the full findings of the fieldwork and desk research and incorporating feedback we received on the interim paper. We would like to thank CPP places and the Network Steering Group for all their comments and suggestions, which have been particularly helpful in shaping section 5 of this report on lessons learned and recommendations.

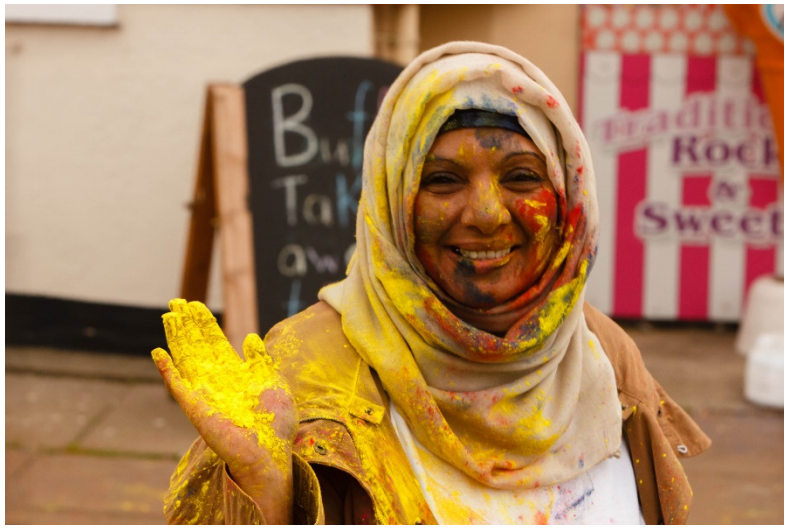
The evidence used to write this report is largely qualitative, collected through interviews and focus groups and therefore based on the opinions and perceptions of research participants rather than more 'objective' measurement or observation. As a result, we are confident that the report is a fair reflection of the experiences of the people we spoke to in 8 CPP places, but it is not intended to be a full account of all consortium activities and outcomes and the findings may not be representative of all CPP places.

We have taken care to keep contributions of participants anonymous, but where appropriate we have given examples of consortium working in particular CPP places as an illustration of what some consortia have been able to achieve so far.

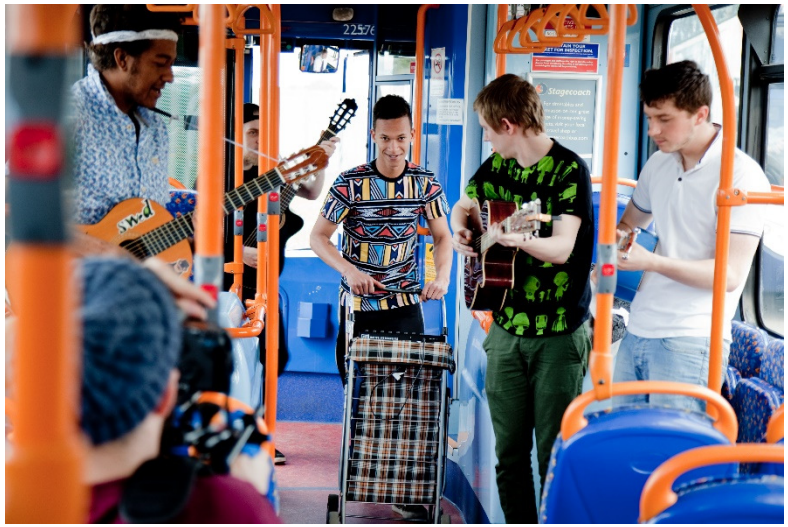
1.2 CPP consortia: key facts and figures

- Across the 21 CPP places there are a total of **100 organisations** involved as core consortium members, giving an average of 5 members per consortium
- This is the breakdown of the 100 consortium members by organisation type:
  - 53% are cultural organisations
  - 26% are charities or community or voluntary sector organisations*
  - 12% are local authorities
  - 4% are education institutions
  - 4% are commercial businesses
- There are 22 current Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) involved as core consortium members, plus a Major Partner Museum (MPM); together they make up 23% of all consortium members
- Of the 21 organisations leading consortia, 13 are cultural organisations (7 consortia are led by an NPO or MPM); the remaining lead organisations are all charities or community/voluntary sector organisations except in Sunderland, where the lead organisation is a university. In addition to arts organisations, there is real diversity in the primary development agendas and sectors of lead partner organisations – from a Housing Association (Blackpool Coastal Housing) to rugby league club (St. Helen's); or from a museum (Beamish) to a Canal River Trust (Pennine Lancashire).

* Charities and community and voluntary sector organisations include: national charities; charitable foundations attached to private businesses; housing associations; social enterprises, networks and trusts set up to run community services, support community development or enable community representation in local planning; and membership and representative bodies for local voluntary organisations.



Barking and Dagenham: Cultural Connector Farida Mohamed at Artoniks Colour of Time at the Out There festival, Great Yarmouth, 2014. Jay Bright photography.



Hull: Bud Sugar bus flash mob. Photo by Jay Moy.

1.3 Shining a light on the processes and outcomes of consortium working

In our interviews and focus group discussions with consortium members we explored five main questions, which helped to reveal some of the key processes and outcomes of consortium working:

Big picture questions	Process and outcome areas
1. How was your consortium put together, and what were your organisation's motivations to be involved? 2. How does your consortium operate, and how has this changed over time? 3. What works well about your consortium's governance and management arrangements, and what do you find frustrating? 4. How would you describe the working culture of your consortium, and what are the most important factors in maintaining positive relationships? 5. What is working in a consortium enabling you to do that you couldn't do alone?	**a)** **Rationale and 'fit'** – balance of perspectives and skills within the consortium; alignment between the consortium vision and the aims and agendas of individual partners **b)** **Structures and processes** – partnership models and agreements, decision-making and accountability arrangements, meeting cycles, resource management **c)** **Values and behaviours** – clarity of purpose, shared ownership, leadership styles, quality of relationships **d)** **Collective capacity and impact** – how consortium working helps to increase reach, encourage innovation and raise the profile of the arts locally

2. The Consortium Balancing Act

This short section presents some of the insights we have gained about the **opportunities and challenges** of consortium working where there is a blend of differently scaled and positioned organisations in each consortium. This is a core development challenge for CPP, but it is also perhaps the programme's greatest strengths: fashioning new types of relationship to address long-term development issues for the arts.

a) The balance of building audiences over the long-term, while developing the capacity and skills of the local arts sector

The CPP programme sets an ambitious opportunity for participating places. The ultimate aim of CPP is to **transform how local people perceive and engage with the arts.** This may mean experimenting with new and quite different approaches to artistic programming and production, audience development and marketing and community involvement and empowerment. In other words, for CPP places to deliver 'success', local arts provision, practice and partnership may need to look and feel quite different.

At the same time, CPP places have all been encouraged to build on what they have, and to work with and through the practitioners and organisations that are already established in the area.

This requires an openness of approach, the co-creation of agendas and, to an extent, a collective re-imagination of the role of the arts. It also means, for some, a repositioning of the arts – for example in terms of who takes responsibility for the arts as part of a wider approach to engagement alongside and within approaches to social and economic development, wellbeing and place-making.

CPP strategies therefore prioritise the needs of communities – as expressed through consultation processes and more directly through involvement in decision-making and commissioning panels – while also building the capacity and confidence of the local arts and wider social sector to respond to those needs. As one interviewee explained:

"Community commissioning processes are great, and the key to long-term audience engagement…but to be sustainable we need to have local artists who are willing and able to put on work"

Like many forms of arts investment and development, running a CPP project is therefore a constant balancing act: between building demand and improving supply; between giving audiences what they want and surprising (and challenging) them with something previously unimaginable; and between strengthening and showcasing the existing arts offer and introducing incoming ideas, expertise and capacity to show what else is possible.

b) The Investment Opportunity

The ambition of CPP – to genuinely increase engagement in the arts and build local capacity to enable this – cannot be achieved without new investment and a new type of partnership and collaboration. Arts Council England actively encouraged different types of organisation to get together as consortia to generate a productive dynamic which would enable the arts to become central to effective community engagement and place making. In doing so, Arts Council England has laid down an incentive and a challenge – to identify and explore new ways of working which imaginatively reach and engage new audiences. With new investment comes a different type of relationship and re-orientates the role of arts organisations which might historically have been to the margins of policy and investment (such as for regeneration).

In this sense, new investment has empowered arts organisations to become a central part of the 'conversation' – such as with regard to social and economic development. But more than this, at a time when many other sources of public funding are being withdrawn and in places which have not historically benefitted from significant public investment in the arts, new CPP funding can open up many new opportunities which were previously not available.

However, with new funding comes new responsibility and each CPP consortium has needed to work hard to achieve a balanced, inclusive and transparent approach to decision-making and investment. There's no doubt that this has involved complex processes of negotiation and a realignment of relations between organisations of different sizes and specialisms. For smaller organisations it has provided an opportunity to participate in a strategic development process as equal partners. For larger organisations (such as NPOs, local authorities and universities) – it has involved a process of collaboration which was not historically a priority.

All CPP consortia members have been involved an intensive learning process and an ongoing exercise of negotiation and dialogue. This has required a level of self-awareness – to ensure consortia have a balance of voices and perspectives and that smaller organisations are not over-stretched by the time commitments required to actively participate. The return on investment for participation can change throughout the process, but it is important to retain an awareness of the differing levels of capacity to participate for different types of organisation and it is vital that larger organisations are particularly sensitive to this.

c) Co-creating Legacy

All of the CPP areas have relatively low arts capacity. This is part of the 'chicken and egg' challenge of developing audiences in areas which have historically lacked the capacity to do so. It is also the major opportunity presented by CPP: to address capacity, build confidence and embed collaborative working. Some consortia have needed to consider how to integrate arts capacity and expertise and programming into core community activities and services, which can range from 'front line' pressures such as managing food banks to long-held approaches to community engagement.

This is where **the workings of consortia can come into their own** – mobilising new ways of working and establishing a parity of risk and reward for partners. The tasks of embedding arts-driven practice, genuinely building audiences and transferring ownership of arts development to appropriate organisations and community partners become absolutely critical. This is also an issue of **legacy**. As one CPP consortium member put it:

"The challenge we face is finding a home for the arts...of developing capacity and responsibility to lead on future projects and programmes…and of doing the simple things well like writing funding bids and keeping up to speed with new opportunities."

3. The typical journey of CPP consortium development

Initiation
CPP call for bids; initial discussion/ consultation at local level. Often led by larger arts organisation or local authority.

Identification
Partnership model agreed. Consortium members identified and agreed. Bid developed (and vision) – with consultation central.

Planning
Business plans developed or bid refined and re-submitted, in consultation with the Arts Council. Consortium members often change.

Development
Roles and responsibilities shaped and agreed. Terms of reference negotiated and adapted. Ongoing Arts Council dialogue; peer learning/review nationally.

Engagement
Connections with wider stakeholders; development of mechanisms to work with consortium. Role of LAs and larger organisations fully clarified.

Negotiation
Ongoing process of review and negotiation helps to revise vision, firm up trust and shape a coherent terms of reference. May be some churn in membership.

Recruitment
First delivery staff appointed, reducing need for external consultancy steer; critical friends begin work. Delays here can frustrate members coping with the administrative burden.

Transition
Transition from planning to delivery; consortium members incorporate agreed roles within their day-to-day operations. Meetings are less frequent and focus more on reporting.

Investment
First major investments made; demonstrates vision and clarifies the role and remit of CPP.

4. Observations and reflections on consortium working

a) Managing expectations when the pace is slow

Without exception, the process of consortium development has been slow and often frustratingly so. This is especially the case for bids which were not successful at the first submission, for business plans which have stalled, or where the transition from very low capacity to being 'CPP ready' is most pronounced.

The journey from the initial CPP opportunity being announced to the delivery of tangible projects has been particularly arduous and at times complex for consortium members unfamiliar with the nature of arts funding programmes in complex, multi-agency environments; and/or where CPP is being balanced against competing priorities, some of which involve communities with particularly challenging circumstances. **At times it has proved challenging to 'bring people along' with the process and then to sustain energy and a collective vision.**

Consortia which integrated programming into the business planning and consultation process have dealt with this most effectively. This is where, from an early stage, programming ideas were co-created with consortium members, who themselves were engaging their core constituencies (such as community groups, educationalists and businesses), so that the planning process also opened up new relationships and went beyond a technical exercise. In a small number of places (especially where a larger arts organisation is involved), cultural production played an important role in the planning process – enabling consortia to test ideas, reach out to audiences and mobilise participation. One-off events and unexpected artistic interventions (particularly via outdoor arts) were a means of 'making it real' while the planning process continued.

Despite these efforts, the length of time it has taken to work out how to work together – the best part of 18 months in most cases – has felt frustrating for some consortium members. However, there is recognition that developing an effective governance model is a complex process and **that the time and energy invested at an early stage can result in a solid foundation for long-term collaboration:**

"We wasted a lot of time forming as a group – it felt scary because the clock was ticking and we weren't moving forward. But it's working really well now and we have good options for going forward"

Literature from other sectors indicates that CPP consortia are by no means alone in finding partnership challenging and time-consuming. For example, the Cabinet Office (2008: 5) advises organisations developing a consortium *to 'be realistic about the risks, challenges and costs involved. It takes time, effort and resources to get a consortium up and running.'* Indeed the process by which a consortium develops common purpose and shared identity can begin well in advance of a grant or contract being awarded (Jones, Evans and Kimberlee, 2010: 9). In section 5 we consider how funders of consortium-based programmes can provide further support to organisations in the early stages of consortium development to enable them to 'hit the ground running' once their application has been successful.

b) The lead organisation model

Throughout the CPP process, the Arts Council has been clear that it can only issue a grant to a single organisation, and that this organisation needs to act as the lead for the consortium as a whole. In some places the lead organisation was established right from the start: a particular organisation identified the CPP programme as an opportunity, led initial consultation to test the logic of this opportunity, led on identification and recruitment of consortium members and has continued to drive development, recruitment and commissioning.

In other places the lead organisation emerged more organically as local partners developed their ideas and learned more about what running a CPP project would involve. In some cases, an organisation was appointed as lead because it was identified by other consortium members as being the type of organisation that would appeal to the Arts Council (and therefore strengthen the bid), because of its profile, strategic position, resources or track record of large-scale project management.

It is often not until funding has been awarded that consortia realise the extent of the role and responsibilities that the lead organisation has taken on, and the effect that the model will have on relationships and power dynamics within the group. In terms of the funding contract with the Arts Council, the lead organisation has sole accountability and all the legal liability for the project, and therefore shoulders all of the risk. As one lead organisation explained:

"We thought we were being commissioned to deliver the project as a consortium…but actually only my organisation has any real acountability. We didn't realise it would have to be like this"

Some consortia help the lead organisation to manage the risk through formal voting rights – for example by giving the lead organisation a vote with double weight, or by ensuring that the casting vote comes back to the lead. In this way there is little danger that the trustees of the lead organisation will have to take responsibility for a decision that they don't support themselves. It's rare for a lead organisation to have to use its casting vote in this way, but the existence of the principle can have an impact on the working culture of the consortium.

Some consortium members value the clarity, transparency and efficiency that comes with having a lead decision-maker – but others feel that the dominance of the lead organisation limits their ownership of the CPP project, and their ability to contribute strategically:

"We're only delivering what was specified in the original bid…we don't feel that our input is valued or wanted in a broader sense. We have no strategic input"

Where the lead organisation does not have an arts background, a different type of balancing act is required. Here the lead needs to engage with consortium members from the arts in ways that re-distribute influence back to the arts sector (and thus to non-lead organisations). **It can also introduce expertise and systems which may be relatively new to the smaller organisations in the consortium, providing a valuable knowledge exchange function.**

Our review of wider literature suggests that it is hard to avoid a consortium model based around a lead accountable body – most third sector commissions, for example, will require bidding consortia to nominate a lead organisation for contracting purposes (NCVO, n.d.).

Indeed there is guidance available on the advantages and disadvantages of taking on the lead organisation role within a consortium (Cabinet Office, 2008: 28-29). However it is possible for a consortium to develop a new legal body specifically to deliver the local CPP project, and there are also options for how consortia can oversee delivery and manage risk through the use of formal mechanisms such as prime or sub contracting arrangements or service level agreements. Different models are considered in more detail in section 5, where we also discuss what support could be provided to consortia at an early stage to help them grapple with these issues.

c) Cross-sector collaboration – to extend networks and exchange knowledge

Each consortium involves a unique combination of organisations from different sectors, with diverse models, styles, connections and specialisms. This presents an incredible opportunity for cross-sector collaboration – especially that which embeds culture into a wider fabric of social, economic and educational activities. In many ways this is where consortia are most productive and the outcomes of consortium working most compelling, with the interplay between **different organisations and sectors generating ways of working that, if not entirely new, are unprecedented in terms of the level of focus and commitment**. For example:

- a major museum is working with a richly experienced and locally embedded voluntary and community sector organisation and an internationally renowned arts organisation to co-create arts programming in an area of the country which lacks a major town/centre, does not have an NPO, struggles with some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country, and yet is culturally rich and hugely distinctive.

- A large but still relatively new arts organisation is working with a long-established and deeply experienced local arts body, very engaged and locally respected community partners, and representatives of local business determined to work for a better future for the locality.

Some of the non-arts charities and community and voluntary organisations that we spoke to explained how they are **enabling CPP projects to engage non-traditional arts audiences and more vulnerable groups, drawing on their extensive networks and expertise in community consultation techniques** and their relationships with trusted intermediaries. Some have experience of working with the arts, while others are working on a dedicated arts project for the first time:

"We would have had no idea how to do this by ourselves…it's a unique strand within our offer"

Some non-arts-based organisations have valued the role of the arts in shaping their approach to community engagement and even brand positioning. As one museum puts it:

" We didn't really do the arts, but we have begun to recognise the value of contemporary arts practice in reanimating heritage, as well as in giving us a different kind of role beyond our normal reach and with different communities".

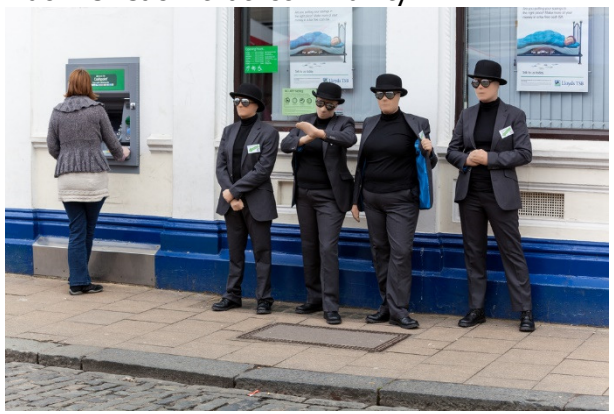
Perhaps most compelling is the way **consortia have positioned arts-based approaches at the heart of local community development.** At their best, consortia open up a fresh conversation which, as one member explained:

"…shifts the balance so the arts become for people like us with people like you…and then we become one".

This does though introduce a set of definitional and ownership issues. For example, how can consortia balance an endorsement of existing artistic practice (i.e. what local stakeholders might call 'the arts'), with an approach that introduces new types of practice and challenges audiences and partners to cross a set of aesthetic, social and even community boundaries?

Unsurprisingly, cross-sector collaboration does not come seamlessly and without tensions. Issues have included:

- contestation on whether the approach is sufficiently 'community-driven' – including on how 'art' should be defined
- managing differences in organisational style – for example, some community organisations have a high pressure working environment and need a lot of notice to be able to commit to (non-urgent) meetings
- devoting sufficient attention and resource to creating meaningful opportunities for the most 'hard-to-reach' groups, and evaluating the impact of their involvement on wellbeing and wider social outcomes
- under-developed relationships with business, which have led to the pursuit of quick fixes on issues such as sponsorship and in-kind support
- inertia – where common purpose is not achieved due to asymmetries e.g. 'who is this for', 'how does culture fit in', 'how do we reach 'that' community'.



Swale and Medway: Flux. An Ideas Test engagement event 2013. Photo Gary Weston.

That for the most part consortia are openly discussing and navigating these issues is testimony to the level of enthusiasm, commitment and goodwill shown by partners, and to the degree of shared vision being developed across the CPP programme.

d) The role of public sector partners

Relationships between CPP consortia, the Arts Council and local authorities have varied enormously and have changed over time as a result of changing personnel, perceived adjustments to the priority outcomes of CPP, and through feedback on bids, business plans or delivery progress. **The relationship has been most productive where the Arts Council and local authorities are part of the ongoing dialogue rather than a visitor to the conversation.** For some consortia the Arts Council and local authorities have provided a valuable neutral voice that has helped to resolve conflicts or political difficulties. For example:

"The Arts Council has been brilliant…they come to meetings, help bring people back together, provide one-to-one support"
Significant credit is given to individual Arts Council staff:
"Our relationship manager was really helpful – from making introductions to arts organisations and artists, to clarifying planning issues"

Others, however, felt that it took time to establish a productive funding relationship:

"We felt slightly ill at ease in the early stages, where one thing was being asked of us and then this changed to another, It has taken time to find a shared terms of reference, but we feel we are there now".

Several consortium members share this view that greater clarity of purpose might have been achieved at the outset. On the one hand, this has made the process more fraught and at times painful than it perhaps needed to be; on the other hand it has **resulted in models,**

visions and approaches which are bespoke and totally owned by individual consortia. In section 5 we consider what additional guidance could be provided to applicants to similar funding programmes in the future.

The involvement of local authorities has had mixed outcomes for CPP consortia overall. There are some instances of local authorities acting as core consortium members and providing a sense of stability, a long-term view, useful resources and infrastructure and, like the Arts Council, a relatively neutral voice that helps to diffuse tensions.

However, the reduction in public investment in the arts (and across the social sphere) can compromise the productivity of consortia. This is because there is pressure on covering the gaps left by disinvestment elsewhere and for delivering on local authority strategic agendas (where the local authority still has the potential to leverage such activities). In other words**, strong and resourced local authorities and stricken local authorities present two different types of offer to consortia.** To add to the complexity, competing interests – such as major infrastructure projects, cultural events and local politics – can shape the context and terms of engagement for consortia in ways beyond their control.

The interplay between the Arts Council and local authorities brings another dimension for consortia to manage. At a national level the Arts Council recognised that local authorities had a role to play in catalysing and encouraging consortia, but were explicit that local authorities could not 'get the cheque'. Locally, the messages about the desirability of local authority involvement have been mixed. The Arts Council has strongly encouraged some places to involve the local authority as a strategic lynchpin within the core consortium; in other places the Arts Council has been concerned that the local authority will see CPP as a replacement for its own (disappearing) arts investment, and has been wary about consortia giving local authorities too much of a voice. This has caused confusion for some consortia, who would have welcomed more consistent advice from the Arts Council about the involvement of local authorities in different places.

e) Is consortium working encouraging real innovation?

The scope for innovation within the CPP programme is significant, given its emphasis on new investment in new collaborations with new audiences. Certainly the profile of consortia – with the mix of often-not-previously-connected organisations and the emphasis on 'mainstreaming' arts and culture into wider agendas while demanding excellence – lends itself to innovation. But it is perhaps too soon to clearly tell.

At their best, consortia are mobilised by a new type and level of openness, honesty and shared risk and reward. We see this in consortia where for the first time community organisations and regeneration companies are sharing an arts development agenda; where sports clubs and museums are lead organisations and thus taking ownership of an arts development agenda and required to shift perspectives and innovate internally; and where larger arts organisations are seeking new ways to work with the community sector and smaller arts organisations. This is **driving new approaches to delivery – taking activity to different places and communities – which seem to be achieving results in terms of excellent (and distributed) art and genuinely engaged audiences.**

However, the process itself has and continues to foreground the outcomes. Taking a long-term view, all consortia are in their early stages; some are further into commissioning and have a higher profile as a consequence. Others are in the midst of partnership development and planning. Few have the human resources 'on the ground' to drive programming to the

desired extent (delays in recruitment and a rather staggered momentum are factors). Most are frustrated at the pace of development.

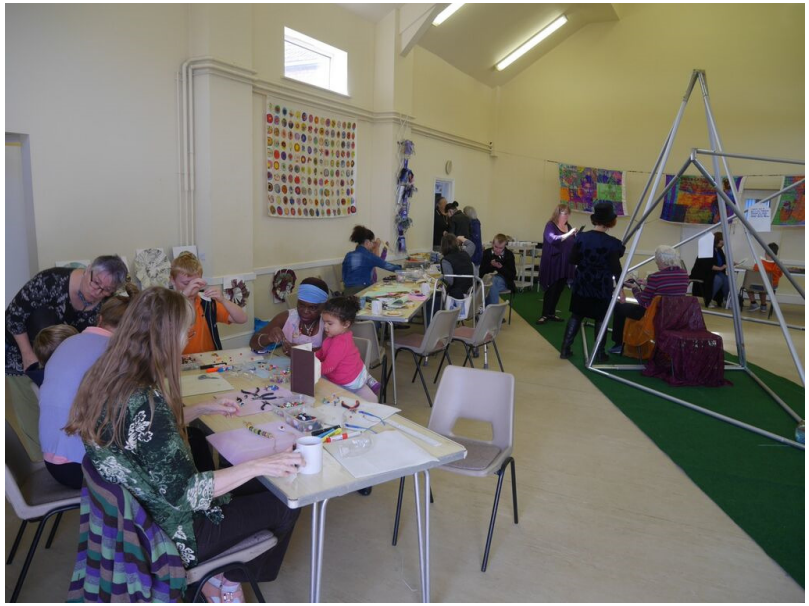
This means that much of the innovation is yet to arrive, or has thus far been located in partnership working (e.g. finding new ways of working via sharing responsibilities, pooling skills), rather than in programming per se. Where it is most apparent, it is in the ease of partnership working between organisations that historically would not (or could not) have worked together. In this sense**, incentivised cross-sector partnership is itself an innovation that, should it become a sustainable practice, could be ground-breaking, and the networks being developed within and beyond consortia need to be recognised as valuable outcomes and assets in their own right.**

Change is also evident in the way in which the diverse skills and perspectives of consortium members are 'rubbing off' on each other. In particular, cross-sector collaboration is enabling more advanced and far-reaching forms of community engagement and involvement which, as one (non-arts) consortium member pointed out, are "alien to the practice of standard arts organisations". Examples include site-specific arts programming in community centres and shopping arcades where previously there was none; and cross-overs between core audiences of different consortia members – e.g. connecting sports and arts audiences through joint engagement and development.

Where cultural organisations are leading consortia, they tend to feel as though the experience is having a significant impact on their own approach:

"It's opening up our practice, challenging our practice – engagement levels have been low here for a long time and we've realised that we need to work differently to change that"

If this sort of shift in attitude is widespread across the programme, then in the long-term there is potential for CPP to result in radically different approaches to artistic programming and audience engagement across the country.



Corby: Made in Corby, Fun Palace, October 2014.

5. Lessons learned and recommendations

This Section introduces some broad lessons learned from our research into consortia working for CPP programmes. It gives some specific learning points for CPP consortia, plus identifies some points of relevance to consortia and partnership working in the arts in general. It is positioned to illustrate rather than provide answers and it is shaped to stimulate thinking on approaches to consortia and partnership working.

Our first overall reflection is that for organisations in the eight CPP places that we researched in detail, the process of consortium development has been **slow and often frustrating**, but largely rewarding. None of the eight consortia have had a straightforward journey, and no two journeys are the same. Our review of wider literature suggests that in all sectors and contexts consortium development is complex and time-consuming, and we feel that overall CPP consortia are managing relatively very well, making good shared progress towards ambitious and complex goals with enthusiasm and commitment.

There is an impressive and growing level of knowledge exchange and peer learning across the CPP network, but when it comes to consortium development it seems that most places have started without a clear idea of what's likely to be involved and with a lack of common guidance on options for governance and management arrangements. In some ways this has been positive because in several places the process of working together to establish from first principles how the consortium should operate has helped members to develop shared purpose, work through tensions and find the right tone and pattern for their ongoing working relationships.

It is also clear that to a certain extent a consortium model needs to be designed to reflect local circumstances and make the most of local assets and opportunities: there is no one-size fits all approach and the diversity of CPP lead organisations, members and eventual strategic priorities illustrate this.

We start this section by looking at the kind of guidance that might be helpful to consortia at the early stages of their development, focusing in particular on how a consortium might need to evolve over time; clarifying and balancing governance and delivery roles; and options for managing delivery through different consortium structures. Here we are not advocating one model or approach in particular, but rather presenting some options and framing some questions for consortia to consider as they develop their terms of engagement. This applies to both CPP consortia and consortia models in the arts. We hope that these insights will be useful to round 3 CPP places, who are still in the process of consortium development, and to other organisations planning to work together to design and deliver a large-scale community arts project in the future.

We then consider how funders of consortium-based programmes can provide more support to applicants at an early stage. For established consortia, both within CPP and elsewhere, we suggest a checklist of questions that members can ask themselves at regular intervals to ensure they are upholding good practice governance and partnership principles.

5.1 Consortium models and options

Some of the most helpful literature on consortium working is in the form of guidance provided to third sector organisations planning to work together to deliver public sector commissions. Much of the guidance starts from the premise that the service to be delivered by the consortium is fairly clearly specified, normally by the commissioning body. CPP consortia, however, are not starting from this position. The Arts Council set broad goals and some expectations as to how CPP might be delivered in places but, rightly, left it to consortia to develop the local vision, approach and programme of activity.

As a result there are at least three distinct phases to the CPP process: pre-application; business planning; and the main delivery phase. Consortia have tended to run into difficulties when they failed to recognise that different organisations might need to be involved in the CPP project in different ways at different stages, and that their governance arrangements might need to evolve over the life of the project. Where places have stuck to the same consortium model and core membership throughout, they have often found themselves in what one CPP conference delegate described as an 'Alice in Wonderland' world in which the same organisations end up governing, commissioning, delivering and monitoring the project all at the same time.

At the **pre-application** stage (for CPP consortia) or early development stage (for other consortia), we suggest that the consortium may need to be fairly large to ensure wide representation of local interests in the development of the overall vision for local arts engagement and an outline approach to the CPP project. At this stage Consortium members need to have a broader interest in the long-term cultural development of their local area and be prepared to engage in the planning process without any guarantee of future funding.

Once the application has been successful, the **business planning** stage is an opportunity to identify and develop in full the ongoing consortium model and to review consortium membership. At this stage we suggest that the consortium could split into two distinct functions. First, a **project governing board** could be established to set overall direction and priorities, resolve key issues, take major decisions and ensure that the project is being delivered effectively and achieving its goals. Second, as the business plan develops and the programme strands become more clearly defined, organisations that are going to carry out the bulk of the activity could form the **core consortium charged with project delivery**.

In this way organisations that have a stake in the direction and long-term legacy of the programme, but are unlikely to be commissioned or contracted to deliver any activity themselves, can form the overseeing governance group; while the consortium itself comprises organisations that are working together to deliver a shared programme, each contributing a particular area of expertise and taking responsibility for an appropriate strand of activity. There may be some overlap in membership between the two groups, but at any point individuals should be clear about whether they are playing a governance role or whether they are contributing at an operational level.

For the organisations that come together as a consortium to deliver the bulk of consortium activity, our analysis of relevant literature suggests that there are four main consortia delivery models, each with strengths and weaknesses (Bagwell et al, 2014: 89-90; Cabinet Office, 2008: 22-27; NCVO, n.d.):

Model	Main features	Pros	Cons	Best when
New legal body	A new entity set up to deliver a specific contract or project (also known as a 'single purpose vehicle')	Jointly owned by all partners – so no power imbalance Risk is ring-fenced so individual organisations are protected	New entity with no accounts or financial history may not be attractive to funders Time-consuming and complex to establish	Partners are thinking of working together over the long term, potentially beyond CPP
Lead body plus joint working agreement	One organisation has sole accountability to the funder and reports on finances and delivery Decision-making and delivery managed jointly through steering group and consortium working agreement	Allows close involvement of all members in management and operation of consortium	Members have greater exposure to risk associated with negligence or failure to deliver by other members Joint decision-making can be slow and require extensive negotiation across the group	There is a high degree of trust between partners and some commonality in terms of philosophy, values and culture
Lead body plus subcontracting	One organisation has sole accountability to the funder and reports on finances and delivery Delivery managed through overarching terms and separate contracts between lead body and each member	Clear leadership and responsibilities; swift decision-making Small organisations can take responsibility for a delivery strand without having to commit time to consortium management	Contribution of views of individual organisations to the whole is limited Lead body needs capacity and capability to manage multiple contracts	Partners feel most comfortable working within clear contractual terms Consortium has between two and four members
External body or prime contracting	A non-delivering partner (or 'prime contractor') takes responsibility for the management of the contract, and coordinates the required activities and services as a 'supply chain'. No single ownership of project within group of delivering organisations	Delivery partners free to concentrate on their area of expertise rather than subcontracting Lead body can play a useful role in capacity-building within the consortium and negotiating with funders	Lead body typically needs to be knowledgeable, respected and well-resourced, with a track record of contract management Grant may need to cover costs of non-delivering organisation taking on the contract management role	There is an obvious local infrastructure organisation to take on the non-delivering lead

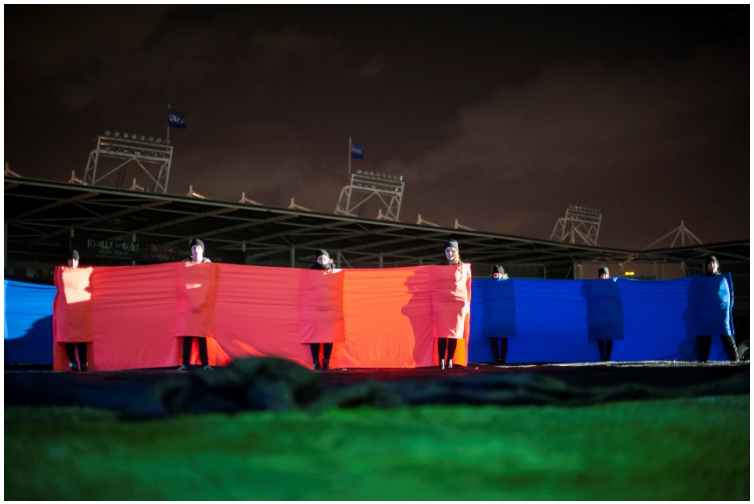
There is no preferred model of consortium delivery, and the NCVO's 'KnowHowNonProfit' site explains that models can be varied, for example by involving different levels of subcontracting, and that 'the model chosen should be appropriate to the circumstances of the project' (NCVO, n.d.). The key point for budding consortia to note is that there are a number of possible approaches to how they structure and organise themselves and that members can work together to identify the model that best suits their needs, depending on:

- the extent to which they wish to distribute leadership, responsibility and risk across the consortium
- how hierarchical or democratic, and how contractual or negotiated they wish their working terms and relationships to be
- how much time and expertise individual members have to contribute to consortium management and maintenance, above and beyond project delivery
- whether partners see themselves working together over the long-term.

Once the consortium model has been agreed and developed, and the project moves into its main **delivery** phase, collaboration between the project governing board and the delivery consortium can ensure that the needs of the project and its stakeholders are met effectively. HM Treasury (2007: 20-21) provides an example of a simple project governance system in which a governing board oversees the overall direction of the project, and reviews the project plan and progress reports from a delivery group to ensure that the project is being delivered effectively. If this model were applied to the CPP context, the core consortium would form the delivery group – chaired by a representative from the lead body if there is one – and be responsible for the day-to-day management of the project, reporting to and from a separate governing board.

In the case of CPP, a further key role for the governing board would be to consider the legacy of the local CPP project and to undertake longer-term planning and advocacy with potential funders and other key stakeholders to enable the most successful elements of the project to be sustained.

HM Treasury (2007: 16) also notes the importance of creating a forum for 'neutral challenge' to help both delivery teams and wider stakeholders to be realistic about what they can achieve by when and to 'avoid a conspiracy of optimism'. In several CPP places critical friends are already playing this valuable role.



St Helens: Silent Night: Silent Night / 'And, on that note' (More than 1,500 people were involved in an evening of musical reflection and visual art).

5.2 Pre-application funding and support

The Arts Council awards CPP funds to places in a staged process. Once an application has been successful, a small amount of money is available to places to support them through the business planning stage. The main grant is only released once the business plan has been signed off.

Our conversations with CPP consortia suggest that business planning is a challenging but helpful part of the process for consortium development. Investing time and effort to develop a business plan that all consortium members believe in and are committed to (and that meets the expectations of the Arts Council) has provided many consortia with a solid foundation for long-term collaboration. However, starting the substantial work on business planning and consortium development once the application has been successful means that consortia have invariably taken a long time to get the local project up and running and in most places at least the first of three years of CPP funding has been dominated by management issues – clarifying roles and responsibilities, establishing decision-making processes and meeting cycles, recruiting staff.

In a public service commissioning context, consortia often spend considerable time on planning and development before they begin to tender for contracts. The Cabinet Office (2008: 7) points out that 'development over a period of nine months to a year before the consortium is ready to submit a tender is not unknown'. We suggest that in future the Arts Council and other funders of consortium-based programmes similar to CPP could provide more support to organisations in the pre-application stage so that by the time the proposal is submitted the design of the local project is more advanced and partners have a clearer idea of how they will work together. This support could take the form of:

- guidance on consortium models and key governance issues, drawing on the findings of this research
- access to expertise in key areas such as local cultural planning and community engagement techniques
- a small amount of funding to cover the management time involved in consortium development and to pay for specialist legal or governance advice if required

This could bring the following benefits:

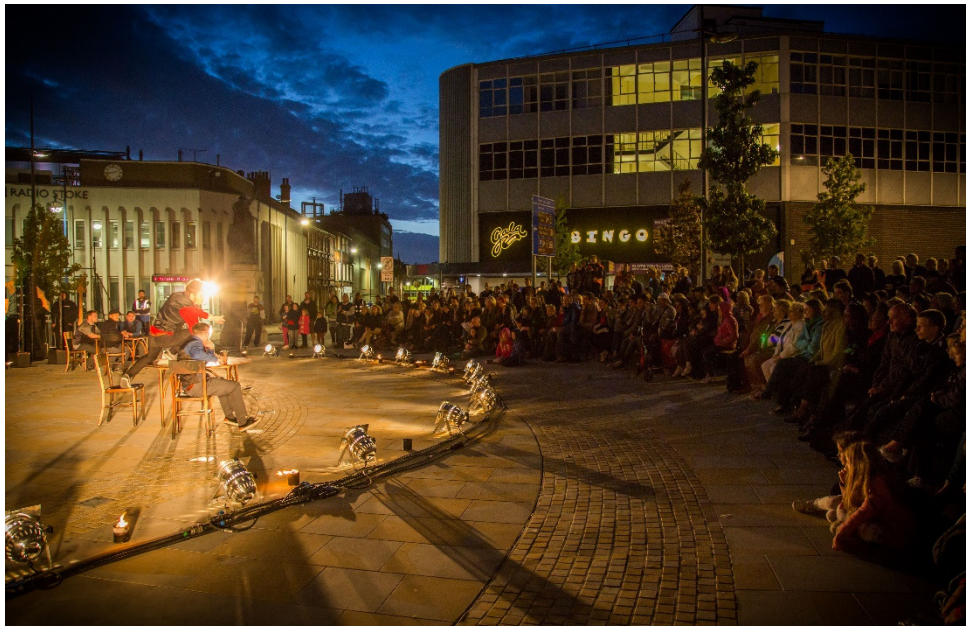
- potential partners have the opportunity to explore how they might work together in broad terms, incentivised by the possibility of funding but free from the politics and pressures of managing a significant grant
- strategic agendas and relationships have matured and thus become more aligned by the time investment arrives
- confidence is higher and options for effective governance and programming models are more legible
- scope for innovative practice has been explored, enabling a more seamless transition from development to delivery
- shared learning on good practice is disseminated across the country to inform approaches at an earlier stage.

However, any pre-application support attached to a particular fund would need to be positioned as part of a wider arts development agenda, linked to other investment opportunities such as Grants for the Arts for consortium-led projects, or positioned as part of the leadership responsibilities of NPOs. In this way there would be value for local partners in going through the consortium development process even if their subsequent bid to the fund was unsuccessful. Otherwise, work to prepare for bids that were ultimately rejected could be perceived as a waste of time, and might result in a rapid drop-off in partnership practice.

5.3 Checklist of effective consortium governance

Our discussions with CPP places have highlighted ten key milestones that a consortium needs to achieve to establish effective governance arrangements (this applies to CPP and other consortia in the arts and cultural sector):

- ✓ Project governing board established to drive start-up phase
- ✓ Pre-start-up research and development to align partnerships, cohere agendas and agree the preferred model
- ✓ Business planning includes elements of programming and production – to test ideas and build relationships
- ✓ Agreed terms of reference with key partners such as local authorities and the Arts Council – to give clarity on their involvement from an early stage
- ✓ Skills audit of consortium members to identify strengths and undertake gap analysis. This might inform training requirements plus help to shape recruitment requirements
- ✓ Terms of reference agreed regarding specific roles and responsibilities and share of risk and reward – including access to funding and the alignment of consortium and institutional aims and objectives
- ✓ Clear lines of communication established within consortium and to a second tier of partners – to design-in an open and accessible approach to decision-making
- ✓ Development of a bespoke consortium tool-kit for each delivery area – including governance structure, financial model, communications and approach to managing and recording meetings
- ✓ Long-term development plan defined in Year 1 – to stretch the strategic horizons of the consortium and shape thinking on coordinated approaches beyond specific funding agreements
- ✓ Evaluation and review built-in and addressed as an agenda item at every consortium meeting – to 'put on the table' options for changing the model, the participants, or the strategic direction.



Stoke-on-Trent: Faust, The Big Feast, Stoke-on-Trent, Appetite, 2014 by Clara Lou Photography.

We also suggest a set of questions that consortia could ask themselves as part of a self-reflective exercise every 6-12 months to check on the effectiveness of their overall collaboration (with material adapted from IDeA (2009) and Audit Scotland (2011)):

A. Behaviours

As consortium members, do we agree and communicate a shared vision?

Are we clear about what each partner brings to the table?

Are we open to challenge and able to change our outlook and approach?

Are our meetings focused and productive; less on process and more on substance?

Do we spend more time bemoaning barriers than finding solutions?

B. Processes

Is our business plan fit-for-purpose, and is it a document that we all believe in and are committed to?

Are the roles and responsibilities of each partner agreed and understood?

Do we have the right skills around the table to achieve the agreed tasks?

Do we have clear decision-making processes – and do we stick to them?

Are our decisions transparent to a wider public?

Are local communities able to have meaningful influence over our plans and decisions?

C. Resources

Are we effectively monitoring the costs of partnership working?

Are we achieving clear shared efficiencies by working together?

Do we share expertise and information on resources and trends?

Is consortium working rewarding for us as individual members and for our wider teams?

D. Outcomes

As a consortium, do we agree about what success looks like?

Do we have an effective system for managing performance and evaluating outcomes?

Do we fully understand and prioritise the needs of local communities – and is our project responding to those needs?

Do partners effectively balance personal, organisational and consortium objectives?

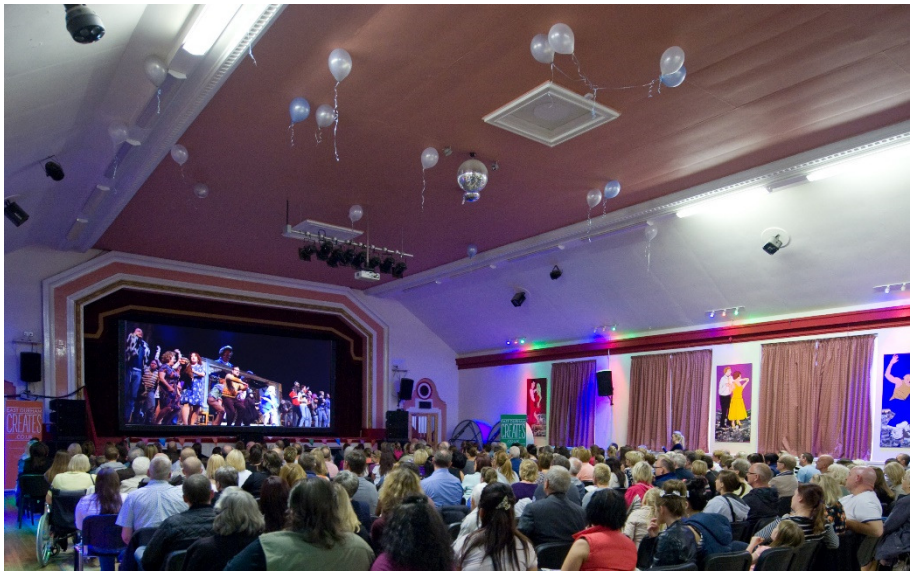
Are we achieving outcomes together that we couldn't achieve alone?

6. Exploring longer-term consortium development

"Diversity, which can be a partnership's greatest strength, also presents the biggest barrier to the partnership working well. Partnership work, like life, is inherently difficult" (IDeA, 2009: 8)

This study has sought to understand the development and experiences of CPP consortia including practicalities, challenges and opportunities. It has also explored the features, strengths and limitations of different governance models and identified key factors in effective governance. This has given us some practical and strategic insights into consortium working, which has in turn introduced learning of relevance to partnership working across the arts and between arts organisations and a wider set of strategic interests.

However, the study has focused on a particular period in consortium development and engaged with just 8 consortia (although we did pay attention to the knowledge exchange platform enabled by Basecamp and spoke to a wider cohort of consortia through the CPP conference and via responses to our interim paper). This means our findings are illustrative and open up new questions and lines of enquiry. It also means we can't confidently predict what may happen next – with several consortia reaching that critical point where planning transitions into comprehensive programming. This presents an opportunity for partners: to continue to share learning, provoke critical discussion and co-create an agenda for effective consortium working in the future.



East Durham: '8' Credit/info: Billy Elliot the Musical Live at Easington Social Welfare Centre. Photo: Colin Davison.

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