



LEFTCOAST (BLACKPOOL & WYRE)

**CREATIVE
AND PEOPLE
PLACES**

PLACE GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS



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CASE STUDY THEMES

- › Governance and partnerships
- › Organisational structure

PROJECT SUMMARY

LeftCoast is a 3 year programme of arts and cultural activity across Blackpool & Wyre. With its 10 year vision, the programme aims to enrich the lives of those who live, work and visit Blackpool & Wyre and to get more people involved in arts activities in areas of low engagement.

“Fundamentally it’s about engaging people in arts and culture in Blackpool & Wyre, part of doing that is developing the arts, culture and creative sector, which is a means to an end. It’s also about bringing and creating amazing arts experiences to the people that live and work here. We see our role as giving vision and confidence to the cultural sector and as a catalyst for keeping things sustainable and exciting.” LeftCoast

LeftCoast is one of 21 Creative People and Places (CPP) programmes funded by Arts Council England (ACE). It was established as an innovative public/private partnership and brings together a wide range of partners including Blackpool Coastal Housing, Blackpool Council, Wyre Council, Merlin Entertainments, and the Grand Theatre Blackpool.

Drawing on interviews with LeftCoast staff, the programme’s critical friend and community team members, this case study focuses on the process of establishing a partnership and governance structures for LeftCoast and looks at how partners came together to develop the programme, and how their experiences as a partnership influenced the development of LeftCoast as an organisation.



KEY FINDINGS

- › The governance arrangements for LeftCoast have been a success, bringing together scope for joined-up thinking and involvement of both the public and private sectors in the decision making process.
- › The organisational structure of LeftCoast has been effective with Blackpool Coastal Housing providing operational support, which has allowed the LeftCoast team to focus on programme delivery.
- › A key priority is for LeftCoast to evolve into an independent organisation to ensure that it can be sustained beyond the 3 year programme and achieve its long term vision.



INTRODUCTION

Blackpool & Wyre provides a unique context with a strong sense of identity, which is shaped by a long entertainment tradition and significant visitor economy. The arts sector is fragmented and there are small numbers of people working locally with the knowledge, expertise and influence to independently develop a strong cultural programme. In short, audiences consume a lot of entertainment, but not arts per se. There is a need to change the perceptions of those who do not engage about what art is and to make the right connections with the local community to attract new audiences.

This unusual backdrop brings both unique opportunities and challenges to make Blackpool & Wyre's arts and cultural offer visible, reach out to its local communities and build local ownership.

Before CPP, arts funding in Blackpool & Wyre has been led by the local authority with two organisations awarded regular funding from ACE in 2012. A strength of CPP is that it has provided the opportunity for all the key providers to come together as a consortium¹ to work collaboratively for the first time.

¹ It was a condition of the CPP grant that applications came from a consortium who were to manage the programme in each place

APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS

Prior to CPP, there had been limited scope for joined-up thinking and public/private sector involvement. CPP has allowed key providers in Blackpool & Wyre to come together and introduce a more strategic approach and to find ways to connect the arts sector with the area's wider offer.

CPP was regarded by Blackpool & Wyre's consortium partners as a real opportunity to do things differently. From the beginning, there was a strong sense that this was an equal partnership, which would bring together a team with a mix of competencies, not just from arts based organisations. Since its launch in late 2013, the LeftCoast partnership has delivered more than 100 events at a range of venues and public places across Blackpool and Wyre.

Blackpool Coastal Housing acts as the accountable body of LeftCoast on behalf of the consortium partners. Blackpool Coastal Housing is responsible for the overall administration of LeftCoast, and for providing operational support in finance, HR and secretarial support for steering group and advisory board meetings. Blackpool Coastal Housing was set up by Blackpool Council to manage its housing stock of 5,500 homes. In addition to providing high quality homes and services, Blackpool Coastal Housing has a major role to play in community development. Although Blackpool Coastal Housing had no prior remit for the arts, it saw the potential that

CPP could bring and how arts could be used as an innovative tool to engage, inspire and bring their residents together.

The consortium steering group is responsible for overseeing the strategic direction of the programme, and its decision making is informed by the stakeholder advisory board. A memorandum of understanding was established which outlines the responsibilities of the steering group. LeftCoast has also set up a number of sub-groups / working groups to support the steering group, some lead more on the artistic side, others on the financial development, and some on the evaluation of the programme.

The steering group and advisory board involve a wide group of stakeholders and independent members, including the five consortium partners (Blackpool Coastal Housing, Blackpool Council, Wyre Council, Merlin Entertainments, and Grand Theatre Blackpool), the core delivery team (executive director and artistic director), a police officer, a Blackpool Coastal Housing tenant, and three external arts advisors from visual arts and performing arts. The advisory board is chaired by Blackpool Coastal Housing.

In terms of reporting arrangements, LeftCoast has quarterly working group meetings, followed by steering group meetings and advisory board meetings. There are also monthly director update meetings with Blackpool Coastal Housing.



WHAT WORKED WELL?

- › **Committed partners** - what has worked well is that the partners involved are fully on board and that the partnership has the “right kind of people, at the right level, in the same room together”, which simplifies the process for decision making. This has been invaluable for reaching a consensus and for getting things done quickly and efficiently.

“There is a real will to make things work and people were very involved in developing the programme.” Partner

Gaining commitment from all partners and having the “right” things in place have come naturally as partners have shared vision of improving outcomes for local people. Despite them working across different sectors, the consortium recognised that delivering a programme in partnership would make the best use of resources and that arts could be a catalyst for new and innovative ways of working.

- › **Organisational set up** - LeftCoast has benefitted greatly from being set up under Blackpool Coastal Housing. If LeftCoast had been set up as an independent organisation from the outset, “it would have taken away a lot of the flexibility”. Having operational burdens such as setting up finance and human resource functions, would have meant that LeftCoast would probably not have got off the ground as quickly or achieved what it has to date with programme delivery.

“We were lucky in that we were supported by an umbrella organisation. Being a very new organisation we were fortunate that we could step straight in Blackpool Coastal Housing and have the support of their finance team and their HR team, to get things up and running. If we started from scratch it would have been quite hard.” LeftCoast

- › **Co-directors** - LeftCoast’s executive director and artistic director have been instrumental to the success of bringing the whole programme together, providing clarity to the artistic vision and making things happen within a short timescale. Collectively both directors have been working in the arts sector for over 20 years. Their experience spans a wide range of art venues, art forms and large scale events. The consortium partners have been fully supportive of the co-directors introducing their own artistic vision, refocusing the business plan, and leading on the artistic direction of the programme.

“Once we had sign-off from steering group, we had two months to condense and shape what the vision might be, and four months to get it all happening.” LeftCoast

- › **Critical friend²** - LeftCoast’s consortium appointed an arts consultant with over 30 years of professional arts experience who specialises in evaluation to be their critical friend. The role of the critical friend has been pivotal, not only for monitoring and evaluation support, but also in terms of seeing the whole process through at each stage and bringing the steering group together in the early days, as well as hosting the away days. The critical friend has also been very important for the continuity of the programme and has been advising the new chair, the chief executive at Blackpool Coastal Housing.

“It’s invaluable to have someone there that knows all the background to the programme”. Partner

- › **Influence on partners** – there are signs of synergies emerging from partnership working. For example, CPP has been a unique opportunity for Blackpool Coastal Housing to bring arts into their practice. “They are already thinking about different ways that they can start using the work we have been doing on some of their estates” and changing their culture and approach to what they do. LeftCoast are also working in partnership with the Grundy Art Gallery to develop a new audience development and marketing plan for the gallery. The gallery’s artist policy has become more aligned with LeftCoast, in terms of “entertainment, popular culture, art, and exploring the context of the town”, which has come to fruition with its work with the new curator.

“We are starting to see things are coming together and people are working together and sharing ideas.” Partner

² All CPP areas are required to have a critical friend to oversee their place’s evaluation.

LESSONS LEARNT:

- › **Organisational structure** - although the current organisational structure has been very beneficial, it does restrict LeftCoast's ability to accept charitable income or generate income, due to its lack of legal status as an unincorporated association. However, there are plans in the pipeline for LeftCoast to evolve into an independent organisation. A key priority of LeftCoast in 2015 is to establish a new legal structure to secure the future of the organisation, which will enable it to attract funding from the widest possible sources, diversify income streams and also hold property if necessary. The steering group believe that this is the right direction for LeftCoast so that they can build a longer life span to the organisation. Possible vehicles for LeftCoast currently under consideration include the creation of a new creative charity, community interest company (CIC) or other type of social enterprise.
- › **Public/private partnerships** - Blackpool & Wyre are the only CPP area that has attracted a major commercial partner, i.e. Merlin (operators of Blackpool Tower). There is huge potential and leverage which can be generated from this partnership. However, such partnerships can be complex in terms of what not-for profit activities a commercial organisation can support. So far Merlin has provided in-kind support, rather than financial support. However, Merlin is likely to step up their support "when the moment or project is right".
- › **Role of partners** - with the changes to organisational structure, there is also an opportunity to review the role of each consortium member and to bring new partners on board to help LeftCoast meet its CPP aims. For example, there is potential to develop links and explore opportunities to work with Blackpool and the Fylde College, the largest provider of further and higher education in the area which offers many relevant creative courses e.g. photography and performance.
- › **Commissioning** - the balance and diversity of LeftCoast's commissioning approaches has worked well (e.g. open calls, mini commissioning pots for local artist and collaborations with voluntary organisations). Going forward, LeftCoast would like to open and decentralise its processes to involve more of the creative community in the selection process, which would be equally beneficial for the creative community and LeftCoast.
- › **Meetings** - LeftCoast is looking at how they can use their steering group and working group meetings more effectively. Although meetings are productive, they could be more interactive. "Its more of a formal reporting process, but it could be more dynamic and discussion based."



As the World Tipped aerial performance ©Mark McNulty

TOP TIPS FOR DEVELOPING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

- › **Allow plenty of time for staff development**, especially when partners are diverse and come from a non-arts background.
- › **Employ directors/team earlier in the process** to be part of the business planning stage.
- › Aim to embed sustainability amongst partners by co-developing a partnership agreement.
- › **Be forward thinking** and ensure partners always have the 10 year vision in mind.
- › **Use partners' existing networks** to build capacity and buy-in of local creative people and the community.
- › **Effective communication and language is very important** to make the right connections with audiences and partners from other sectors and backgrounds. Avoid using industry and 'arty' speak and focus on selling the experience.

OUTCOMES

LeftCoast has already brought a successful artistic programme to Blackpool & Wyre, and some of its events have had a national profile. This has been achieved by the partners building trust, confidence and capacity to deliver an ambitious programme of arts and cultural activity. Key steps have been taken in developing local artists and a lot of innovative ideas have emerged from the consortium. For example, the Art Bed and Breakfast project puts creative ideas into the physical infrastructure of the town. The idea is to refurbish a fully functioning hotel with artist designed rooms. It will also be an opportunity to create new jobs in the creative economy across Blackpool & Wyre and help generate income to support future LeftCoast activities.

“The reputation, creditability and brand of LeftCoast has been established, there’s still more work to be done, but I’m proud to be associated with it, both personally and professionally”. Steering group member

Art Bed and Breakfast project image courtesy of LeftCoast



LeftCoast has done some interesting work at the Fleetwood Festival of Transport, a traditional event attracting 50,000 to 60,000 visitors annually. Commissioned and coordinated by the consortium, the SpareParts festival aimed to integrate interactive arts, performance and cultural activities into this already well established event, known to locals as Tram Sunday, to enrich the event and inspire people to get more involved in arts. Overall, the event was a success and it showed that **adding art components to a traditional festival engages new audiences** e.g. **a festival in Blackpool and Wyre had a strong pull for bringing new visitors to the area with 33% having never been to the festival before. 55% of visitors to the festival were from local postcode areas. In addition, 75% of visitors to the Festival did not perceive themselves to have attended or participated in any arts or creative activity within the last 12 months.** This festival engaged and influenced visitor’s expectations and perceptions of art; the art was welcomed and received by non-arts audiences.

“It’s made a real impact, there’s been a lot of activity and people know about it for good reasons.” Steering group member

On a smaller scale, the consortium have worked together to ensure there are also instances where people in the arts sector have gained valuable skills. For example some people have received marketing training through the programme, which they have then been able to use and apply to the benefit of their own work and organisation.

“It’s a small outcome, but in terms of sustainability within Blackpool & Wyre, it could be immensely important”. Steering group member

“There are some big scale successes and small bespoke successes, some of which feels that it would have a long term effect”. LeftCoast

Overall, it is the partnership which has allowed relationships to grow and innovation to happen.

“That’s the strength of arts and culture, its ability to innovate and to create.” Steering group member

Moreover, partners now have a better understanding of audience development which has been quite “a game changer”, considering there was very limited expertise in the area prior to CPP.

CPP	LeftCoast
Lead organisation	Blackpool Coastal Housing
Partners	Blackpool Council, Wyre Council, Merlin Entertainments, and Grand Theatre Blackpool
Location	Blackpool & Wyre



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