



CITIZEN POWER PETERBOROUGH

IMPACT AND LEARNING

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Citizen Power Peterborough partners

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) responds to the new challenges and opportunities for the human race, by developing and promoting new ways of thinking about human fulfilment and social progress. Our vision is to be a powerful and innovative force. The RSA Action and Research Centre (ARC) puts enlightened thinking to work in practical ways. By researching, designing and testing new social models, we encourage a more inventive, resourceful and fulfilled society.

Peterborough City Council is a unitary authority providing services to its population of 177,162 living in the city and its surrounding areas. The vision is to create a sustainable Peterborough, an urban centre of a thriving sub-regional community of villages and market towns, a healthy, safe and exciting place to live, work and visit, famous as the environment capital of the UK.

Arts Council England (ACE) aims to deliver great art for everyone. It works to support talent and develop creative skills, build world-class arts facilities and raise the profile of the arts. It believes that by enabling artists, arts organisations and investment partners in the region to work together, it can help the region to offer excellent arts opportunities that engage more people and enhance economic growth.

1. Citizen Power Peterborough

Citizen Power Peterborough (CPP) is a three-year project developed by the RSA in partnership with Arts Council England East (ACE) and Peterborough City Council (PCC). The programme was a unique, multi-dimensional, partnership in place-making and citizen activism.

This report marks the end of the project and draws on an evaluation of the project undertaken for the AHRC by Dr Mark Roberts of De Montfort University. However, it is not a rigorous, quantitative evaluation. Instead, its aim is to give an honest ‘warts and all’ overview of CPP that can provide insights and lessons for others seeking to tap into citizen power.

CPP began in mid-2010 at a time when many initiatives sponsored by the Labour Government had focused on citizen engagement and just as the Coalition Government began its programme of public service funding cuts. It sought to put meat on the bones of the then new Prime Minister’s idea of the Big Society.

The CPP approach focused on cultivating three of the conditions necessary for a more vibrant civil society: supporting people to be more civically active (participation), creating stronger connections between people and where they live (attachment), and developing new citizen-led responses (innovation) to long-standing social and civic challenges such as drug dependence and anti-social behaviour.

This focus emerged in response to two factors. The first was local conditions in Peterborough. Citizenship and Place Surveys data from 2009–10 showed levels of civic participation in Peterborough to be below the national average with key generators of citizen power like attachment to place, social trust and respect for other people, all lower than the average unitary authority in England. When CPP began, Peterborough was already on a journey to grow citizen power. A major discussion involving city stakeholders had been held under the title Perception Peterborough, drawing on the insights of political theorist and former White House advisor Benjamin Barber. Peterborough City Council had also introduced Neighbourhood Councils to localise decision-making.

The second factor is a widespread belief, held by among others, political parties, think tanks, and a range of public intellectuals, that increasing civic engagement is an essential part of strategies to renew democracy, reform public services and respond to social change (see Table 1). This belief is part of the RSA’s commitment to increasing human capability and was inherent in David Cameron’s extolling of a Big Society.

1,497

local residents
actively participated
in the Citizen Power
Peterborough to
improve community
attachment and
participation

Table 1: The benefits of citizen powered energy¹

The benefits of citizen powered energy	
Economic	Participation helps to save money. Regular volunteers are estimated to contribute the equivalent of £88 per person per month to the economy, while for a service like the NHS, the economic value of volunteers is considered to be worth £700,000 per hospital trust.
Public Services	Participation develops more effective services. A recent evaluation of citizen empowerment mechanisms — including participatory budgeting, individual budgets and deliberative forums — concluded that involving people in decision-making delivers improved public services. In Control, an organisation dedicated to expanding the level of self-directed support in health and social care, found that three quarters of people who took part in setting their own budgets felt their quality of life had improved as a result.
Community	Participation is considered an important means of developing both bonding and bridging social capital. Shared social norms and strong feelings of trust and belonging are in turn able to nurture further participation. Creative practice has had significant success in nurturing these qualities.
Individual	Participation increases individual well-being, confidence and skills. People who are engaged in activities such as volunteering and the arts tend to experience greater levels of happiness and well-being. In addition, people can develop useful skills, confidence and self-determination, which they can apply in other areas of their lives.

The problem, it seemed, for citizen engagement was not so much intent but developing and implementing new ways of doing things. The challenges involved included:

- Seeing communities as assets, understanding those assets and mobilising them;
- Reframing and redesigning the essence of public services, from bureaucratic delivery mechanisms to reciprocal relationships; and
- Changing the locus of political and managerial authority from one of control and risk reduction to empowerment and innovation.

The generators and conductors of citizen power are often place-specific, unique to the local ecology. However, the challenge of unblocking citizen power remains an unresolved national problem, in its modern manifestation reaching back over 20 years to John Major’s Citizens’ Charter, which sought to use a consumerist model of citizen empowerment.

Nevertheless, evidence on key indicators of citizen engagement – for example volunteering – is ambiguous at best. Reports consistently conclude that citizen engagement remains at the margins of most public management. Also, the pool of civically active citizens in places like Peterborough is unrepresentative of broader society, coming as it does from what the Centre for Third Sector Research has called the ‘civic core’ (see Table 2).²

1. For references see J. Rowson, M. K. Mezey and B. Dellot, *Beyond the Big Society: Psychological foundations of active citizenship* (RSA: London, 2012).

2. Professor John Mohan, *Mapping the Big Society: perspectives from the Third Sector Research Centre* (Third Sector Research Centre, 2011).

The CPP project explicitly set out both to discover and work with Peterborough’s ‘changemakers’, the people who are inclined to make things happen, but also those far away from the city’s civic core.

Table 2: Where does citizen power come from?

Attribute	Details
General population	It is widely accepted that only a small percentage of the population – the civic core – participates in any substantial way. Research has shown that 8% of the population deliver nearly 50% of total volunteering hours. Likewise, only 4% of people are actively involved in their local services, and only a further 5% say they want to take part.
Age	The most active volunteers, marginally, are those in middle age. There is little difference between this age group and that of younger and older generations, but the volunteering rates of the latter have been falling for some time. The difference between age groups is more marked when considering participation in ‘thicker’ activities. 70% of local councillors, for instance, are aged 55 or over.
Education	Education is a key predictor of participation. The higher the level of qualification received, the more likely the individual is to volunteer. 56% of degree holders formally volunteer while only 23% of those with no qualification do. Some commentators attribute this to the impact of education on people’s self-confidence, their political knowledge and their literacy skills.
Employment	Participation in formal volunteering is correlated with higher levels of employment and professional hierarchies. Those in managerial positions volunteer more often than those in intermediate and routine occupations. Socio-economic groups AB and C1 are considerably more likely to volunteer formally than C2 and DE groups; this has changed little over the past decade.
Ethnic background	Although groups often identified as marginalised communities are relatively inactive in formal activities, this is not the case in other forms of participation. Within BME groups there is ‘a long tradition of more informal, self-help participatory activity between individuals and households rather than with organisations’.
Place	Rural areas have far more engaged communities, with 70% of people involved in civic engagement and formal volunteering, compared to 60% for urban areas. People are less likely to participate in civic engagement and formal volunteering in deprived areas.

Overall, as a project, CPP was highly experimental and emergent. Experimental because while the project workers and partners contributed a wide range of skills and insights, CPP was a new departure for the RSA, for ACE and for Peterborough City Council: none of us were applying a predetermined template to the project.

For example, the dimension brought to CPP by the involvement of the Arts Council East (ACE) is important. Peterborough had long been perceived as a place with a weak cultural offer and infrastructure. It is to the credit of ACE that they sought to address this not simply by parachuting cultural resource into the city but by connecting cultural investment to the broader civic challenge. The Arts and Social Change strand of the project sought to open a new two-way relationship in the city between civic capacity and arts participation.

The project was emergent in that its different (ultimately seven) strands of work, which reflect the interests, capacities and priorities of the partners, were allowed to develop in different ways and at a different pace (see Table 3). As this report will show, the outcomes of these strands vary in their success.

It is to the credit of Peterborough City Council that they opened themselves up to such an experimental and emergent approach to generating citizen power, particularly at a time when other local authorities, facing similar challenges and pressures, were choosing to hunker down and wait for the bad weather to pass.

Table 3: Citizen Power Peterborough in numbers

Timeline	<p>CPP was a three-year programme:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scoping phase (December 2009 – February 2010); 2. Set up (March – July 2011); 3. Core project activity (July 2010 – August 2012); and 4. Completion (September – December 2012). 	
Projects	<p>CPP was made up of seven core projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sustainable Citizenship: how very local communities can help solve environmental problems. 2. Recovery Capital: how personal, social and community capital can help tackle problematic drug and alcohol use and generate the support necessary for recovery. 3. Peterborough Curriculum: enhancing educational opportunity and civic participation for young people by connecting what they learn in school to the place where they live. 4. Civic Commons: creating a new space for political and social debate, discussion and local activism. 5. Arts and Social Change: delivering high-quality creative experiences through the arts to strengthen civic life in the city. 6. ChangeMakers: mapping local civic leaders and seeking to unlock the collective asset they represent. 7. Innovation Forum: a strand that emerged as a result of the joint vision and activity of Citizen Power and the Single Delivery Plan for Peterborough's public services. This programme enabled over forty local senior managers to forge a new public service culture based on cooperation and creativity. 	
Participation	Overall	Participation in projects
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The programme reached thousands of local residents. 2. At least 1,497 people actively participated in the Citizen Power Peterborough to improve community attachment and participation, and public service innovation in Peterborough. 3. Diversity: participants ranged from schoolchildren to city leaders. The participants came from across the public sector, the voluntary sector and local business. 4. The programme involved more than 100 local organisations. 	<p>Peterborough Curriculum: 678 children.</p> <p>Sustainable Citizenship: 75 local activists.</p> <p>Innovation Forum: 40 city leaders.</p> <p>Civic Commons: 27 local activists.</p> <p>ChangeMakers: 80 residents, activists and policymakers.</p> <p>Recovery Capital: 140 recovering drug users.</p> <p>Arts and Social Change: 457 residents and local artists.</p>

Publications and communications	Overall	Breakdown by outputs
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CPP produced 23 reports. 2. More than 25 articles in national and local publications including the <i>Guardian</i> and <i>Local Government Chronicle</i>. 3. CPP Newsletter was received by 1,500 local people and organisations every two months. 4. CPP-specific website to communicate the programme and its activities was accessed by more than 2,000 people. 5. We held around 10 public information events/meetings in Peterborough (not including the individual projects) to advertise CPP. 	Programme wide: 3 Peterborough Curriculum: 10 Sustainable Citizenship: 1 Innovation Forum: 1 Civic Commons: 1 ChangeMakers: 2 Recovery Capital: 2 Arts and Social Change: 11

10
major public information events in Peterborough to advertise the project

Together these strands sought to generate the conditions for a step change in citizen engagement, addressing both the broader challenges of engagement and the specific ones for Peterborough.

The economic context in which CPP took place is important. As local public sector austerity bites and it has become increasingly clear that the growth in local needs – particularly for social care – is set massively to outstrip local resources, there has been a growing acceptance that strategies must seek to build capacity and resilience among citizens and in communities. However, here too there is a gap between aspiration, evidence and practice. As budgets are squeezed, interventions to build civic capacity are required to show results in short order, something reinforced by the growing role of payment by results mechanisms for public services. CPP aimed to be judged in part by the legacy it leaves; the project was implicitly seeking to gain insights into the scope for a social multiplier effect, whereby relatively modest investment creates new and enduring civic capacity.

In the face of deep cuts in local government budgets along with rising demands associated with an ageing population, the need to identify and tap into citizen power has moved from a contested option to a pressing necessity. To use a term coined by the RSA’s 2020 Public Services Hub, public interventions must become more ‘socially productive’; more able to encourage people to manage and meet their own needs individually and collectively.

The lessons of Citizen Power Peterborough are thus important not just to the ideal of civic engagement but also to the core tasks of democratic leadership and public administration at a time of economic sluggishness and public sector austerity.

2. The seven strands

In this chapter we give brief descriptions of the six original strands of the project plus the innovative city-wide leadership programme that emerged in part, as a result of our work. The strands are listed in order of the degree of impact they had, which is reflected in the amount of space given to them. We start with the Innovation Forum, which has had a significant cultural impact and generated substantive outcomes, and end with the Civic Commons, which failed to deliver on its early promise largely because of over-ambitious design and political suspicion.

For each strand we describe the major features, identify key aspects of impact, and list key learning points with a particular focus on what future similar projects should do differently. The material is sourced from the research team and from evaluation material generated by Peterborough City Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

The Innovation Forum

In 2011 Peterborough's local strategic partnership, the Greater Peterborough Partnership (GPP) launched an ambitious 10-year transformation agenda (the Single Delivery Plan) with a set of underlying principles requiring a substantial shift of culture in city-wide public service delivery.

The RSA and the Map Consortium (a group of experienced artist facilitators), already working together in the city through CPP, proposed establishing an Innovation Forum. The aim was to support and accelerate culture change, working with 40 leaders in Peterborough from across the public sector along with representation from the third sector and local business. This programme aimed to foster a new city-wide leadership ethos, inspire innovative working practice and, in particular, to use arts and creative processes to help make this happen.

The Map Consortium and the RSA led on the design of all aspects of the programme in consultation with the Greater Peterborough Partnership and forum members.

The programme included:

Forum events: Six events were held across the year: Conditions for Change and Innovation; Perceptions of Place; Leading Innovation; Engagement; Facilitative Leadership; and Sustaining Innovation. These events comprised a carefully facilitated blend of creative practice, external speakers, reflective discussions and the application of learning to everyday issues and relationships.

Learning groups: Eight cross-sector groups of six to eight people were established to embed learning from the forum events. These met between

each event and were initially facilitated by the Map and RSA team, and then self-facilitated.

For example, a group worked with film to explore how green space is used in the city, which in turn, prompted the Nene Park Trust's Chief Executive to reframe plans for a major capital project on the site. Another group developed a 'challenge toolkit' for the forum focusing on how to bypass entrenched cultural blocks to change.

Conversation: Individuals were supported to apply new approaches in dialogue with Map and RSA facilitators. A protected website enabled forum members to share reflections and experimentation.

Dialogue in Action: This project was a partnership between the Arts and Social Change programme and the Innovation Forum and offered self-selected groups the opportunity to work on relevant issues in partnership with creative/artist associates from Peterborough.

Four of these projects took place involving 10 different organisations and five creative/artist associates:

- Falls is a project crossing public health, voluntary services and adult education to address the challenges presented by reducing risks of falls in the home.

'A multi-agency approach was used to successfully bid for funds that have enabled measures to be put in place very quickly to try and reduce the number of older people becoming ill or dying from the extreme cold this winter. None of us could have achieved this result working in isolation. This is another example of how working in collaboration can help to generate adequate funding and implement solutions quickly and effectively.'

David Bache, Chief Executive, Age UK Peterborough

- The Neighbourhood Project was instigated by a local councillor to encourage greater civic engagement and community cohesion and to bring about partnership working with a designated local area. The council's neighbourhood team worked closely with the creative associate who brought local artists to the project. They worked with photography, distributing cameras within the community to surface residents' own perspectives on the neighbourhood. Other local councillors are keen to use the same techniques again, especially in areas of emerging tension or where single issues are dominating an area.
- The Sharing Success Project was led by the Principal of the Community College, the General Secretary of the Peterborough Council for Voluntary Services and leaders within the NHS Executive locally. The project built a small team across health and learning sectors to look closely at what has worked and why and consider how to record those characteristics.

‘Working with the creative practice has allowed us to cascade a new way of thinking to managers within our organisations. This programme has also developed us, the facilitators, to gain new skills. The creative practitioner has harnessed our natural abilities and given us permission to try new things.’

Pat Carrington, Principal, Peterborough City College

- Engaging school leaders in the Peterborough Learning Partnership was led by a head teacher who was active in the area based curriculum and in the forum. She continues to bring ideas from both to influence leadership of schools in the city and is now being commissioned by a variety of public services to act as a critical friend.

Impact

Engagement in the programme was encouraging. Perhaps most significant is that a second phase of the forum has been requested by its members and is going ahead with an increased and wider membership for a further year.

Attendance in all organised activities was consistent at 75% and above. Many smaller self-selecting partnerships were formed and undertook initiatives as a result of forum connections or activities. Similarly, most members reported new relationships bearing fruit in relation to their ‘day jobs’, with support or refreshed ideas occurring.

Learning

- Creative practice as a methodology needs practice and persistence to embed; a strong rationale for this distinct approach needs restating often. Subtle and skilled external facilitation is key to placing this work in this context.
- The forum had to dedicate enough time to working differently in order to make a difference, though time pressures meant that participants sometimes had to disengage and re-engage.
- Consistent attendance by senior leaders attracts and maintains other’s engagement.
- Skills and leadership development work needs to be balanced alongside application to the daily context. If the balance tips too far either way, some parties disengage. This insight has informed the structuring of the second year of the forum, which looks to blend more application into the process as the forum gains momentum and confidence.
- Small group work cements and produces unexpected alliances and engagement.
- Meaningful measurement tools are needed to chart progress and impact.

‘I am confident that we will continue the work in a creative way. It is remarkable the impact it has made on all of us.’

Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive, Peterborough City Council

1,500

local people and organisations received the CPP newsletter every two months

Shift in mindset and culture: ‘I enjoy the fact that we can now be so open with each other in terms of current issues, and how we challenge each other to do more, do differently- or just see the positives in times of difficulty. It’s already changed the way I approach and package some of my projects, and how I see the wider city leadership role we all have.’

James McCulloch, Chief Executive, Nene Park Trust

Relationships and problem solving: ‘An excellent case of leading by example for cutting bureaucracy was demonstrated through the work. A current example of how bureaucracy was blocking a good cohesion initiative was raised at a forum learning group and as a result the hurdle was not only removed but additional benefits are now possible to over 20 community groups.’

Jawaid Khan, Cohesion Manager, Peterborough City Council

Experimenting with creative practice: ‘The overwhelming learning for me was the impact of creating an opportunity and simply allowing and trusting the team to work with it in their own way – creating high energy – and that is where the learning is for them as well.’

Sue Mitchell, Assistant Director, Public Health, NHS Peterborough

Empowerment: ‘The last innovation forum was a real inspiration for us all. I certainly went away believing that we can make difference in Peterborough, and I particularly love the mantra “We have the will, the power and the ability...”’

David Bache, Chief Executive, Age UK

‘The depth and breadth of the experience so far is certainly touching my day to day business with plenty of bold steps being taken - and far better results as a consequence!’

Adrian Chapman, Director of Communities, Peterborough City Council

Arts and Social Change

The Arts and Social Change programme explored the role of arts and imagination in creating new connections between people and where they live in order to strengthen participation in community life in Peterborough.

The primary aims were to deliver high-quality creative experiences through the arts to increase community engagement and build social capital. We aimed to build a self-sustaining network of locally based artists who could contribute to the artistic aspirations of Peterborough and play an active role in the arts community regionally and nationally as well as fostering an appetite and capacity to establish the city as a place for creative engagement. The programme included seven sub-projects:

Creative Gatherings a programme of 10 gatherings held in different spaces across the city, encouraged a mix of people to attend and to support an inclusive arts community. Gatherings were co-produced with local artists, were interactive and offered creative practice as a way of exploring and investigating themes of interest to both the local arts community and the CPP project.

Made in Peterborough included two commissions. The first, *Take Me To* was created by Encounters, a participatory arts organisation, together with artist architect Nicolas Henniger. *Take Me To* involved a series of bus tours led by residents who shared their stories along the way about why they had chosen a particular place. *Take Me To* culminated in a shared feast and evening of storytelling with 35 local residents.

The second commission involved London-based Polish artist Joanna Rajkowska who created a sculpture called *The Peterborough Child* over late summer 2012. An artificial Bronze Age archaeological site, the sculpture responds to the rich archaeological and cultural heritage of the city by inviting local residents to contribute to the work with contemporary personal items.

Context Matters included two artist residencies. Joshua Sofaer worked with Morland Court Residents' Association in Werrington on a creative competition, which asked 'How Morland Court Got Its Name'. Involving a series of creative workshops with residents and community groups it resulted in the creation of a new sign for the building created by a local artist, Stuart Payn in response to the winning entry from Emily Henderson. This strengthened the resident community at Morland Court at a time when the landlord, the Hyde Group, was undertaking a major refurbishment.

Simon Grennan of Grennan & Sperandio worked alongside the Peterborough Street Pastors and created a series of 15 comic strips that told the stories of their work, motivations and faith. These were published individually in the *Peterborough Evening Telegraph* and exhibited as a collective narrative at Peterborough City Art Gallery.

Talking Arts included three public events that aimed to provide a space to discuss creative ideas and cultural ambitions. The first event, *Cross Pollination* took place in October 2011 at Peterborough Town Hall and featured artists Marcus Coates and Andy Holden, ornithologist Peter Holden, local poet Keely Mills and Sophie Antonelli of the Green Backyard.

The second event, *Peterborough's Cultural Ambition*, brought together city leaders to explore the potential of growth of the arts in the city and was chaired by John Knell, a Fellow of the RSA. This event was hosted in partnership with Vivacity, the cultural trust in Peterborough and it is likely that further similar events will continue. The final event, *Leading a City Differently: Arts, Partnership and Public Services* was held at the RSA in February 2013 focusing on the work of the Innovation Forum.

The Emissary Project was led by four 'ambassadors' representing the interests of Peterborough's arts community:

- Di Goldsmith and Louise Richards, Executive Director, Motionhouse Dance Theatre
- Shelagh Smith and independent arts consultant Virginia Tandy, recently of Manchester City Council
- Garth Bailey and Judith Knight, Chief Executive, Artsadmin
- Kate Hall and Erica Campayne, Participation Director at London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT)

The RSA brokered the initial introduction of these individuals from national arts organisations or backgrounds.

They explored who might have ideas and insights that had resonance for their own community.

Experiments in Place-Making aimed to create conditions in which different ways of working could address locally identified challenges. Artists who had not previously worked together were paired up with Peterborough City Council's Neighbourhood Managers to explore creative practice as a way to develop new approaches to place-making. The four projects were:

- Stuart Payn and Tom Fox with Cate Harding and the Christmas Card project in Eastgate;
- Juliet Holdsworth and Sue Shields with Lisa Emmanuel and the Fireplace Project at Fellowes Gardens in Fletton;
- Alex Airey and Nicola Day-Dempsey with Lisa Emmanuel at the Ortongate Shopping Centre; and
- Anita Bruce and Fiona Lidgley with Julie Rivett at Eaglesthorpe Sheltered Housing in New England.

Dialogue in Action involved four collaborations with creative practice to support public service delivery. Local creative practitioners were placed in a catalytic role within small groups of public sector leaders working in the context of the Peterborough Single Delivery Plan.

Impact

- While 457 residents and local artists directly participated in the project, its reach was in the thousands.
- The programme resulted in an increase in local arts activity with pop up galleries appearing in multiple settings across the city, new partnerships developed across art forms, formation of a cross art form network (Creative Peterborough) and local artists leading and visible in Vivacity and the Peterborough Festival.
- New relationships are being sustained. For example, arts advisor Diane Goldsmith is linking dance programmes and schools in the city and her work with young people and dance is now funded by Creative Peterborough. Visual artist Garth Bayley is now taking part in a new national project outside Peterborough and bringing this learning into his work in the city. Shelagh Smith, Chair of Vivacity hosted a series of dinners with leaders across the city on the theme of heritage and has forged a relationship with Manchester City Council.
- Through the arts activity in the city outside of Arts and Social Change, there has been a burgeoning of projects situated within local communities specifically looking at engagement. In total 14 artists involved in the programme wished to take part in a similar initiative in the future.
- There has been a change in the local authority's willingness across departments to engage with the arts and creative process

as evidenced by the council leadership and funding for an arts-based leadership programme within the Single Delivery Plan (see Innovation Forum case study).

- Networking improved the self-efficacy of participants, their sense of belonging and the perception that they were supported and valued by their own community. Local artist Tom Fox co-managed the last three Creative Gatherings and will continue to lead it going forward. In terms of replication it is important to note that local arts networks in Peterborough were starting from a very low base.
- The programme was successful in demonstrating that creative change could be delivered despite difficult economic circumstances. Some interventions had a high cost per participant, and the programme successfully made the case that such spending was valuable where it can be afforded, because of the 'long tail' of change delivered.

Learning

Audience engagement and participation: Participants from marginalised or vulnerable groups, and those who had little or no prior involvement with art, reported strong growth in feelings of self-efficacy both in their engagement with art and civic activism. This has relevance both for socially engaged artists, and for anyone who holds the view those groups traditionally characterised as marginalised or vulnerable can be denied meaningful access to art of a high quality.

Local knowledge and sensitivity: Participants on the ground and the programme's delivery partners all identified potential difficulties for 'outside experts'. The environment was a place that had been characterised as having relatively poor arts provision, and for that reason was particularly sensitive to criticism.

The importance of institutional mapping (external players developing a clear understanding of the place they are working in before that work actually begins) was highlighted. This ensured that programmes were not replicating something that a smaller, local partner was already doing, but could instead build upon local success in a supportive way, acting as a catalyst for local experiments with new areas of provision.

The building of trust was key to virtually all success. Those coming from outside the community must earn the right to be acknowledged as experts by local partners, and must appreciate, harness and build upon expertise held locally.

Embedded artists: The programme discovered that the most effective way for art to be embedded in a community is for the artist to be embedded in the community. The constant level of interaction gained by programme partners who spent more time in the city was found to have been a key to success where it occurred.

Some of the most effective creative interventions were made by local artists working within their own communities, whilst at the same time the programme was effective in placing outside artists within local voluntary groups and the wider city.

Funding limitations: The Arts and Social Change programme would have benefitted from being able to put more funding into the local

40

city leaders joined
the Innovation Forum

economy with directly funded arts projects with local artists. This was a barrier that resulted in our offers of small funding opportunities often not being taken up as we would have wished. However, we hope the overall programme means that the conventional attitude to a perceived cultural deficit of ‘parachuting in great art’ will be looked at more critically.

Peterborough Area Based Curriculum

The RSA worked with five schools in Peterborough during 2010–2012 to develop a series of projects in partnership with organisations and people from the local area. The goal was to create engaging learning experiences for pupils that draw on the locality, at the same time as involving a diverse range of stakeholders in the education of young people.

The RSA selected five schools in the city, which were enthusiastic about curriculum redevelopment and about engaging with their communities. A total of 693 students took part across the five schools, with some involvement for all students at Thomas Deacon Academy (around 2,200 students).

Forty-one representatives from potential community partners and schools met to discuss project ideas concluding in the schools working with a range of partners, including Railworld, the Red Cross, Lindum Group construction firm, Peterborough United Football Club, Peterborough Cathedral and the Inter-Faith Council.

Through a process of networking, local resource mapping, partnership support and project development, the RSA supported schools to identify and develop partnerships. The RSA provided Continued Professional Development in curriculum design, partnership working, involving young people and using the local area for learning. We supported the partnerships to develop, plan and evaluate their projects; developing learning about, by and for Peterborough.

This form of partnership working was intended to provide a range of benefits to students and schools, including:

- Access to local expertise and resources to support learning;
- Access to sites for learning in the locality that could be used;
- Alternative perspectives on learning, education and the locality;
- Shared ownership of the learning going on in schools, providing common cause between schools and other local stakeholders;
- A range of relationships between schools and local stakeholders which could be drawn upon in different ways; and
- Direct, positive contact for students with adults from a range of sectors and backgrounds.

To these ends, the programme put relationships before content, leading to open-ended and exploratory projects; this in turn meant that the relationships and the projects could be flexible and change to meet the evolving needs of schools and children. A feature of the more engaged partnerships was the ‘creative disruption’ they brought to the practice of teachers and schools. The involvement of an outside partner meant that children were placed at the centre of schools’ ‘outwards accountability’.

Schools took different approaches to developing Area Based Curriculum projects, and placed a different level of emphasis on creating curriculum that was: about a place (making use of local context and resources to frame

learning); by a place (designed by schools in partnership with other local stakeholders) and for a place (meeting the specific needs of children and local communities). Although each of the projects touched on all these to some extent, three projects illustrate each aspect particularly well.

- Learning about Peterborough: West Town Primary school and Peterborough Cathedral explored the Cathedral in the context of a changing city. This project demonstrated the potential for projects that start with local areas but go well beyond the locality; addressing national curriculum content while adding meaningful engagement with children's own – global – communities. It demonstrates the importance of re-imagining local sites as resources for learning that goes well beyond the obvious established features of a site.
- Learning by Peterborough: Dogsthorpe Junior School and Railworld explored the question of how to make Peterborough a destination city. Railworld staff worked closely with the school to develop a strong partnership in which collaborative planning was possible. Resulting activities for students related both to the school's curriculum, the children's personal development, to the goals of the partner organisation and of the wider city.
- Learning for Peterborough: Bishop Creighton Academy and Peterborough Cathedral looked at the role of the Cathedral and the school in the community in the past, present and future. The project revolved around the production of a 'Question Time' style event in which members of the inter-faith council and the school council sat on a panel and answered questions from an audience of Year 4 and 5 students. This project demonstrates how the school curriculum can become a 'social project', which engages with the real issues facing a community, specific to time and place, through engagement with local institutions.

Impact

The project aimed to create learning experiences that were engaging for children from all backgrounds and which embedded schools more fully in the locality.

- Teachers report improvement in student performance in literacy when in Peterborough Curriculum lessons.
- Students reported knowing far more about the opportunities available locally.
- Students enjoyed learning about where they live and learning outside the classroom.
- Students reported learning more factual information outside the classroom than in school.
- Students particularly enjoyed having other adults involved.
- Teachers learned about the locality and felt more connected.
- School and partner representatives reported a change to the way organisations engage with schools.

CPP generated

23

reports and numerous
articles in the national
and local press

- Partners reported that more schools are now open to working with outside agencies.

This project was given considerable coverage in the educational trade press and generated several publications and expert seminars. Some of the learning is now being taken forward through collaboration between the RSA and the Institute of Education through the ‘Grand Curriculum Designs’ work aimed at developing teachers’ capacity to be curriculum designers.

Learning

For some schools the Peterborough Curriculum represented a choice between a standards’ driven agenda and a more holistic approach that involved developing students as whole individuals. It was therefore framed as very much part and parcel of a strategic direction that was *in opposition* to a standards agenda.

The secondary school curriculum in particular remained not only resistant to modification, but also to enhancement by the locality. This is in part due to the structures of the schools, where subject and classroom teachers were difficult for partners to access.

Specific and skilled capacity is needed to identify partners and broker and maintain relationships. The community development/relationship brokering aspects of this project proved to be much more time consuming than the curriculum development aspects.

A lack of confidence in the outdoor environment, and existing negative views of Peterborough affected some students’ engagement with the work.

Recovery capital

Recovery Capital examined how best to support people in Peterborough with problems associated with drug and/or alcohol use, developing better collaboration between organisations and individuals. When the project started Peterborough had a higher than regional average injecting drug using population, drug related crime was said to be, on some measures, four times the national average, and levels of existing recovery capital are generally low amongst both drug and alcohol users.

This project aimed to develop a culture of user-centred provision, linking in with the city’s Family Recovery Project (Peterborough’s local version of the government’s Troubled Family Programme), which engaged service users in the design of new ideas to help them become more resilient and less reliant on the state. The project included a number of elements:

- A local stakeholder event was held in January 2011 with 20 drug and alcohol service users, service providers and community organisations. This identified the areas of the city being most challenged by drug and alcohol use, and potential barriers or gaps when it comes to accessing treatment.
- In May 2011 the RSA and the National Treatment Agency (NTA) East held a joint Recovery Champion Expert Symposium. It brought together 80 participants identified as strategic, therapeutic or community recovery champions within

the East of England region. Several leading figures in the recovery field participated.

- Around 150 interviews were carried out with people in Peterborough who have current issues or a history with drug or alcohol abuse, including 25 people from HMP Peterborough. This provided an overview of how service users view local agencies, identified the different groups and networks they engage with, began to assess what personal, social, community and cultural resources exist to initiate and sustain recovery (recovery capital), and identified a need for more safe places for people to come together to provide mutual support.
- This research provided a benchmark for understanding the extent of existing levels of recovery capital and social networks in Peterborough and was presented to Peterborough City Council, the Safer Peterborough Partnership and the local Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT).
- In January 2012 using this research, an event took place to begin co-designing services focusing on the 'whole person' with everyone involved across the various organisations including service provider CRI and service users. This also started a process to create a tool to measure recovery capital and to use it in a meaningful way.
- A peer support group was set up in order to get to know the recovery community better, to establish links within the community and provide positive role models. Art classes, a cooking competition with the Royal Northern Hotel and exercise classes were started with an additional offer by the council of space to meet in the community hub at 439 Lincoln Road. The group continue to meet themselves, and have decided to be called the FREE group (Free Recovery for Everyone).
- Recovery coaching training took place in spring and summer 2012 with prisoners, service users, mental health practitioners and volunteers including the Samaritans. All the respondents to the evaluation interviews have reported an increase in confidence and are using new skills and techniques following this training.

Impact

- FREE continues to work with the drug treatment provider to develop the service. The council has said a number of the founding members of FREE have now moved on entirely, ready to completely sever their links to drug treatment-based support.
- The Peterborough City Council task and finish group found that Recovery Capital has already delivered a strong legacy. Involving service users in the development of treatment programmes has been a critical step in improving local services.
- The project has improved understanding of the needs of the drug using population, developing service provision, encouraging better support groups and will undoubtedly assist in some hardened drug users to recover from their addictions.

- Recovery Capital has provided positive role models to encourage more people to access the support they need to start their own recovery journey.
- There is a hope among officials involved in the project that the principles of user-designed services can be replicated across other council services.
- The project was the basis for an early paper on Recovery Capital that helped build an understanding of the concept and its importance. This paper influenced, and was cited in, the Government's 2010 national drugs strategy, helping to position Peterborough as a place of innovation on an issue that they had previously been seen as struggling to manage.

Learning

- *Civic capacity is everywhere, if you look hard enough.* Some of the most marginalised people in society – recovering drug users – can be some of the most inspiring and committed civic innovators. But for this to happen, local agencies must first recognise and value them as social assets. This requires a change in mindset that can be difficult to achieve and significant support, particularly in the early stages of engagement. We had to work hard and consistently to combat negative attitudes (for example, from the local MP) towards recovering users and the resulting stigma they experience on a daily basis.
- *Front-line staff must have the capacity, resources, incentives and support to innovate.* That means making system change in drug treatment services an organisational priority, from top to bottom. Without this, short and medium term gains (for example, a better knowledge base) and momentum (for example, a new group of active citizens), however significant, can be lost, sometimes rapidly.
- *Build from solid foundations.* Local authorities and other public agencies produce reams of data that is never used or acted on. Yet efforts to mobilise citizen power should begin with evidence and data on the needs and experience of service users. This can help to target resources and support to the people who most need it. It is also the first step towards developing drug services that are built around the experience of recovering users.

140

recovering drug
users benefited from
Recovery Capital

Sustainable citizenship

The aim of this project was to encourage local environmental activism from the bottom up. The objectives for achieving this were: to encourage innovative projects (with an emphasis on encouraging behaviour change) led by local residents that made Peterborough a more sustainable place; create a digital network that would allow sharing of information and best practice among local volunteers; building capacity and supporting innovation; and support Peterborough's bid to become the Environment Capital of the UK, through contributing practical projects and building learning on environmental activism.

Around 75 local environmentalists participated in the project, which funded and supported 14 hyper-local civic environmental pilot projects designed and led by local people. There were two primary packages of activity, the first stimulated and incubated community-led environmental projects, while the second strengthened the local network of environmentalists and made it more innovative.

As part of the first activity, a series of competitive processes were created, inspired by initiatives like Social Innovation Camp³ and the ‘sandpit’ events used by some of the Research Councils to encourage collaborative and innovative applied research.⁴ The purpose was to stimulate the ‘supply side’ of innovation, including workshops in which local people were led through creative problem-solving processes and helped to make new contacts and collaborators to develop more innovative projects. Individuals were helped to develop their project ideas and eventually pitch them to judges who decided whether the ideas were appropriate to receive financial funding and in-kind support.

As part of the second activity a formal partnership was established with Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT), which managed an existing environment network of individuals, charities and community groups interested in sustainability. The RSA worked with PECT to run workshops and events on relevant topics, and drew their support into some of the funded projects. In consultation with PECT and members of the environment network, the RSA created a partnership with Project Dirt and a social network of ‘green’ projects. These were commissioned to create a specific section of their website, devoted to Peterborough.⁵

Impact

- The funding and support of a range of 14 pilot projects designed and led by local people that are making Peterborough a more sustainable place, from a scheme to ‘upcycle’ surplus paint and sell at reduced cost, to a bicycle maintenance service that encourages more people to cycle.
- The project strengthened the network of local environmentalists; at almost every meeting people held new connections were made that helped solve some need or other.
- The relationship between public sector efforts to reduce Peterborough’s environmental impact and those of community groups has been strengthened. Local councillors and officers are now more fully aware of the community’s potential, as one council officer recognised: *‘We need to know where those pockets of [community work] are happening in Peterborough so we can join them all up and have a more cohesive approach’*.
- The launch of Project Dirt in Peterborough has increased the visibility of practical environmental action by community groups, and helped effective networking among local environmentalists, while acting as a long-term repository for people’s experience

3. See <http://sicamp.org/>

4. See <http://researchers.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/2011/04/30/research-council-sandpits/>

5. See www.projectdirt.com/cluster/peterborough/

of running such projects. A website with national reach, Project Dirt brings Peterborough residents into easy contact with non-Peterborough projects, again encouraging solutions that are innovative with respect to the city.

- Fourteen projects and organisations are currently featured on Project Dirt's Peterborough 'cluster'.
- Although not all projects that received funding were expected to become financially sustainable, some are continuing, and the knowledge gained by those involved will be recorded and archived (via blogs posted on Project Dirt, a condition for those projects successful in receiving funds) for others to learn from.
- Through delivering the project, we gained significant amounts of experience in encouraging and incubating community-led projects in Peterborough, which forms part of our legacy to the city.

Learning

- Developing the network should have been one of our first activities; mapping and connecting existing capacity is as important as generating new capacity.
- Peterborough has 'hidden assets' in the form of environmental volunteers, who could be of significant support to the council's Environmental Capital agenda.
- Innovative ideas often depend on collaboration, but Peterborough's voluntary sector is relatively fragmented, with individuals rarely supporting or learning from each other.
- Competitive but informal processes can foster collaboration and innovative projects from community groups, and could be used by the Community Leadership Fund.

ChangeMakers

In 2011, the RSA developed and published *The Civic Pulse Model*, a framework for understanding and measuring the capability of people to actively participate in civic and social life. The RSA also created and piloted a new ChangeMakers tool that puts this thinking into practice, and helps to better understand the capabilities and networks of the key individuals driving change in local areas. The project:

- Defined with local stakeholders the main characteristic traits and features of ChangeMakers (for example, they were highly-connected, generous with their time and impactful);
- Built method and survey tools for ChangeMaker identification;
- Identified the capabilities of ChangeMakers and their connections with one another and with local institutions; and
- Brought together those identified through a new ChangeMakers' Network.

Over the latter half of 2011 two surveys were created. One was used to identify the ChangeMakers using an open, independent process. The other was sent to the people identified in order to elicit more information about their background, their ChangeMaking abilities

and the type and strength of their connections to one another and to local institutions.

In total 240 Peterborough ChangeMakers were identified of whom 85 completed the final survey. This group includes artists, police officers, social entrepreneurs, businessmen, housing officers, community activists and charity workers, among others.

Survey findings revealed that the group are well-placed to drive change in Peterborough. They are rooted in their city, have an impressive repertoire of skills and breadth of knowledge, and have a clear appetite to apply their capabilities to improve Peterborough for the better.

Despite these qualities, the surveys also highlighted a number of challenges facing the ChangeMakers, not least that their expertise was being left untapped by local agencies. To address these difficulties, a ChangeMakers' Network was created (with 20 core members).

Impact

Benefits for the local authority included: a pool of readily accessible expertise and knowledge on particular issues or local areas; a sounding board for new ideas and strategies; a source of partners for joint ventures and a channel for spreading information and messages throughout the city.

Benefits for ChangeMakers included: a space to network and forge stronger cross-sector relationships; a space to share ideas and to receive advice from like-minded individuals; a forum for the development of new ChangeMaker-led initiatives; and a place to hone their own skills and grow their knowledge in different areas.

The Peterborough ChangeMakers' Network has attracted attention beyond the city and was the subject of a substantial feature in the *Local Government Chronicle*. A refined version of ChangeMakers – focusing on people engaging with children, families and learning – was undertaken in Lowestoft as part of the RSA inquiry into school standards in Suffolk. The RSA has also received funding to undertake a ChangeMakers project with the East African and Indian diaspora communities in the UK to find and develop the leadership potential of people who are improving the lives of their communities of heritage.

Learning

- *Build in enough time to hand over control to members.* It was always intended that the ChangeMakers would take on the responsibility of managing the network after the RSA project ran its course, but the effort needed to build that kind of momentum and buy-in was underestimated. This would require more investment early on to organise more events and encourage ChangeMakers to get involved in their coordination with guidance.
- *Agree the level of local authority input from the outset.* The ChangeMakers Network was attractive to some of the members in large part due to its independent nature, but at the same time this lack of affiliation with a major body meant that the necessary support was not always available.
- *Start simple and build in more features over time.* The plan for the network was at times overly complex. Rather than take

The programme
involved more than

100

local organisations

part in activities such as a workshop to discuss particular local challenges, many of the members showed a greater interest in simply networking and meeting like-minded individuals from other sectors and organisations that they seldom come across on a day-to-day basis.

Civic Commons

Civic Commons was an attempt to develop and pilot a new model of citizen participation in Peterborough. In contrast to most approaches to citizen participation which ask people for their views (consultation) and invite people to influence decision-making (engagement), the Civic Commons model had the more ambitious aim of supporting citizens to create their own initiatives to impact on social problems in their communities.

The Civic Commons forum brought together a diverse group of 27 citizen activists who agreed to work together to develop and pilot the model. They discussed and deliberated on topical issues with leading thinkers and decision-makers. The Civic Commons had a network that functioned outside forums and training sessions. Citizens who put their social action project ideas and plans to work in their local communities ran this. Participating citizens were given regular training and learning opportunities to enhance their capacity to contribute to the forum and take action as part of the network.

The Civic Commons was successful in attracting people beyond the usual suspects. An impressive 75% of those invited to participate agreed; the membership comes from varied backgrounds and is of varied ages and a quarter of those involved were not previously civically active.

The first Civic Commons session, held in January 2011, engaged with participants on the issue of tackling anti-social behaviour in Peterborough. Subsequent meetings focused on a specific area of Peterborough – Century Square – which experiences particularly high levels of anti-social behaviour and the group developed a number of interventions to be trialled here.

Impact

After a good start, this project faltered and was the least successful of the projects. This was largely due to a lack of capacity in the local authority to support the Civic Commons members. Indeed, a small but vocal minority of councillors were explicitly opposed to the Commons.

During the project the Neighbourhoods and Community department of Peterborough City Council was managing major cuts, which significantly reduced their community development capacity. In addition, the original plans for civic activism were said to be ‘too ambitious’ for many of the founding Civic Commons members.

However, there has been some, limited, impact. The project has aroused interest from other local authorities and central Government and has helped to raise the profile and improve the reputation of Peterborough as a place committed to localism and citizen participation.

Early evaluation showed that three quarters of Civic Commons members reported that the project improved their confidence and capacity to be civically active ‘a great deal’. A core group of five people have self-organised to support one another as community leaders

and want to reinvigorate the original plans; they are now part of the ChangeMakers Network.

Learning

- *However strong a participative idea is in principle it needs strong local foundations to take off.* The key quality of the Civic Commons – that it was about citizens acting together to tackle issues, not simply discussing them or lobbying for change – was not sufficiently embedded in the design or appreciated by the participants and partners.
- *The will or capacity of local people to tackle difficult social issues on their own is limited.* Civic participation and place-making needs different levels of participation and responsibility corresponding to the different levels of need, interest and capacity in communities.
- *Social action approaches to participation require a lot of local capacity building up front and facilitation throughout.* This is a role that needs to be filled ideally by a locally embedded community or voluntary group.
- *People learn by doing.* The more people participate the better they get at it. Seminars and workshops are very useful and important but in the end people like to feel like they are doing something rather than talking about doing. People are often motivated by issues rather than the idea or virtue of participating in society in itself. Work on issues where people can make a clear difference and see the product of the labour.

3. Becoming citizen powered

678

children helped
develop the
Peterborough
curriculum

In the three years since Citizen Power Peterborough's inception the funding of local public services has deteriorated considerably. It is unlikely that a project as experimental and broad would be funded today. However, the issues addressed by the project are more urgent. As austerity stretches ahead into the middle distance, communities must become more engaged, more resilient and more creative or a hollowing out of the public sphere and deterioration in quality of life – particularly in disadvantaged areas – is surely inevitable.

For those seeking to find ways of protecting people, making communities stronger, and mobilising citizens to do more for themselves and others in difficult times, Citizen Power Peterborough has some important lessons. Our sense is also that these lessons will prefigure the final evaluation of the Government's Community Organisers' programme, which is due to end in 2015.

Generating citizen power

The shift to a new power source is inherently a system change, and depends on what Mulgan and Leadbeater (2013) define as 'system innovation':⁶

'System innovation is an interconnected set of innovations, where each influences the other, with innovation both in the parts of the system and the ways in which they interconnect.'

Using the metaphor of power supply, a fruitful way of thinking about how to generate citizen power is to distinguish between issues of demand (primarily about strategy and leadership in public agencies), of supply (primarily about capacity and mobilisation in communities) and transmission (primarily about motivations and barriers for individuals on both sides).

1. The demand for citizen power

In the context of traditional hierarchical political and bureaucratic structures and expectations a serious shift towards citizen power relies on commitment from those in leadership positions.

6. G. Mulgan and C. Leadbeater, *Systems Innovation: Discussion Paper* (London: Nesta, 2013).

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local activists helped
establish the Civic
Commons

There is a history of attempts by the central and local state to devolve power and better engage citizens as agents of change. Indeed, even at times of centralisation the rhetoric of politicians has often spoken to ideals of community empowerment and citizen engagement. However, necessity is the mother of invention.

While good intentions and bolt-on programmes have not generally challenged either bureaucratic or consumerist models of public engagement, the scale of austerity is provoking a step change.

Although the scale of the funding challenge varies (being generally much greater in cities and the north) few local authorities looking at their budgets, the further cuts to come and the demand for services, particularly those resulting from population ageing, can avoid the conclusion that the traditional model of service delivery is increasingly unsustainable. Indeed, in its final report the RSA 2020 Commission on 2020 Public Services called for a focus on ‘social productivity’; the extent to which public service interventions support people to be better able to reduce, manage and meet their own needs.

Whether it a Conservative focus on the Big Society (including the Community Organisers initiative, a Liberal Democrat commitment to devolving power or the commitment of Labour authorities to becoming ‘co-operative councils’ there is a recurrent theme of better understanding, releasing and channelling the capacity for self-help, which exists within the citizenry.

Thus the kind of concerns and priorities that led Peterborough to establish CPP are now much more widely manifest in local government and some other public agencies. From working with a range of local authorities, the experience of the RSA is that a new ways of thinking about power, about service delivery and about forms of leadership are starting to emerge. One manifestation of this is shift in the way council leaders see and project themselves, less now as public sector overseers and more as leaders of place.

The lesson from Peterborough (also reflected in ‘citizen power transmission’ below) is not to under-estimate the culture change that this shift involves. For example:

- From seeing citizens as bundles of needs and demands to seeing them as potential partners and assets;
- From a technology of delivery to one of collaboration, and from control to experimentation; and
- From a zero sum model of power and authority to one which sees power grow by being shared and diffused.

An example of how challenging this can be for lay in the Civic Commons, which started strongly and looked like it could be one of the more powerful and effective projects. The project had managed to identify and sign up a diverse and strong group of local citizen activists, working together to design and deliver hyper-local experiments to tackle anti-social behaviour. But it failed to deliver on its early promise. However, it was not as well connected to existing power structures as it might have been and its expectations of what active citizens could be expected to give was maybe unrealistic.

Albeit driven by hard times, the shift to a greater focus on citizen power is to be welcomed. Given the scale of resource and demand challenges this shift is likely to be long term. For those who have long argued for a more relational and civic ideal of local government it is an opportunity, but one that brings with it challenges that should not be underestimated.

Specifically, because of the scale of cultural and practical change required, the general commitment to a citizen power approach is unlikely to impact the mainstream activities of public agencies unless local leaders publicly and consistently place it at the centre of their overall place strategy. Without such a commitment the chances of innovation moving from the margins to the centre are very limited. This seems to chime with the experience of many Community Organisers.

2. The supply of citizen power

Beyond the limited supply of superhuman altruists (some of whom might be seen as incorrigible busybodies!) amongst us, people are ‘conditional citizens’: we are sources of citizen power only when particular conditions are in place.

As the ChangeMakers strand of CPP demonstrated, hundreds of people in Peterborough had the skills, commitment and potential connections to make important contributions to civic capacity. Beyond them a much larger group were willing to engage if the right opportunities, incentives and support were in play. Even a relatively unambitious strand of CPP – Sustainable Citizenship – found people in every community willing to explore how they might make very local contributions to greening their neighborhood.

The Arts and Social Change created dynamic new relationships between local, national and international artists and local citizens and public service leaders, and strengthened a city-wide appetite for working with the arts. Similarly, the Area Based Curriculum initiative developed new relationships and demonstrated the willingness of a range of organisations voluntarily to engage with schools and provide new opportunities for pupils.

Meanwhile, the Recovery Capital project shows how even the most unlikely sources of capacity – recovering drug addicts – can be highly effective generators of citizen power if their potential is recognised, valued and utilised. Supported by the city council and the RSA, those involved in the Recovery Capital project have set up the first peer-to-peer recovery network in Peterborough, supporting people to build and sustain their drug recovery: the FREE group. Furthermore, the city council reports that learning from the project is now being used to re-shape drug treatment services around the experience and know-how of recovering drug users.

But it is also clear that citizen engagement does not come free, nor is it realistic to believe that once initial momentum has been built that engagement will sustain without further support. Too often efforts to generate civic capacity are abandoned leaving behind groups of citizens with intent but little support, while at the same time new capacity building efforts start up elsewhere as if from scratch.

Many people and organisations are committed to the ideals and practical changes involved in mobilizing citizen power. There is considerable

evidence of the latent capacity, which exists within communities. Through techniques like social network analysis and the use of insights garnered from the behavioural sciences, we may be getting better at analysing and mobilising citizen power. However, for cash strapped public authorities the question remains whether the support for citizen power translates sufficiently into changes in attitudes and behaviours to justify investment in that support. CPP provides supportive material for the affirmative case but not yet conclusive proof.

3. Citizen power transmission

Driven both by socio-economic necessity and a convergence of values, which sees more skepticism about the state on the centre-left and more enthusiasm about collective action on the centre-right, more public service leaders are committing to the goal of enhancing socially productive citizen power. At the same time there is a greater awareness of, and capacity to map, the assets that lie – often untapped – in even the most disadvantaged areas.

However, between greater demand for citizen power and the possibility of substantial supply lie the systems, processes and norms of a bureaucratic, paternalistic and clientelist models of decision-making and service delivery. Developing transmission mechanisms to connect efficiently and effectively the demand for, and potential supply of, citizen power to meet shared individual and civic goals is arguably the hardest element of change.

This was certainly the experience in Peterborough. There were three recurrent and intertwined challenges: first, the enthusiasm of the council leader, chief executive and certain officers for the principles and aims of CPP was not reflected consistently across the rest of the political and managerial system. Second, for many frontline professionals, the challenge was for them to reconcile CPP with what felt like the core elements of their work. For example, this was the case with the engagement of schools and teachers in the Area Based Curriculum strand, and council officers in the Civic Commons strand. Third, in view of these two factors, the RSA had to learn lessons about the complex mix of skills necessary in our own team to sustain initiatives even after promising starts.

The question of resource allocation, and the difficulty of demonstrating conclusively that investing in citizen power pays off in social impact are continuing challenges. However, as this report emphasises the capacity for citizen power transmission is also about ideas, culture and commitment.

Citizen power must be valued for what it is as an expression of a democratic, associative culture as well as for what it achieves. It involves thinking carefully about what citizens can offer and on what terms and about how citizen engagement requires decision-makers and managers to challenge their own assumptions and behaviours. Public officials (including councillors and managers of third sector organisations and businesses with a demonstrative commitment to making a civic contribution) have to be given the incentives, space, expectations and support to be creative, responsive and entrepreneurial.

This means a new ideal for both leadership and management valuing the creative power of disruption, conflict (when and where necessary), and working and thinking against the prevailing norms. This is why the

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residents and local
artists join the Arts and
Social Change project

Innovation Forum – emerging in part from CPP and working with public service leaders to develop creative citizen powered solutions – is one of the most important achievements of the project.

Over the past year, the Forum has brought together city leaders and influencers from the public, voluntary, and private sectors to re-think public service delivery in the city. Connected to the main power grid in the city, and backed by the local authority chief executive and the director of the Greater Peterborough Partnership, the Forum has started to create a new leadership style amongst its cadre of city leaders and managers: one that is enterprising, collaborative, and focused on creative problem-solving.

Those involved argue that its arts-based practices – dance, creative problem-solving and collaborative forms of facilitation – combined with practical work to reduce risk aversion, promote collaboration, and create a more open relationship with the public, has disrupted ‘business as usual’. The Forum continues today and a recent encouraging case study is attached as appendix one.

Lessons for citizen power engineers

For the RSA Citizen Power Peterborough was an ambitious undertaking. It was a complex and major project, which required the RSA team to take on multiple roles and work to a highly demanding timetable. Unsurprisingly, we made mistakes and learnt lessons. It is important for us, and useful we hope for other organisations working on this agenda, to explore the main lessons that can be drawn from the project. We have chosen six:

Distinguishing between creating opportunities and exploiting them: For the RSA, the starting points for our engagement in Citizen Power Peterborough were an analysis of contemporary challenges and a commitment to active citizenship as part of the good life in a good society. The strands of work were chosen and developed as a means to explore the conditions for a change to a more citizen-powered model of policy making, experimentation and action. We saw our role primarily as creating approaches, contexts and opportunities which others – the people of Peterborough themselves – would then turn into projects, actions and impacts.

In the end, for a variety of reasons we got more heavily drawn into day-to-day project management and maintenance, with the consequence that it was difficult to foster a new culture of citizen empowerment while simultaneously running individual projects. Thus, while CPP provides compelling evidence of the scope to see issues and communities differently and to engage citizens in richer more problem-solving ways, it does not so clearly demonstrate the sustainability of these interventions, especially in the challenging context of Peterborough.

More time asset mapping: Although the starting point for our work was a belief that communities are bundles of assets as well as demands and needs, we did not have sufficient time or resource systematically to assess what was already happening and what could be adapted and built-upon rather than being reinvented. With the ubiquity of social media there is a more general point here about the increasing ability – which should be

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residents, activists and policymakers became local ‘changemakers’

exploited – for public agencies to map in real time who is civically active and in what spaces and through what channels.

As the AHRC evaluation emphasises, asset mapping is important within and around key public, voluntary, private and collaborative structures. Understanding where within these structures there is enthusiasm for (and experience of) a citizen power approach and where there is scepticism is vital to building alliances, developing narratives and – on occasion – fighting battles against the right odds.

When architects build physical structures they see surveying the terrain as essential but still there is tendency in the public sector to move to solutions before a full mapping of the social and organisational terrain.

The skill mix: The work of CPP was very demanding of staff requiring three different and broad skill sets: as community organisers with a focus on public engagement; as project designers and researchers with a focus on content and analysis; and as stakeholder managers with a focus on soft political skills of understanding and working with the interests and concerns of managers, politicians and leaders of other organisations with a community focus.

The need to bring content, engagement and stakeholder skills together is a more general challenge for all projects seeking to mobilise citizen power, to channel it and to maximise its impact on mainstream ways of working.

Project management and evaluation: Although as the project developed there were many forms of evaluation of CPP, the need to have an ongoing process of evaluation providing ‘real time’ feedback became clear. This meant we were not always able to respond as quickly as we would have liked when problems emerged or when projects were in danger of losing momentum or focus. There are dangers with any metrics in an area as complex as this: it is easy to put too much emphasis on the numbers of people engaged (easy to measure) and too little on what they actually achieve (hard to measure) for example. The messy, complex nature of citizen mobilisation makes it even more important to have robust ways of managing projects and evaluating their progress.

Communication: For a project that is at heart about public engagement communication is vital. But projects with multiple, somewhat open ended and fluid goals it can be difficult to describe succinctly (and without using the often opaque language of bureaucracy or social science). Beyond the need for a strong and clear core narrative, there were three communication horizons for Citizen Power Peterborough; within the city council, within Peterborough more broadly and with the wider policy and practitioner community. Ironically, from the RSA’s perspective there was an inverse correlation between distance and success. Whilst CPP generated a healthy amount of national interest and coverage, including a great deal of input from leading national thinkers and practitioners in the field of citizen engagement, and some good local press (as well as some hostile commentary) it proved harder to get the message across within the council, something which may reflect the delays in identifying a lead officer.

Our aim in the chapter has been to provide future citizen power engineers with the kind of practical insights and advice that would have aided our own efforts at the outset. Having said this, the most important lesson is that general frameworks for citizen engagement and cultural change are only useful when allied with a deep and nuanced understanding of the specificities of each place and its people.

Conclusion

This report has summarised CPP and its seven strands, looking at what we did and describing what we have learned. So is there an overall assessment that can be made of such a diverse project?

The independent AHRC evaluation of CPP, undertaken by Dr Mark Roberts (formerly a senior local authority officer) and colleagues at De Montfort University, concludes that:⁷

‘Citizen Power Peterborough was a success, with some strands more effective than others. Despite working under difficult circumstances from the beginning, including enforced communication embargos for long stretches of time, and significant political interference, Citizen Power Peterborough made a significant impact on the programme’s principal objective of improving citizen participation in Peterborough.’

Citizen Power Peterborough made a difference to many citizens feeling that they could make a difference within their communities themselves. Engagement opportunities were embraced as such and confidence within many of the groups we worked with was demonstrably increased. A sense of pride in the city was also strengthened through this work. Examples of this lie within the programme’s case studies. From the RSA’s perspective as a centre for research and development, we believe CPP was an extremely valuable learning experience that generated important lessons when it succeeded but also when it did not. The RSA has carried forward into its current work programme both the broad lessons of CPP and some of the specific techniques and insights. For example, the experience of the Area Based Curriculum has informed our partnership with the Institute of Education to design and test a new curriculum development training module for teachers. The RSA has recently been funded to undertake a development of the ChangeMakers methodology for use among diaspora communities.

From Peterborough’s perspective, CPP galvanised a large number of residents and organisations in the city, and developed innovative responses to long-standing problems in Peterborough, such as drug dependence, which council sources anticipate will improve services and reduce costs in the future. CPP was also successful at leveraging in significant additional funding, with the City Council’s investment of £250k being multiplied by the Arts Council, by the RSA, and from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) who funded the independent evaluation.

7. M. Roberts, *Citizen Power in Peterborough: Understanding the impacts of citizen participation in Peterborough*, Independent Evaluation (Forthcoming).

CPP generated

23

reports and numerous
articles in the national
and local press

Beyond this, the internal RSA management of CPP continually returned to three criteria for success. First, did the strands have local impact? Second, would they be strong enough for them to be adapted and replicated elsewhere? And third, would there be a longer-term legacy for Peterborough?

As we have outlined above and in Chapter 2, the answers to the first two questions vary from strand to strand but are, in our view, overall sufficient to deem CPP a successful intervention. While the RSA, Peterborough City Council and the Arts Council East may not have achieved all their aims and hopes by combining efforts and investment (as well as drawing in third party engagement and funding) more was achieved than any of us could have done alone. As for the third, we are encouraged by the continuing work and mainstreaming of elements of the more successful strands (Arts and Social Change, Peterborough Curriculum and Recovery Capital), and particularly by the flourishing of the Innovation Forum.

Appendix: case study

Doing together differently

The Innovation Forum/Dialogue in Action

At a time of economic disarray, when even enlightened local authorities are having to consider cutting their arts and libraries budgets, to claim that artists can have a significant role in improving services and in helping local authorities to engage and motivate the citizenry is a bold and radical argument to make. It requires jettisoning the notion that the arts is something that always sits outside mainstream social and political activity – a product that you simply go and see or read or listen to – and accepting that, stripped of its rarefied aura, the ‘arts’ is simply another word for the common creative impulse to express and communicate ways of being and acting in the world. And it was through different forms of expression and communication – from dance to photography – that the city of Peterborough’s major stakeholders found new ways to relate to and work with each other and from that engagement to begin to provide better services for the people living there.

‘With all the challenges of a city like Peterborough, we decided that doing the same old things in the same old way wouldn’t get us very far.’

Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive, Peterborough City Council

In 2011 Peterborough’s local strategic partnership, the Greater Peterborough Partnership, launched an ambitious 10-year transformation agenda with a set of underlying principles requiring a substantial shift of culture in city-wide service delivery: the Single Delivery Plan. After some debate about how best to achieve this shift, the strategic partnership grappled with how to move away from traditional meetings in council buildings to an approach that breaks the mould and transforms the way all partners work together.

At this point it seemed logical to the strategic partnership to turn to the RSA, with whom the city council had been working over the last two years on the Citizen Power programme. Their question was: how could they engage people of influence in the city to work together to produce a strategy that would work well on the ground and not just on paper? How should they set about fostering a new and shared city-wide leadership ethos where new productive relationships and innovative working practices could flourish? To help answer these questions, the Citizen Power team of Jocelyn Cunningham and Sam McLean brought in the MAP Consortium, which had been running the programme’s successful Creative Gatherings.

The subsequent establishment of an Innovation Forum can be seen as a realisation of citizen power: a genuine attempt to listen to what the people of Peterborough would actually like rather than to carry on prescribing services for them in the traditional way. The programme of activity that underpinned and validated the forum’s claim of innovation drew on one particular strand of the Citizen Power programme: Arts and Social Change.

Headed up by Jocelyn Cunningham from the RSA, Arts and Social Change had already achieved a range of positive outcomes using creative practice to build rich new relationships between agencies and individuals across the city (see the other case studies for examples). The Innovation Forum was, thus, in many ways the culmination and global realisation of all those discrete activities. All the partners were, in effect, offering the opportunity to put creative practice at the heart of the public, private and voluntary sector's machines.

But precisely how could creative practice or artistic intervention help to forge improved cross-sector partnerships or build a stronger culture of shared leadership in the city, both essential to the creation of an effective Single Delivery Plan?

Unlocking change

‘The Innovation Forum programme was anchored by creative practice ... a mechanism for unlocking change. Creative practice draws on the thinking, processes and structures of the arts (such as theatre, visual art and curatorial practice) as channels and catalysts for defining new ways of working. In this context it involved a range of techniques, exercises and structures, which were designed and carefully facilitated in order to give participants a distinct experience of themselves, each other, and their work.’

Jocelyn Cunningham and Chris Higgins, *Leading a City Differently: the Arts, Partnership and Public Services*

The initial invitation to join the Innovation Forum was accepted by over 50 community leaders from various sectors and agencies, around 70% of whom remained as the ‘hard core’ of a constantly evolving and inclusive group. There were elected council members alongside officers from various city departments, including planning and finance as well as adult social care and neighbourhood development. There were senior leaders from the fire service and the police. Hospitals and the then PCT were represented, along with public health. The City College and the Regional College attended, along with a range of voluntary agencies including Mind, Age UK and managers from enterprise and private sector business, such as Opportunity Peterborough, Serco and Thomas Cook. The city's two trusts – Vivacity, the cultural and leisure charitable trust and PECT, the environment city trust – were also represented. This was then a potential Babel of different policy agendas, working practices and languages too; the clashing jargon of professionals from different worlds who had hardly ever had the chance to meet like this.

Its members defined the methodology and the ultimate aim of the forum as ‘Being together differently to do together differently’. The point of this was that, if they were really to reconfigure service delivery, they would need to change their relationships both with their peers in other organisations as well as with their colleagues at their own place of work. There were four main aspects to this process of being and doing together differently.

First was to leave behind the ‘business as usual’ culture as far as possible in order to think afresh about how they and their organisations might behave in a way that would improve things. Second was to ‘experience

difference': to experience in a safe environment what working differently actually feels like. Third was to 'reconfigure relationships': to prioritise city-wide outcomes over one's own agenda. Fourth was to 'access the full potential of the leadership' in the city, not just those qualities evident in the ordinary course of business. This was, then, a highly ambitious programme both for the Citizen Power and MAP team to create and deliver and for leaders to commit to.

Fundamental to its ultimate success was the programme's use of techniques and approaches drawn from creative practice. One of the first things that participants had to grasp was to learn to seek answers but not to force conclusions and to be patient, as new solutions are by definition unknown and may be discovered in unexpected ways or places.

Linked to this was the idea of 'enquiry', using questions and question-making to reframe the underlying issues and dynamics of particular issues. That approach was facilitated throughout the year by working with images, metaphor, place and performance, showing participants how active and indirect ways of sharing perspectives and interpreting ideas opened up new opportunities and often produced unexpected results. In the course of participating in these temporary and often artificial structures for dialogue, new voices and perspectives were heard and appreciated in new ways, making collaboration and trust that much more possible.

A funny thing happened at the Innovation Forum

The programme offered participants several professional development opportunities. First, there were six full forum meetings – eight days of activity – held at two-monthly intervals. Each meeting was held in different, sometimes unfamiliar places – the city museum, a community centre – as part of a general attempt to reacquaint participants with the city, its people and its assets.

The first forum (entitled Conditions for Change and Innovation) was a memorable one for many of the participants as it included a movement workshop where they had to devise a dance piece and perform it to each other. As Chris Higgins explained, this was 'a marker of how different we were prepared to be'. For most, dance of this kind was an unfamiliar experience, exploring a different kind of intelligence and illustrating very clearly the nature of risk-taking. It was important not just in breaking the ice but in heading off from the start the kind of assumption about the nature of this programme that one participant voiced on the first day: 'Should we bring our own spreadsheets or will you be providing them?' Guest speakers were invited to stimulate discussion and ideas on the themes. On this occasion, Hilary Cottam, co-founder of Participle kick-started a discussion on innovation in social care.

Equally unexpected was the task of the second forum: taking a packed lunch on a city-wide tour of 'hot spots' and 'cold spots', places in need of attention. Members were invited to collect objects they found en route and then label them. This curation exercise was aimed at developing visions of the city beyond those already laid out on paper. It was extended to developing a question (*If we don't change it, who will?*), a mantra (*We have the will, the power and the ability*) and an instruction (*Take small, brave steps*). Franco Bianchini, Professor of Cultural Planning and

Policy from Leeds Metropolitan University, talked with members on the session's theme, 'Perceptions of Place'.

The next forum took the vision thing a step further, working with innovation techniques based around the stimulus of image and metaphor as a route to generating new perspectives and ideas. The fourth forum took them out again, this time to the city museum, which a surprising number of participants had not visited before. Here they were asked to consider what they experienced in the museum and how this might be applied to their own place of work. They saw photographs taken by Chris Porz and exhibited here, pairing portraits of Peterborough citizens he had taken recently and thirty years previously. They tried out artist Gillian Wearing's idea of wearing 'signs', statements, in this case, of what each felt were blocks to making progress. The honesty of their response startled Chris Higgins, who feels that this marked a turning point in the programme. One sign read 'Let me in'; another 'Excluded from the current debates'.

The fifth forum focused on performance and the roles of actor and director; aptly enough. Forum members took on some of the facilitation of this session. The sixth in the series explored storytelling. As before, members were encouraged to reflect on what they were experiencing and how it might apply to their own working life and the way they interacted with each other. Although all the activity over these meetings was group-based and interactive, Chris believes that its key impact was on individual thinking.

'The learning was individually embodied. Although there was a lot of collective experience, people took it in a personal way. And it affected how they approached their own work.'

To embed what they had discovered in their everyday working life, members then tried things out in smaller learning groups, facilitated by members of the RSA and Map team joined by highly experienced Peterborough-based creative practitioners. This ranged from simple things like visiting each other at work, which would often unlock new thinking, to undertaking short experiments to test out these ideas. One group made a film about Nene Park, exploring perceptions about this rich but under-appreciated resource for the city. This prompted the park's chief executive to reframe his plans for a major capital project there. Another group developed a 'challenge toolkit' to help people deal with blocking behaviour within local organisations. By engaging in purposeful activity of this kind, forum members moved beyond just talking.

Dialogue in action

This engagement in real issues in the city deepened halfway through the year when the RSA introduced 'Dialogue in Action', which formalised the notion of the creative associate as a prompt or provocateur for new thinking. Not all of the five people who worked in this way for Dialogue in Action were professional artists. Diane Goldsmith, who led on the programme, has a dance and education background and Stuart Payn is a visual artist but Sophia Antonelli runs the Green Backyard, an environmental project, Andy Coles is a retired civil servant and now a writer, and

photographer Chris Porz works primarily in the NHS. Diane articulated their key role:

‘To support, inspire, challenge and make links to creative practice, acting as a catalyst for individuals or groups within the Innovation Forum. It is as much about creative thinking, questioning and skills as co-delivering experiments and projects. It is also about building capacity and enabling collaboration.’

They asked questions but did not provide answers; they started conversations and then listened. Although they had their different disciplines to fall back on, that was not as important as their skill at eliciting new thinking and new behaviour from the groups they were working with.

This core idea of the creative associate acting as a catalyst for new ways of working – as grit in the oyster – led ultimately to a structure where those who were interested in this role in Peterborough learned how to do it. This ensured that local people could ultimately sustain the programme; it also opened up new opportunities for those trained as creative associates. For example, Diane Goldsmith herself has been approached to take on this kind of role for the fire service.

Dialogue in Action embraced four projects involving over a dozen different organisations. Forum members volunteered to put themselves on this programme, which gave them an unusual opportunity to address a major issue facing the city in greater detail. The Arts and Social Change strand responded by funding the creative associates and their work.

Falls brought public health, voluntary services and adult education together to address the challenge of reducing risks of falls in the home. Engaging school leaders in the Peterborough Learning Partnership was led by a head teacher involved in the Peterborough Curriculum strand of Citizen Power who worked with a creative practitioner to create a space and an opportunity for other school leaders to explore reciprocal partnerships. The Neighbourhood Project, aimed at greater civic engagement and community cohesion, was run by a local councillor in partnership with neighbourhood team leaders. Finally, the Sharing Success project brought together the Principal of the Community College, the General Secretary of the Voluntary Services and leaders within the local NHS Executive to examine what has worked in providing adult social services, to think about why and to find ways of recording those reasons. Each project had a creative associate attached and sometimes, as in the Neighbourhood Project, a creative initiative emerged that engaged with local artists.

In describing the outcome of the first of these projects, David Bache, Chief Executive of Age UK Peterborough, summed up what all four achieved to some extent:

‘A multi-agency approach was used to successfully bid for funds that have enabled measures to be put in place very quickly to try and reduce the number of older people becoming ill or dying from the extreme cold this winter. None of us could have achieved this result working in isolation. This is another example of how working in collaboration can help to generate adequate funding and implement solutions quickly and effectively.’

What difference did all this make?

‘I enjoy the fact that we can now be so open with each other in terms of current issues, and how we challenge each other to do more, do differently – or just see the positives in times of difficulty. It’s already changed the way I approach and package some of my projects, and how I see the wider city leadership role we all have.’

James McCulloch, Chief Executive, Nene Park Trust

To illustrate what difference the Innovation Forum has made, many of its members cite a range of changes, beginning with simple administrative matters. For example, a question about the presentation of board papers that would have involved a lengthy exchange of emails and perhaps even a meeting was resolved with a quick phone call. There is, it seems from talking to the forum members, a new willingness amongst people who had hitherto rarely strayed from the security zone of their own office and their own policies to take risks not just in terms of reaching out to colleagues elsewhere but also in loosening their dependence on the formal routine of the meeting, with its comfortable, iterative framework of agenda items dutifully gone through and minuted, sometimes without having engaged the very people it was most relevant to. As Sean Hanson, the Partnership Director of the Peterborough Serco Strategic Partnership, characterised it:

‘The purpose of the meeting is to get to the end of the meeting. You don’t listen to whether there is actual agreement around the agenda – there’s a two-dimensional response: are you with us or not? Ok, then, let’s move on...’

Richard Astle, Director of the Greater Peterborough Partnership, confesses that he and his colleagues had thought more about output and outcome measures than people’s actual needs:

‘We had an agenda based on documents and numbers but we didn’t invest any time in talking to people – we assumed that assessing our agreed joint targets was all that was needed. We now know that we need to make people part of the team. Taking part in the forum could be uncomfortable at times – very uncomfortable – but barriers were broken and relationships changed for the better. The fact that we are renewing the Forum for another year is a measure of our progress.’

Gillian gave an example of another kind of change with far-reaching consequences: the city’s disability forum had long been viewed by the council – benignly enough – as an outside pressure group until Gillian ended up in the same Forum learning group with its representative, Brian Taylor. Brian is now frequently in the building, advising on all kinds of disability-related matters, including clearing an area for disabled people to attend the council meetings there. One experiment Gillian took part in, trying – with some difficulty – to get from Peterborough railway station to city hall in a wheelchair, convinced her that people unable to walk know better than anyone else what they might need in terms of access. This was all part of a wider realisation:

‘Just to say to a community: “Here’s a range of services on offer” is not the right approach. We don’t actually know what people need. We don’t have the answers. One forum session we did only allowed us to ask questions of each other – the first questions were, in retrospect, quite naïve. The more questions you ask, the deeper you go. I have learned not to go with that first question but to try and find out what it is really like to stand in someone else’s shoes.

In looking at what older people might need, for example, rather than simply announce what kinds of home help might be available, the council should ask more questions and consult older people themselves before commissioning services. It might then discover that what older people want more than home help is help in getting out and having a stimulating life outside the home.’

Melting the ice

Gillian Beasley and other leaders from across the public, private and voluntary sector spoke at a RSA seminar held to share the Peterborough experience. All testified to the impact of the forum on their ability to develop new kinds of relationships with colleagues in other agencies and other sectors: relationships based on trust. That new sense of trust had come, they said, from sharing in the creative group process, as Gillian put it:

‘It has made us properly understand what other organisations – health-care, the police and so on – are actually doing. That means the lack of alignment that sometimes caused inter-agency difficulties has now largely gone. If there is a problem, we just say: “Let’s find out what it is – and it gets sorted”.’

In a reiteration of the ‘object as metaphor’ technique used so often in forum gatherings over the last year, seminar speakers were asked to describe the process they had been through via an object or image of their own choosing. Gillian’s was one of those joke plastic ice cubes with a fly trapped in it. It made her think, she said, of how she and her colleagues and perhaps the city itself had been stuck, dormant, as if frozen in ice and then of how, given the right temperature, real ice melts and things can then start moving.

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The RSA: an enlightenment organisation committed to finding innovative practical solutions to today's social challenges. Through its ideas, research and 27,000-strong Fellowship it seeks to understand and enhance human capability so we can close the gap between today's reality and people's hopes for a better world.



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