

Arts at the Heart asked Phil Taylor, Arts Development Manager for Liverpool City Council whether and how Liverpool's Capital of Culture programme was changing the way the Local Authority delivered its arts services and also what impact the year was having in the often invisible domain of community provision. Here's what he says.

A World Turned Upside Down

Phil Taylor

Having won the nomination for Capital of Culture 2008, Liverpool City Council had a radical rethink on the delivery and management of its arts development, tourism and events services. The Council made major changes to the way cultural services had traditionally been delivered and set-up a new agency to deliver the city's cultural agenda – the Liverpool Culture Company.

In particular, the city was determined to make culture central to its whole regeneration process and to harness the inherent creativity of its people to produce future success. This is demonstrated by the fact culture is seen as an accelerator for delivery of the Local Area Agreement.

A new organisational structure was put in place bringing the former Cultural Services and bid team together. The Liverpool Culture Company has now assumed responsibility for the creative and cultural agenda of the city, integrating the normal functions of arts, events and tourism services with forward-looking, inclusive and dynamic programmes across other city departments. Other service areas falling within the definition of culture have recently been brought together to create the Culture Media and Sport directorate. As a result Liverpool has broken the mould of traditional arts service delivery, with hugely beneficial results.

“There has been participation on an unprecedented scale”

Creative Communities - The Largest Community Arts Programme in Europe

We want 2008 to be relevant for all. It was always recognised that for 2008 to have a real value and legacy, its spirit would need to be strongly felt at grass roots level, in and amongst all the communities of Liverpool.

Involvement is central to neighbourhood renewal. As regeneration goes on around them people can feel left behind. The absence of participation can lead to isolation and suspicion of any opportunities. Creative Communities is a fundamental part of the solution to this, delivering across key policy areas. Project participants are enthusiastic about the programme because it gives them a voice and brings people together. At the heart of the Creative communities programme are residents and communities. They are supported rather than dictated or 'done' to by practitioners and cultural organisations.

Thus the programme enables communities and schools to take the driving seat in developing art work that is relevant and life-enhancing.

A significant development that has had an impact on engagement is the level of partnership working that has developed, between the City Council, communities, cultural and strategic partners. There has been participation on an unprecedented scale – this is the largest community arts programme in Europe.

Key partnerships with English Heritage, Arts Council Northwest, Sports England, Environment Agency, National Health Service and Arts and Business have enabled the Culture Company to establish a Creative Communities team. All members of the new team are developing a programme of activity that impacts on the creative regeneration of the city. They are also working closely with cultural partners and developing key strategies to support their growth to 2008.

Culture and Civic Renewal are cross cutting themes underpinning the acceleration of delivery of Liverpool's Local Area Agreement. Colleagues in the different city council portfolios are experiencing first-hand the endless potential for arts and culture to support the successful achievement of targets and priorities for housing, health, environmental improvement, and educational achievement and a better appreciation and respect for our diverse heritage.

The areas of the programme outlined on page 12 demonstrate how we are working in partnership to support delivery of corporate priorities.

In conclusion, Liverpool has substantially changed the way things are being done and aims to put culture and creativity at the centre of the nation's thinking. ●

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