



ROCHDALE
BIRTHPLACE OF CO-OPERATION

Cooperative Culture Making in Rochdale: A Cooperative Councils Innovation Network Policy Prototype, 2023-2024

Summary.

The initial idea, in summary, was this:

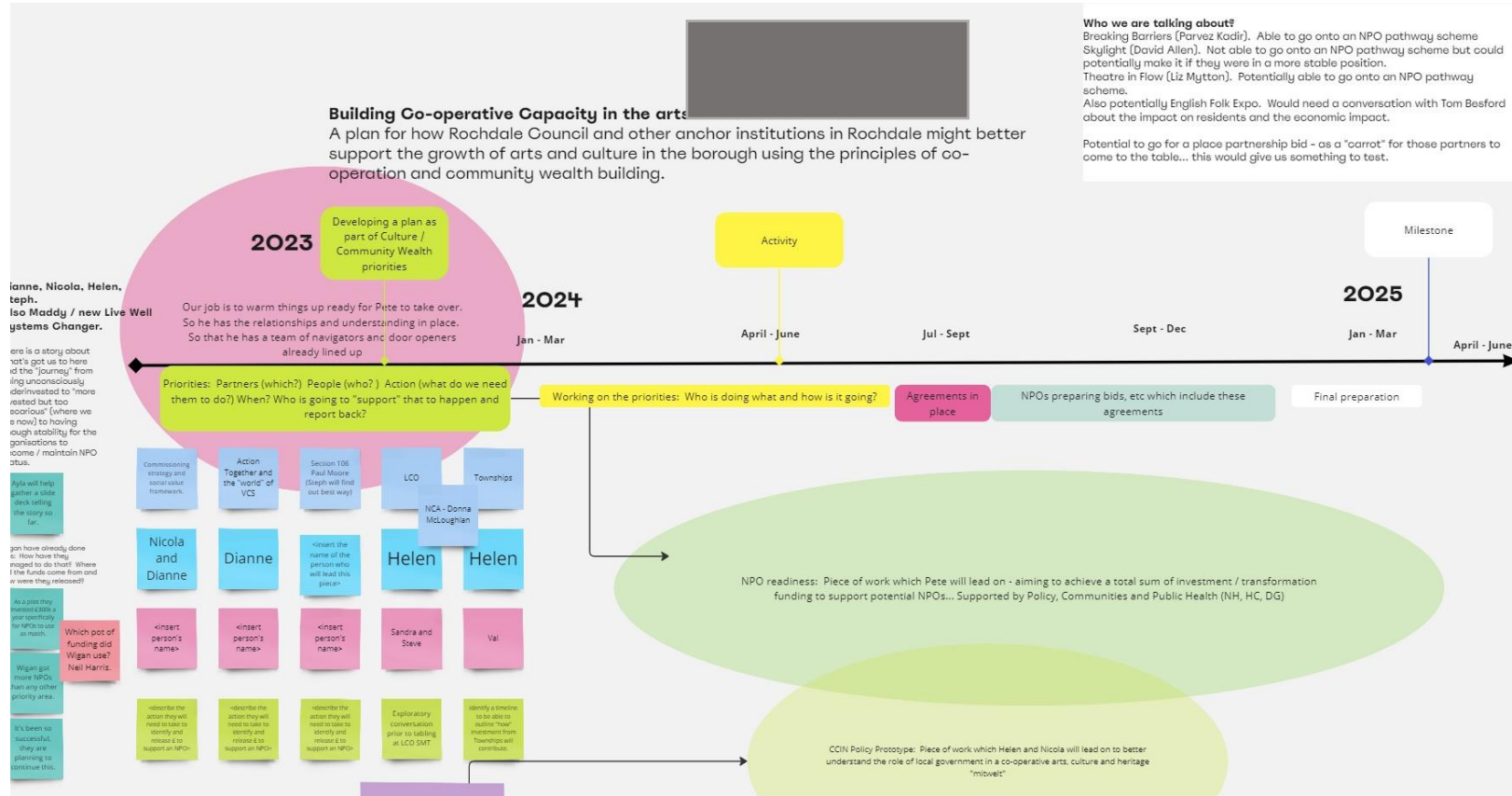
“Rochdale Borough Council’s Cooperative Culture Making prototype is a framework of ideas that provides local areas with ideas and options for how local government and elected members can work collaboratively with arts and culture in communities to foreground equality and solidarity in their practice and decision making.”

The prototype aimed to develop and apply a framework, which blended co-operative approaches with the needs and behavioural preferences of the arts and culture sector in order to generate more value in the form of community wealth, social value or capital. The intention was to develop this, collaboratively, through a brief literature review and two large workshops using participatory arts approaches.

The result was “even” more workshops, a broader involvement of participants and a wider ranging literature review. This has led to the development of the framework, a richer understanding of “how” to do this (co-operatively) and two significant developments which are changing the conditions for arts and culture development in the borough.

The framework.

The early iterations looked something like this



The framework reflected conversations about "real" arts and culture organisations and the "real" challenges they were up against in order to realise their potential and ambition (any details about "who" has been redacted from this document).

This framework expanded over time (it was a time of significant change, not least of which was an unforeseen change in director for arts and culture, including an interim).

The framework illustrates how the work expanded to include the flow of relationships, conversations (through the 6 workshops and additional semi structured conversations).

It started with a focus on financial value and preparing the “environment” for the arrival of the new director of arts and culture. These conversations were held with key people in the “system” of local government, public health and economy. The workshops were held at the same time to understand the needs and experiences of people in the arts and culture sector in the borough. This included fledgling and grassroots arts organisations, those with “NPO” status (Arts Council National Portfolio) and those organisations facing the intersection of inequity and scarcity (largely organisations with artists from the global majority and / or those facing multiple disadvantages).

This was supported by a more significant body of literature research about what works, what artists need and how best to make that happen. Finally, to add body to the research, a number of semi structured interviews were undertaken with activist and grassroots arts organisations who were more well-established in other parts of the UK.

As the work progressed, we were able to distil what we were discovering into some key questions, which we developed into participatory arts events to deepen understanding and convert what we knew and understood into clearer ambitions and tangible actions.

The questions concerned matters of inequity (why do inequities exist in arts and culture?) and community wealth (what does wealth mean to us?).

Production

The products of those events (in the form of insights and artefacts) included this “zine” which illustrates the conversation content of a Long Table (a participatory arts approach to deep understanding). This was showcased as part of our CCIN policy prototype at the People’s Powerhouse convention in Preston (which, incidentally, was well attended by CCIN members and affiliates).

Quite simply, yes!

The use of Sociocracy, flat and peer governance in the arts and culture part of the system in Rochdale borough has had significant influence on how we think about power in the wider system.

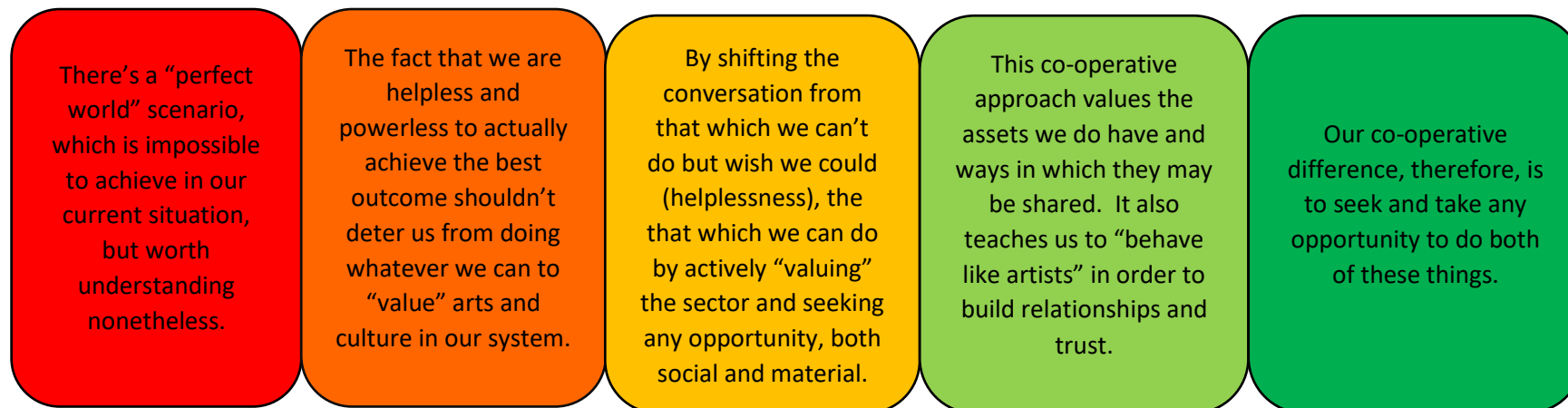
Along with the work on co-production (another CCIN policy project), colleagues in Rochdale borough have been able to develop their knowledge, application and capacity in power shifting and power sharing action. This has started to influence change in other parts of the system including:

- Health
- Social Care
- Thematic programmes including:
 - o Anti-poverty
 - o Trauma Informed Practice
 - o Engagement and Insight
 - o Monitoring, measuring and evaluating
- Skills and work
- Communities and partnerships

The influence has manifested in changing terms of references, focus on relationships and approaches that include and enable participation and sharing power. Including Sociocracy and other peer governance or behaviour changes. In some areas, the structures have been redesigned and significant programmes of development have followed to permanently shift to a more Co-operative way” of doing work together.

And back to the first part of the aim, did the work directly impact on improvements in the arts and culture sector?

The impacts went way beyond anything we could have imagined at first. The idea was to better understand and to do what’s possible. And there was a learning journey, illustrated in the framework and timeline, which went something like this:



So we can say that we "achieved" the aim of understanding what we need to do. But did we manage to "do" that?

By taking that co-operative choice and seeking and taking the opportunity to "any" asset, we have been able to support grassroots arts organisations in a number of ways.

There is a developing network of sharing social capital intentionally with the arts and culture sector. This means looking at the assets and opportunities that happen between people and relationships inside the council and other anchor institutions and thinking about how they may be offered and shared to potential NPOs. This includes coaching, project management, financial and safety expertise; connections which value the expertise of the artist and which add value to it. It is often the case that, to grow, a grassroots artist or organisation feels they need to change "who" they are; to give primacy to the organisational and business skills they would, ultimately employ if they could just grow – and shelve their creativity and ideas in the process. That feels punishing, especially to those people and organisations who have faced inequity and disadvantage to even "be" an artist. But to reach out, to value those skills and to match them with the skills that are in abundance in many of our anchor institutions: that co-operation might just make the difference in that organisation becoming an NPO.

The most impressive example is the development of the new studios at Richard Street. This beautiful new facility has been developed and is now being led by a local grassroots organisation, using the principles of co-operation to develop and share opportunities for local artists.

[The brochure](#) speaks for itself:



Rochdale Creates **Space**
Richard Street Studios
 ROCHDALE'S NEW WORKSPACE FOR CREATIVES, RUN BY CREATIVES.

For the doers, the makers, the future facing innovators. A space to grow, a space to meet, a space to stand on your own two feet.
 A creative community.



RICHARD STREET STUDIOS IS YOUR NEW CREATIVE SPACE

At the heart of Rochdale's developing creative cluster, with rail station, Metrolink and bus station on your doorstep - our studios are the perfect place to connect across our borough, and our regions thriving creative ecosystem.



Space for creatives.

Space for creatives.

Space for creatives, run by creatives. Rochdale Creates Space is excited to announce local production company 'Breaking Barriers' as lead tenant / operator for Richard Street Studios.

“ This is an exciting time for art and culture in Rochdale. As a Rochdale-based production company, Breaking Barriers are so proud to be the creative operators of Richard Street Studios, a space for artists to create, imagine and make in our hometown. Richard Street Studios is an investment in the developing creative economy of our town, as well as future generations of creative innovators.

Parvez Qadir - Artistic Director, Breaking Barriers



GET IN TOUCH: studio@breakingbarriers.com

Space for creatives.



OUR SPACE IS DESIGNED TO PUT YOUR CREATIVITY CENTRE STAGE

Together we're more than a sum of our parts.
Its in our DNA.
Put simply, it's the Rochdale way.

Space to collaborate.



THE KITCHEN HUB IS THE SOCIAL HEART OF OUR BUILDING

The perfect place to pause for a brew, collaborate with colleagues or come together around our large digital presentation screen for informal meetings and workshops.



STUDIO 1 IS OUR MOST FLEXIBLE SPACE

Available for short or long term bookings, the flexible fit out includes track lighting, projector, stackable / folding furniture, and wraparound acoustic curtains. Ideal for rehearsals, performances, workshops or exhibitions.

Space to collaborate.



OUR CORRIDORS ARE DESIGNED AS EXHIBITION SPACES



Space to grow.

Is it time for that next step? We want to support you to do what you do best.



YOU DECIDE WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

Initial packages allow you to decide between workstation and fit out options:

- Clean workstations with ergonomic chair and optional widescreen monitor.
- Messy workstations with sinks in studios.



AN ARTIST DEVELOPMENT HUB

- On-site artist development programmes and networking events.
- Regular funding advice surgeries.
- The Growth Company host free training and networking at neighbouring Fire Up.

Space to grow.



STUDIO 6 (2 PERSON)



STUDIO 2 (3 PERSON)



STUDIO 5 (3/4 PERSON)



Space for you.

GROUND FLOOR

MAIN ENTRANCE

KITCHEN

STUDIO 2

STAIR

LOBBY

STUDIO 1

WCS

GALLERY CORRIDOR

LIFT

YARD

FIRST FLOOR

STUDIO 5

STUDIO 4

STAIR

STUDIO 3

PINK CORRIDOR

LIFT

STUDIO 6

7

Your options

Whether you've got a short term project or need a long term base, we're providing options tailored to your needs:

RENT A FULL STUDIO

If you're looking for a new home for your business, or know other creatives you're keen to share with - our range of studios allow you to find the perfect fit.

BECOME AN ASSOCIATE MEMBER

If you're a local freelancer looking for that home from home, our associate membership offers space in a shared working studio, as well as a mailbox, access to the kitchen and invitations to our Artist Networking events.

RENT OUR FLEXIBLE SPACE - STUDIO 1

Studio 1 is available for daily or weekly hire, and is the perfect space for workshops, events, rehearsals and showcases.

Rochdale Creates

Rochdale Creates Space is part of Rochdale borough's cross-sector initiative to support creativity and culture across our borough: 'Rochdale Creates'.

This includes the refurbishment of Touchstones and Heywood Civic, a range of creative business support programmes, commission opportunities, and a new 'Rochdale Creates' website to raise the profile of creatives, and communicate funding, training, and job opportunities.

ROCHDALE STREET STUDIO 28
SUPPORTED BY:

Rochdale Creates

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Ambition
Impact
Enterprise
Artists
Community
Collaboration
Innovation
Growth
Ideas
Stories
Pioneers
Curiosity
Space
Rhythm
Narratives
Vision
Pride

Case study

Edited quotes from an interview with Ollie (developer/designer) and Parvez (director/building manager):

“Richard Street was conceived in an unusual way. Originally it was going to be part of Fire Up (local co-working space) but covid and changing working practices drove fire up being separate and we took the time to do the additional creative studio afterwards, using different methods.

Early on, through the cultural compact and engaging with partners through that forum (using methods like Sociocracy), it was clear there was a need for a different type of offer than fire up. Both spatially and in the ethos / how it was managed.

We used the inclusive methods to think: “How can we do things differently?”

We went on a whistle stop tour of places in the borough to understand what places are like, the experience of them and why they are that way.

Things that came out of that included the need for rehearsal type space... we were severely lacking in that in Rochdale. Folk were having to travel outside of the borough to create.

But also people need places they can make messy. Through the informal / organic ways of talking to each other, we were really able to find out what people need and why. It was market research in a different way. Ollie has an architecture background so was used to working with creatives and behaving like a creative.

We were working with an aspirational, non existent client! This was an unusual development role in that it jumps across the different elements. Becoming a boundary spanning practitioner.

A space for this purpose should feel like a creative space: a celebration of creativity: with scope to be aspirational for the planet as well as the people of the borough.

As time went on and the building works were getting on - we had chance to develop the operating model.

As a starting point, we were keen for it to be different from Fire up - good to have different things going on but also it's a very different need. The operating model at Fire Up is that the manager holds the power (which is absolutely as it needs to be for that model). But we were interested in that community wealth building model. There are always risks. To stay true to that "behaving like an artist" value, we gave primacy to the risk of inauthenticity rather than the business risk. We based our model on the insights gathered from other local, small and purpose led, artist and collaborative buildings and spaces.

Breaking Barriers are a grassroots arts organisation founded in the borough and they have been able to develop a business plan that they now operate and own.

Why? It is vital that they have the ambition for the borough and there are people with that kind of amazing, shared ambition of championing Rochdale and lifting their communities in the work they do and the action they take. There are lots of places and people doing that and it is a notion that needs to be valued by the system. Wanting to achieve with everyone. Which is different than a competitive business model. It's founded in values.

Through the more general conversations with Breaking Barriers we are aware they have intention to do artist development work and become an NPO and the space has the potential to help them achieve that in a bigger and bolder way.

Investment and match funding is helping the business model get going. We have now handed over the keys and the trust that they know better than us how to make it grow.

There is something distinct in this, on reflection. Even in this conversation, it's entirely based on trust. We barely knew each other but went straight in with "who we are" as well as the "work we do". Imagine that as a systematised behaviour change - getting out of the roles and rules and into the relationships!

What was different was that we were listened to. Because of that, we began to realise that we actually had that potential and to build that legacy in Rochdale. We have the potential to really build this space that starts a new creative culture in Rochdale.

We had reached a point where we were storing materials in our own houses. We couldn't grow. Having this space ramps up our ambition and our ambition is impressive - to work internationally but from Rochdale.

We want to be a beacon of Rochdale in a way that challenges assumptions about what Rochdale is and what it can do. Touring to different countries and across borders.

It is the opportunity we needed. It is scary, of course, but we have the story - this is the building that holds the story and the success will be in staying true to our ethos.”

For more information contact helen.chicot@rochdale.gov.uk



