

Understanding the value  
arts and culture  
organisations place on  
support from local  
authorities

London Councils

October 2014

**GO**  
CONSULTING



# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>1. Executive summary .....</b>                              | <b>1</b>  |
| 1.1 Introduction .....   | 1         |
| 1.2 Key findings .....   | 1         |
| 1.3 Future prospects .....                                     | 2         |
| 1.4 Recommendations .....                                      | 2         |
| <b>2. Introduction .....</b>                                   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>3. Evidence review .....</b>                                | <b>5</b>  |
| 3.1 Local authorities' investments in the arts .....           | 5         |
| 3.2 The situation in London .....                              | 5         |
| 3.3 Londoners' cultural attendance .....                       | 6         |
| 3.4 Local government's attitudes to the arts and culture ..... | 7         |
| 3.5 Cultural commissioning .....                               | 7         |
| <b>4. Analysis of online survey .....</b>                      | <b>9</b>  |
| 4.1 Type of organisation and activity .....                    | 9         |
| 4.2 Commissioning .....  | 10        |
| 4.3 Direct in-kind support .....                               | 11        |
| 4.4 Other forms of support .....                               | 12        |
| 4.5 Future support .....                                       | 13        |
| <b>5. Focus group and interview findings .....</b>             | <b>15</b> |
| 5.1 Council support is highly valued .....                     | 15        |
| 5.2 The council landscape is changing .....                    | 16        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 5.3 Non-mainstream organisations .....          | 17        |
| 5.4 Learning to speak the language .....        | 17        |
| 5.5 Cultural commissioning .....                | 18        |
| 5.6 Regeneration and economic development ..... | 18        |
| <b>6. Case studies .....</b>                    | <b>20</b> |
| 6.1 Introduction .....                          | 20        |
| 6.2 Bureau of Silly Ideas, Roger Hartley .....  | 20        |
| 6.3 Julia Vogl, artist .....                    | 22        |
| 6.4 Watermans, Jan Lennox .....                 | 23        |
| 6.5 Janett Plummer, Aspire Creativity .....     | 24        |
| <b>7. Conclusions .....</b>                     | <b>26</b> |
| <b>8. Appendix .....</b>                        | <b>29</b> |

Cover photo: *Pineapple Car*. Courtesy of Bureau of Silly Ideas



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



# 1. Executive summary

## 1.1 Introduction

Earlier this year London Councils published a report that looked at the support local authorities in London provide to arts and cultural organisations.<sup>1</sup> This research follows on from that report, giving further nuance to the analysis by exploring what arts and cultural organisations think of the forms of support (other than direct funding) councils offer them.

Many arts organisations get only a small proportion of their direct funding from local authorities, usually for specific projects. As a result, it is often 'non-funding' forms of support, from networking opportunities to subsidised exhibition or office space that represent local authorities' greatest contribution to the success of the arts and culture sector.

This research explored these issues through a number of methods: a short evidence review; an online survey of arts and cultural organisations and individual artists; a series of focus groups and interviews; and four case studies.

## 1.2 Key findings

**'Non-funding' support from local authorities is valued by those arts organisations that get it, and for some it is crucial to their survival as organisations.** Direct in-kind support is especially highly valued, though brokering and networking support is also appreciated.

**The types of support available vary considerably,** from subsidised rent for premises, help with licences, and opportunities for networking

and brokerage, to support to tackle transport or logistics problems associated with outdoor arts projects.

**Arts organisations find it hard to navigate the changing structures of councils.** Arts organisations' contact with councils tends to be intermittent, and they struggle to know who to contact or who the key people are, especially given the structural changes undertaken by many councils in response to budget cuts. Those who do succeed in navigating their way through these barriers report that having personal contacts in the council is very helpful.

**Relationship-building with councils is more difficult for amateur/community arts organisations and individual artists.** The evidence from the research suggests councils are more likely to engage with professional arts and culture organisations. There is a danger therefore that the relationship between local authorities and the cultural sector becomes dominated by a number of larger, well-established organisations that know their way around the system.

**These problems are compounded by the different approaches of councils in London.** Several participants in focus groups and interviews commented on how different London councils are from each other. They have different internal structures, and varied approaches to arts and culture. While this reflects differences in the political compositions of councils, local demographics and the needs of communities, it does mean that arts and culture organisations have to adapt their practices depending on which part of London they are trying to work in.

**There are some frustrations with the evidencing and evaluation requirements of councils.** While these are not necessarily more onerous than those for, say, the Arts Council, arts organisations express concern about having to deal with different expectations. Many organisations report feeling they needed different 'languages' to talk to local authorities and the Arts Council, and some said they even need different languages for different parts of the same council. Addressing this takes time and effort.

**Commissioning is seen as offering considerable potential for the arts, especially for those working in fields of health and wellbeing.** Those who have embarked on this process say they have had

<sup>1</sup> London Councils (2014) *London local government's support for arts and culture: a brief overview*

generally positive experiences so far: they do not feel their artistic practice is being distorted by the process of securing commissions. However, only a minority of arts organisations have started down this road. Some of those who have not still feel intimidated by the apparent complexity of the process, and would welcome further guidance, either from councils themselves or third parties.

**The majority of those winning commissions do so from their ‘home’ borough**, though almost half win such work from other boroughs, either as well as or instead of support from their home authority.

**Pressure on land use in London is a concern.** London’s booming population and the associated growth in demand for services such as education and health is generating ever greater demand for land. The arts sector has often relied on subsidised or cheap spaces to plan, rehearse, exhibit or perform in – these are getting increasingly hard to find.

## 1.3 Future prospects

Arts and cultural organisations recognise the difficult funding landscape councils face (and will continue to face), and there is an acceptance that things will not stand still. A number of arts organisations see opportunities in the new landscape, and are already adapting their business models as a result.

The majority, however, are still feeling their way into this new world. The changes introduced to councils’ internal structures in response to budget cuts have left many arts organisations struggling to keep up. The importance of having personal contacts at a council is widely recognised, yet reductions in council staff mean that arts and culture officers (if they still exist in a council) are under ever greater pressure, and are harder to get hold of. Some organisations are already somewhat wary of trying to engage with councils on the grounds of the time and effort involved – these changes are adding to those worries.

There is also concern that the changing landscape tends to favour larger, more well-established arts organisations. Council staff have less time to seek out and encourage newer and smaller organisations. A few organisations thought that such pressures were making councils less

willing to try different things in culture. Again, this attitude may favour working with more established organisations.

Nevertheless, arts and culture organisations, of whatever type, often share similar goals to councils, and have much to contribute to the achieving of council agendas, especially if they are better able to master the language of social outcomes in explaining what they do. The following recommendations suggest some ways in which local authorities might be able to work with the cultural sector to help it realise its potential.

## 1.4 Recommendations

The great majority of respondents to this research are realistic about the pressures under which councils operate. In this climate they felt that councils could usefully offer help in the following areas:

- networking and brokerage – arts organisations welcome such opportunities, especially when they offer the chance to meet potential funders or commissioners of work, either from other departments of the councils or outside bodies. These opportunities also need to be extended beyond the ‘usual suspects’ to newer or smaller arts organisations
- publicity – many arts organisations would also welcome councils’ help in raising awareness of local arts events and activities, especially to new audiences
- information sessions – arts bodies would like to know more about councils’ approaches to, for example, the Community Infrastructure Levy. There may be a case for councils to host information sessions on such subjects for the sector
- websites – some council websites give no information about who to contact to propose or find out about arts projects. Even very basic contact information – a named individual, a phone number or an email address – would be useful
- cross-council working – there are opportunities for arts officers to strengthen their work in partnership with other departments of the council, such as regeneration and planning, to benefit the arts. The

sector realises that arts officers are under considerable pressure, but such links can unlock significant funding and other support

- access to subsidised or free workspace – this can be hugely beneficial to arts organisations, whether it be for exhibitions, rehearsals or administration. Councils need to be aware of opportunities stemming from under-used space in council buildings and ‘meanwhile’ or ‘pop-up’ uses of vacant property, and could offer support to the sector in negotiations with private landlords
- evidencing or evaluating projects– many respondents feel that the methods councils use do not fully capture the value of arts projects to the communities they work with. It may be worth exploring opportunities for co-ordinating or standardising evaluation methods, either with other councils (perhaps through umbrella bodies like London Councils) or with the Arts Council. This could both reduce the administrative burden on arts and culture organisations and enable councils to understand the benefits of projects more easily.

It should be noted that many councils offer these services in some form or another already. However, the apparent lack of awareness of them suggests there is scope to increase the take-up of the support local authorities offer, especially around the ‘soft’ areas of information, networking and brokering, and advice. Building networks and connections is hugely important for arts organisations in the current climate, as it enriches the potential set of relationships and services they can draw on for support. Local authorities’ efforts in this regard can therefore provide real benefits to the arts and cultural sector.

## 2. Introduction

This report was commissioned by London Councils from BOP Consulting, a firm specialising in research into the cultural and creative sectors ([www.bop.co.uk](http://www.bop.co.uk)). It is intended as a complement to London Councils' earlier report, *London local government's support for arts and culture: a brief overview*. This research aims to explore the value that arts and cultural organisations<sup>2</sup> put on the various forms of support that local authorities offer, other than direct funding. It takes place against a backdrop of continued spending cuts in local government, especially in non-statutory areas of spending, of which the arts (excluding libraries) is one.<sup>3</sup>

The research uses a mix of methods to examine the topic. It starts with a **short review of recent research reports** looking at the relationship between the arts and local authorities.

It then considers the findings of an **online survey of cultural organisations and individual artists and creative professionals**. This survey was carried out under the auspices of London Councils and GLA Intelligence, and reached 134 organisations and individuals from a wide range of art-forms across London. The analysis of the survey was conducted by BOP Consulting and looked both at the respondents as a whole and at variations between them, especially the differences between professional arts organisations on the one hand, and amateur and community ones and individual artists on the other.

In order to add greater detail to this picture, **four focus groups** were undertaken with arts organisations and artists. These help provide an insight into the practical challenges and opportunities that arise in working with local authorities. A handful of interviews were carried out

by email or phone to supplement the focus groups. A chapter of the report summarises the opinions expressed in these.

This is followed by **four case studies**, which illustrate some of these themes further. Each case study offers a distinct 'take' on the relationship between arts and local authorities. The four are:

- Bureau of Silly Ideas, Brixton
- Julia Vogl (artist)
- Watermans, Brentford
- Aspire Creativity, Lewisham.

The evidence gathered in the research is then drawn together in a short concluding chapter, which sets out the themes that have emerged over the course of the research and makes some recommendations for the future.

---

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this research 'arts and culture' is taken to embrace combined arts, dance, digital arts, libraries, literature, music, museums, theatre, and visual arts.

<sup>3</sup> Spending on libraries is statutory, on all the other forms of arts and culture being considered here it is non-statutory.

# 3. Evidence review

“ Local government remains the Arts Council’s most important strategic and delivery partner<sup>4</sup> Alan Davey, Chief Executive, Arts Council England

Local government has historically been, along with Arts Council England (ACE), one of the two major sources of funding for arts and cultural organisations. However, the unprecedented scale of spending cuts being imposed on local government in response to the national budget deficit, and the non-statutory nature of local authority arts funding,<sup>5</sup> means that such support is currently under great pressure. The Local Government Association predicts that by 2020 councils will face a funding gap of £16.5bn, with social care services eating up more than 50 per cent of budgets. London Councils predicts that in London the funding gap in 2020 will be £3.4bn.

There are, however, many other forms of support offered to arts and cultural organisations by local authorities beyond direct funding. Understanding these better is the purpose of this report. Before the report turns to consider that topic, though, this chapter reviews recent research reports to gain insights into the wider context of a changing landscape of council support.

## 3.1 Local authorities’ investments in the arts

Arts Development UK (AD:uk) and the Arts Council of Wales carry out an annual survey of officers working in arts and culture in local authorities.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Quotation taken from Mansfield, C. (2014) *On with the show: Supporting local arts and culture*, New Local Government Network

<sup>5</sup> Again, this excludes libraries, which is a statutory service

<sup>6</sup> AD:uk/Arts Council of Wales *Local Authority Arts Investment & Partnership Survey 2013/14*

It confirms the spending squeeze affecting the arts and culture teams in local authorities in England and Wales. Indeed, the research found that 35 per cent of local authorities no longer had a dedicated arts/culture officer or direct arts service.

Among the survey’s other main findings:

- arts services were under growing pressure to demonstrate the economic value of the activities they supported. Arts services saw an increasing role for themselves in helping to address social, health and wellbeing issues
- smaller authorities were particularly vulnerable to cuts or closure. Medium and larger spending authorities were more likely to have retained cohesive arts services
- the survey found that over 60 per cent of services had restructured in the last two years. Some of those who had been through the process felt it made their services less vulnerable to cuts in the future
- partnership working had declined over the last two or three years, reflecting reductions in major regeneration funding and fewer staff in arts services leading to less time to spare to develop partnerships.

## 3.2 The situation in London

The level of support London arts and cultural organisations receive has become a source of renewed controversy following the publication in late 2013 of the *Rebalancing Our Cultural Capital* report, which argued that London is getting a disproportionate share of the funding and support available for the arts, whether from the Arts Council, DCMS or private philanthropy.<sup>7</sup> London Councils has responded to this report<sup>8</sup> pointing out that it downplays a number of important aspects of London’s support for arts and culture. The sector’s ‘ecology’ is characterised by interdependence between London and the regions; many of the ‘London’ organisations that ACE funds do much of

<sup>7</sup> Stark, P., Gordon, C. and Powell, D. (2013) *Rebalancing our Cultural Capital: A contribution to the debate on national policy for the arts and culture in England*

<sup>8</sup> London Councils (2014) Written submission of evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee (House of Commons) inquiry into Arts Council funding

their work outside the capital. Londoners do not benefit disproportionately in terms of access to and participation in the arts, and in any case, London is not homogenous: there are big differences in ACE and Lottery investment levels between inner and outer boroughs.

These subjects were explored in more depth in London Councils' own report – *London local government's support for arts and culture: a brief overview* – produced earlier this summer. It reviews the funding support provided by the borough councils. This section briefly summarises the findings.

In the last financial year, London local authorities spent £220.5m on arts and culture. London is home to 245 of the Arts Council's 670 National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) for 2015-18, along with two of the Major Partner Museums (MPMs). Spend per head analysis shows that London as a region spends more on arts and culture than other areas do: arts and culture accounted for around 3 per cent of local authority funding in London in 2013/14, compared with 2.2 per cent across the rest of England. Around 75 per cent of London's arts and culture spending goes on libraries.

In 2013/14 London boroughs spent an average of £26.07 per head, while London as a region spent £27.29 per head on culture (i.e. including the Greater London Authority), compared with the England average of £21.84.

Average spend is generally higher in inner London regardless of the political complexion of the council. Average spend for inner London boroughs (excluding the City of London) in 2013/14 was £26.58, over £6 higher than the average spend by outer London boroughs (£19.99 per head). It is worth noting that the outer London average is therefore below that for England as a whole.

These shares are under pressure, however. The report found that councils' spend in London has fallen by 24 per cent (on arts and culture) over the current spending round, while their investment in ACE NPOs fell by just under 20 per cent from 2010/11 to 2012/13.

Arts and culture teams increasingly work with other teams in councils to deliver projects. The report identified a number of areas in which such collaborations were common. The primary ones were:

- supporting educational outcomes

Two-thirds of council arts and culture teams collaborate with children's services and with schools, tertiary and higher education organisations.

- supporting place-making and regeneration

Just under two-thirds of council arts and culture teams collaborate with regeneration colleagues on cultural provision.

- improving mental and physical health

More than half of council arts and culture teams collaborate with public health colleagues, while just under a quarter collaborate with clinical commissioning groups.

- engaging vulnerable residents

Just under half of council arts and culture teams collaborate with colleagues in adult social care, while a third collaborate with housing associations.

- supporting economic development

Just over 40 per cent of council arts and culture teams collaborate with town centre management groups.

### 3.3 Londoners' cultural attendance

Londoners are not significantly more likely to attend or participate in cultural events than are people in England more widely. Among Londoners, 74.3 per cent engaged with the arts once or more in the previous year, compared with 77.5 per cent for England as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

There were some activities which Londoners were more likely to pursue, however. 61.1 per cent of Londoners visited a museum or gallery in the year – for England, it was 53.1 per cent – while 40.9 per cent in London went to a public library, compared with 35.4 per cent in England. (This reflects in part London's high percentage of ethnic minorities, who are significantly more likely to go to libraries than white people.)

<sup>9</sup> Figures in this section taken from DCMS (2014) *Taking Part 2013/14 Quarter 4: Regional dashboard*



## 3.4 Local government's attitudes to the arts and culture

Some of the findings from the AD:uk and London Councils reports are echoed in a recent study from the New Local Government Network (NLGN), looking at the levels of, and reasons for, political support for arts and culture in local authorities across England.<sup>10</sup>

Its survey suggested that while the arts and culture were generally valued by the large majority of local authorities, the level of support varied greatly, and was often dependent on the interests of a particular council member. Arts and culture officers themselves were often more sceptical about the value authorities place on such activity, though they tended to be more positive about their own authority's attitude.

The reasons given for this support differed, reflecting the economic and social priorities of an area. For the majority of local authorities, the key reason for funding arts and culture was to achieve economic development benefits, particularly to boost regeneration and the visitor economy.

Health and wellbeing was regarded as the next most important reason. In April 2013, local government regained its responsibility for public health, giving councils "direct responsibility for co-ordinating action to prevent illness and to improve the health of their communities". As such, this topic has become a particular focus of commissioning models. Half of the respondents to the NLGN survey said they were considering using the public health budget to fund arts and cultural activities in their area.

Arts organisations can also help with place-making, while arts participation has been found to have a positive effect on social cohesion. Despite this, the NLGN report records that "social issues such as 'to promote equal access and participation' and 'community cohesion' were [seen as] less important, although not insignificant." Resident demand for arts and culture was rated the least important reason for funding such activity: most local authorities felt that while

their residents see arts and culture as valuable, they don't regard it as essential. Libraries were thought to be the service most valued by residents, followed by local theatres and museums.

The report goes on to observe that the majority of local authorities are responding to funding pressures by implementing (or considering implementing) governance changes, such as moving cultural assets into a trust, or switching to a commissioning model rather than providing grant aid directly.

### Commissioning

The report noted that local authorities are increasingly moving away from grant giving and towards a commissioning model of funding where they commission services for people with particular needs or in certain areas, based on achieving certain outcomes.

This switch offers potential opportunities for arts and culture organisations to align their work with the council's priorities by delivering these desired outcomes. There were fears though that such a model would favour bigger, more-established organisations with the contacts and the resources to build the necessary relationships with council officers and members.

## 3.5 Cultural commissioning

There is an ongoing programme, supported by Arts Council England, to encourage arts and cultural organisations to develop confidence in their ability to compete in commissioning processes.

A report by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) and the Cultural Commissioning Programme<sup>11</sup> reviews the arts and cultural sector's experiences of public sector commissioning to date.

The report argues that arts and cultural activities can make significant contributions to achieving social outcomes. The report warns, however, that "arts and cultural organisations needed to explain better how their

<sup>10</sup> Mansfield, C. (2014) *On with the show: Supporting local arts and culture*, New Local Government Network

<sup>11</sup> NPC/Cultural Commissioning Programme (2014) *Opportunities for alignment: Arts and cultural organisations and public sector commissioning*

activity improves outcomes, and to make clear that interventions had to be of high quality if they were to work”.

The report goes on to make a number of observations:

- a significant proportion of arts and cultural organisations pursue social outcomes and target particular beneficiary groups as part of their work – they may be delivering work which could be commissioned
- a significant number of arts and culture providers are already actively trying to engage with commissioning
- however, public sector commissioning is not appropriate for everyone in the arts and cultural sector. Engaging in commissioning can benefit the organisations involved but may also require compromise
- the relatively low rates of commissioning of arts and cultural activities to deliver social outcomes suggests commissioners may be failing to grasp the benefits of such work for their target groups
- arts organisations could help their cause by learning to talk the language of social outcomes
- many arts and cultural organisations depend heavily on arts-specific funding. As this reduces, the core capacity of organisations in the sector is at risk.

# 4. Analysis of online survey

London Councils and the Greater London Authority conducted an online survey of arts organisations to support this research. In all, 134 organisations or individuals responded.<sup>12</sup>

## 4.1 Type of organisation and activity

The majority were professional arts and cultural organisations, as Figure 1 shows. However, individual artists and amateur arts groups were also well-represented.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 1. Category of respondents**

| Type of organisation                            | Number |
|---|--------|
| Professional arts or cultural organisation      | 81     |
| Individual artist or creative professional      | 32     |
| Community/amateur arts or cultural organisation | 11     |
| Other   | 10     |

Source: BOP Consulting (2014)

Survey respondents worked in a wide variety of artistic fields, with many of them working in more than one. Visual arts, music, theatre and combined arts were the most common.

**Figure 2. Field of activity (multiple responses allowed)**

| Field of activity | Number |
|-------------------|--------|
| Visual Arts       | 51     |
| Music             | 38     |
| Theatre           | 36     |
| Combined arts     | 35     |
| Museums           | 22     |
| Digital Arts      | 21     |
| Dance             | 20     |
| Other             | 18     |
| Literature        | 17     |
| Libraries         | 8      |

Source: BOP Consulting (2014)

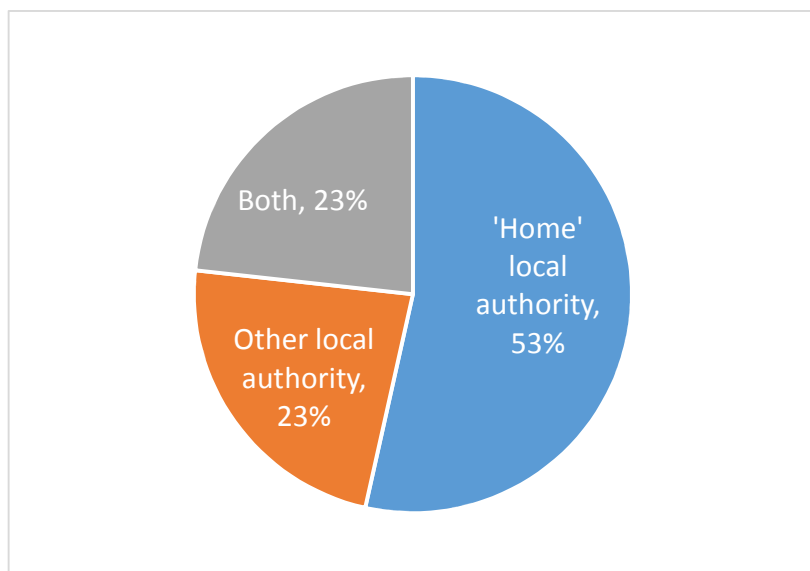
<sup>12</sup> A number of responses e.g. from local authorities were 'screened out' as ineligible. The 134 were the total number of valid responses.

<sup>13</sup> 'Other' consists of a mix of arts organisations which wanted to give more detail about themselves than the categorisation allowed, along with a number of cultural education institutions.

## 4.2 Commissioning

Only a third of respondents (32 per cent) had been commissioned by a local authority to carry out a project. Of these, just over half received that commission from their 'home' authority. Just under a quarter were commissioned by another authority while the remainder (23 per cent) had commissions from both.

**Figure 3. Which authority commissioned you?**



Source: BOP Consulting (2014)

Thirty-five per cent of professional and other organisations received commissions compared with 26 per cent of artists and community organisations.

For the majority of the full set of respondents, it was still the arts and culture team that was much the most likely to commission work, though it may well be the case that such teams are acting as the lead agency for projects that involve other council departments. Among other departments to commission work, regeneration and children's services were the most prominent. Public health was a little less so, but it should be noted that public health has only recently been devolved to local authorities.

**Figure 4. Which local authority department(s) were you commissioned by? (Please tick all that apply – those answers receiving at least four responses shown)**

| Department          | Number |
|---------------------|--------|
| Arts and culture    | 27     |
| Regeneration        | 7      |
| Children's services | 7      |
| Adult social care   | 5      |
| Public health       | 4      |
| Sport and leisure   | 4      |

Source: BOP Consulting (2014)

The level of commissions won varied widely among the 37 organisations and individuals prepared to report a figure. The lowest was £100, the highest was £400,000. Of the 37, 30 were professional or 'other' organisations, while seven were amateur/community groups or individual artists.

Within this figure the mean average<sup>14</sup> of commissions won annually was £64,010. As might be expected, the mean was significantly higher for professional/other, at £66,489, than it was for community/artists, where the mean was £21,243.

<sup>14</sup> The mean average is the sum of all commissions divided by the number of recipients

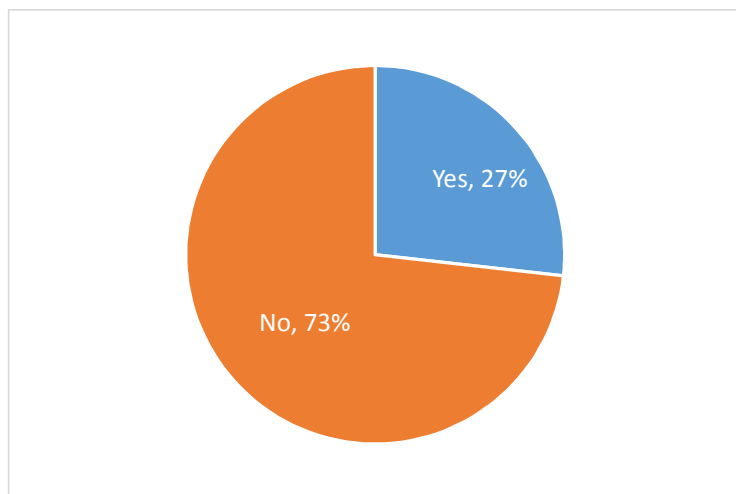


In cases like this it might be argued that the median average is a more useful measure, as it gives a better indication of what an ‘average’ organisation receives.<sup>15</sup> The median annual value of commissions won was estimated at £25,000 for all the organisations. The median for professional/others was also £25,000, while the median for community/artists was £18,000.

### 4.3 Direct in-kind support

Only a minority of those surveyed reported having received direct in-kind support from a local authority.

Figure 5. Have you received any other type of support from local authorities in London in the last 4 years that was not a grant or commission?



Source: BOP Consulting (2014)

Here, there was a marked difference between professional organisations, and community organisations and artists’. Among the professional and other organisations 35 per cent had received such

<sup>15</sup>The median average is the level of support reported by the ‘middle’ organisation (i.e. the 19th recipient out of 37, ranked by size of grant). Such a measure avoids the distortions that can occur when, as here, there are a small number of large grants.

support; among artists and community organisations it was just 9 per cent.

The single most common form of in-kind support received was discretionary business rates relief,<sup>16</sup> though none of the artists or community organisations benefitted from this.

Figure 6. Have you received direct in-kind support from a local authority?

| Type of support received (multiple responses allowed)                              | Number |
|--|--------|
| Discretionary business rates relief  | 17     |
| Support developing project ideas   | 16     |
| Support marketing your activities  | 16     |
| Support developing grant applications  | 10     |
| Support developing your organisation   | 10     |
| Free/subsidised use of local authority premises as studio or rehearsal space       | 10     |
| Free/subsidised use of local authority premises as performance or exhibition space | 9      |
| Support securing licenses  | 7      |
| Free/subsidised use of local authority premises as office space                    | 7      |
| Free/subsidised use of local authority premises as storage space                   | 2      |

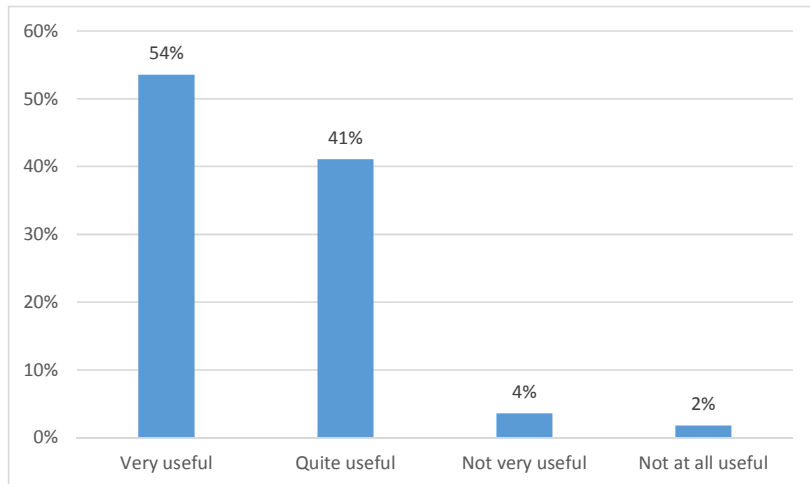
Source: BOP Consulting (2014)

<sup>16</sup> Councils have discretionary powers to award additional business rates relief to charities and non-profit making organisations above and beyond that available (to charities only) in law.

“ Council support is the foundation for wider buy-in, advocacy and partnership” Survey respondent

More than half of those who received direct in-kind support thought it very useful, while almost all the rest rated it quite useful.

**Figure 7. How useful did you find this support overall?**



Source: BOP Consulting (2014)

## 4.4 Other forms of support

Respondents were also asked if they had received brokering support from local authorities. Invitations to networking events and newsletters or e-bulletins were the most common form of support offered here. More costly forms of support, such as public realm improvements around venues, were less frequent.

Once again, such support was more likely to be offered to professional and other organisations. For instance, 47 per cent of them received invitations to networking events, compared with just 20 per cent of artists and community organisations.

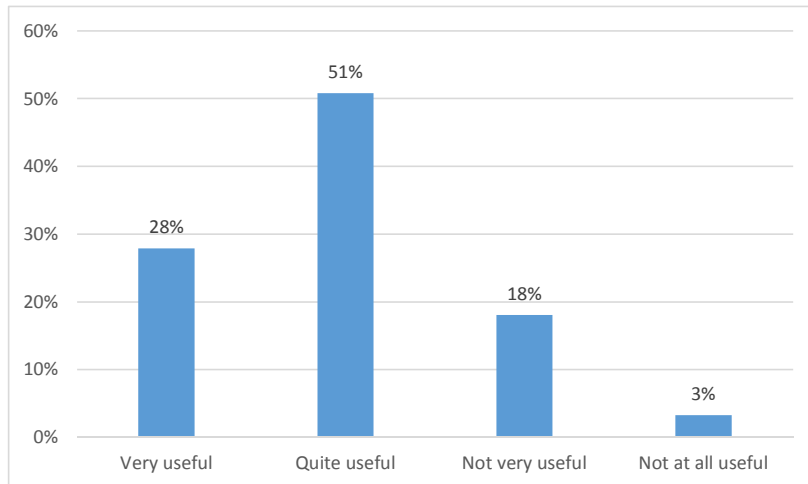
**Figure 8. Have you received brokering support from a local authority?**

| Type of support received (multiple responses allowed)   | Number |
|---|--------|
| Invitations to networking events  | 52     |
| Newsletters/e-bulletins   | 40     |
| Introductions to commissioners within the council   | 13     |
| Public realm improvements around your venue to make it more attractive or accessible  | 11     |
| Support locating or negotiating access to performance or exhibition space   | 10     |
| Support locating or negotiating access to studio or rehearsal space   | 6      |
| Introductions to commissioners outside the council (e.g. local schools, social care centres, town centre management groups etc) | 6      |
| Support locating or negotiating access to office space  | 4      |
| Support locating or negotiating access to storage space   | 4      |

Source: BOP Consulting (2014)

These forms of support or intervention were generally rated as useful, though not to the same degree as the more direct forms of in-kind support described earlier.

**Figure 9** How useful did you find this brokering support?



Source: BOP Consulting (2014)

Those who found it useful gave a range of reasons why: some are shown below.

“ Introductions are incredibly useful and create meaningful connections which have led to paid gigs through our own work. We understand councils aren't always in a position to help financially but are very well connected with what's going on in their borough. Survey respondent

“ Local Authority bulletins and emails are a good source of information for opportunities and news which we also disseminate to our network of artists and producers. Survey respondent

“ Our Arts Officer is very well connected across departments within the local authority. She's also an excellent networker and very generous with her contacts and recommendations. Survey respondent

Other respondents were less enamoured of the support they were offered. Among their views:

“ [We have a] very poor local authority relationship: too much bureaucracy, very different agendas. Survey respondent

“ Sending out a compiled email about a few funding opportunities occasionally that only big charities can apply for is not very useful. Survey respondent

## 4.5 Future support

Finally, the survey looked to the future. What challenges did respondents face that local authorities might be able to help them with?

The most popular responses centred on help with publicity or networking, drawing on councils' knowledge in these areas. It was also clear that finding affordable space for studios, rehearsals and exhibitions is also a big challenge. This time, there were few substantial differences between professional groups and artists and community ones.

**Figure 10 Apart from securing funding, what are the biggest challenges you face that local authorities might be able to help you with?**

| Challenges LAs could help with   | Number |
|--|--------|
| Publicising your activity to new audiences                                 | 85     |
| Meeting potential funding partners   | 84     |
| Meeting potential commissioners  | 54     |
| Finding appropriate and affordable rehearsal or studio space               | 49     |
| Finding appropriate and affordable performance or exhibition space         | 42     |
| Meeting potential delivery partners  | 39     |
| Securing the licences that you need from the local authority for your work | 38     |
| Finding appropriate and affordable storage space                           | 37     |
| Finding appropriate and affordable office space                            | 31     |
| Getting advice on how to develop and grow your activity or organisation    | 30     |
| Getting advice on how to manage your finances                              | 8      |

Source: BOP Consulting (2014)

People were also asked whether there was anything further they wished to add about how local authorities can support creative professionals and cultural organisations. Among the responses:

“ Access to skills and knowledge that local authority staff may have. Actively supporting organisations

that want to apply for funding and allowing them to partner with them. Survey respondent

“ Planning, particularly grasping the nuances of artist space and the real costs involved in terms of how little artists [can afford] to contribute. Survey respondent

“ Working in partnership to explore the role creativity can play within the local authority's delivery of a range of services. Survey respondent



# 5. Focus group and interview findings

BOP Consulting conducted a series of focus groups with London arts and cultural organisations and individual artists to explore the nature of their relationship with local authorities. Their perspectives give insights into the ways in which the changes in the council funding landscape play out for arts organisations, and how they are responding to the new challenges.

Some of these focus groups had a particular topic, including health/well-being/social care and regeneration/economic development. It should be noted, though, that arts organisations often work across more than one of these fields, and the discussions ranged widely.

A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared for each focus group to help guide the discussion. However, the conversations were allowed to flow if they looked like developing in particularly interesting directions.

A list of those who contributed can be found in Appendix 1. A number of organisations and artists expressed a desire to participate in a focus group but were unable to attend. BOP prepared a separate questionnaire for them to give them the opportunity to feed their views into the process. Comments from those interviews have also been included in this chapter.

Given the wide-ranging nature of these discussions, this chapter has been grouped by theme, with relevant comments from across the focus groups and interviews being collected together.

## 5.1 Council support is highly valued

It was clear from all the groups that **arts and cultural organisations value the support they get from local authorities highly**. It was often the 'non-funding' forms of support that were valued most, as many of the arts organisations received only a relatively small proportion of their

funding from local authorities, usually in the form of funding for specific projects. Core funding tended to come from the Arts Council or trusts and foundations, alongside earned income.

Local authority support took a number of forms, including access to free or subsidised workspace, networking and advice opportunities, or access to council-controlled spaces for art projects, such as parks or squares, or libraries.

For a number of the participants, access to subsidised or free space was the most important benefit they received from their council. One is based in the annex of a primary school, paying a non-commercial rent to the council (though the rent is increasing). Another is able to use space in a council-owned art gallery for free to run its workshops. A third gets a reduced rent at its base in a community centre, though this building is not council-owned.

Political support from the council was also valued by more than one attendee, as was the chance to network with other community organisations. One noted that his organisation benefited from strong political support in his borough, including from its elected mayor, even though the borough had only funded small, specific projects to date.

A number of councils were commended for putting attendees in touch with useful contacts. One person noted that her local authority is good at bringing different arts groups together. "They'd tell us if something is coming up that we should get involved with ... and suggest we participate in it. They also commission us to run different programmes for them to raise our profile."

When asked if this was down to the specific relationship her organisation had built up with the council, she answered, "The non-cynical part of me would say it's because they know we're good, that they trust us and know we're the right organisation. The cynical part of me would say because they're so pressed for time we're the first organisation they could think of. But that benefits us and gives us an extra kind of stability, kudos. We're happy to have this relationship."

Arts organisations face ongoing challenges. Competition for funding from the likes of the Arts Council, the Big Lottery Fund and trusts and

foundations continues to grow. When asked what councils could do to help, a number of suggestions were made.

“ The different parts of the council don't know what we could do for them. It's hard to know who you have to meet or talk to. More networking opportunities would help.

“ We need to diversify our income – statutory local authority services are an area of opportunity. But we need support to navigate those opportunities.

Some organisations saw the positives in these changes. Having multiple funding streams available could lead to a more diverse income base, and hence help to make organisations more resilient. The challenge is to be able to commit the time necessary to build these new relationships.

## 5.2 The council landscape is changing

**There was general agreement that the local authority landscape has changed considerably over the last five years. Budget cuts and restructurings (as well as the workings of the London labour market) means that there have been many changes in personnel and in the directorates or departments under which cultural activity falls. Any remaining arts officers tend to have heavier workloads than before. One participant said “it's very different in terms of understanding what money is available in cultural teams and other directorates. It's a more complex map until you are more confident with the relationships.” She thought it would be quite daunting starting out as an arts and culture organisation now.**

**Another thought that councils' ability to act had diminished since 2010 under resource pressures: “Many changes of officers means**

**[you're] always restarting relationships, which is expensive and destructive”.**

These changes mean that **it is often much less clear who the key people in a local authority are for contacting.** Organisations have found themselves trying to work across teams – from arts and culture, events, regeneration, leisure and transport, for example.

The variations between London local authorities resulting from differences in local demographics, communities and politics add to the complexity. Arts organisations can be faced with adjacent authorities with very different priorities – each London authority has to be treated, in the words of one participant, almost as a different city.

One participant noted that her organisation's relationships were often built with different sections of local authorities. In Redbridge its work was supported by the arts team; in Hounslow it came through a community grant; in Lambeth it came from adult social care. Chance connections play a part: a local councillor came to a group she ran in Hounslow and told her about a small grant scheme in the borough which led the organisation in due course to the community grant.

Levels of contact seem to be different for different people and boroughs. Some boroughs always prefer face-to-face meetings, others do not.

“ We always invite them to our events but they don't come. They're too busy or the person is not there anymore.

An interviewee welcomed the chance to work with local authorities. “I do find that council funding is often useful as it comes with a clear sense of what issues are pertinent to a particular location / community.” There were barriers, though, to meeting council officers and members to ascertain what these are. These included an unfamiliarity with who would be the right person to approach, but also “a commissioning mentality that fails to recognise the importance of stepping out of comfort zones in order to see what is happening at a grass roots level”.

She thinks brokering is helpful, as she believes “there are key members of different councils who are looking to do things differently, but they are few and far between”.

“ The best local authority is one who can think out of the box and is able to see the bigger picture, not get bogged down by procedures and limitations. It's all about vision...

However, this is not easy in the current climate. Another interviewee commented: “Five years ago it was much easier to pick up a phone and develop a piece of work. Now everything is so tight, so prescriptive and not flexible. If it's not agreed in a strategy then it's not getting done ...”

## 5.3 Non-mainstream organisations

For organisations outside the mainstream, some of these issues are especially acute. One interviewee, from a company led by disabled artists, noted that local authorities seem still to be funding established organisations but newer ones have difficulty with access.

One of the biggest issues her organisation faces is finding office premises. Despite having won Arts Council NPO status for the second time, her organisation has yet to secure a public building as a base. Doing so (in, say, a community centre) would open up opportunities to involve volunteers and provide training.

She also feels that discussions around ‘engagement’ tend to focus on young people. Disabled people and the over-60s also need to be considered in such approaches. One big difficulty is that some councils do not factor in access costs (such as sign language help, the costs of support workers, and transport) into event programming and budgets.

## 5.4 Learning to speak the language

A number of participants said they struggled to find the right language with which to talk to councils. One commented that in her experience local authorities focus more on the social aspects of projects than the arts side – in other words, they are more interested in education, employment and wellbeing effects than in the quality of the art. So while officers may ‘get’ the argument for culture, that isn’t always reflected in the things they fund or in their priorities.

Another agreed, saying the way her organisation talks about its work to local authorities is different from the way it talks to the Arts Council. “With the local authority we focus more on community, social outcomes; while to ACE our language is more on the quality of artistic production, [and] creative skills to an extent.”

Participants agreed that dealing with the effects of this can be tricky. Some arts organisations have such a range of activities that it can be quite hard to manage and “hold the conversations together”. Reporting and counting become an effort. “Different people have different ways of counting. It’s not straightforward.”

A second respondent concurred: “As an arts organisation we’ve got to start with the art and stick to that. Within that, to make things happen is about managing relationships. The effects of the work means different things to different people, we have to find a language to unlock that.”

“ We need indicators and benchmarks that arts organisations can know. These need to be fed down from local authorities to the arts organisations. The same language might not be applicable across all sectors and it might not transfer to what is happening on the ground.

There was general agreement, though, that this is not solely the responsibility of councils: there needs to be more leadership shown by

the arts and cultural sector about the language they use and how they communicate with local authorities.

Another participant said that her organisation had to tweak its 'offer' to councils project by project. She felt that this was particularly true when working on large-scale projects. "We worked in lots of areas across the council, it might start with licensing, it might be to do with planning, regeneration ... they are all different and have different objectives. You need to know where to go and how to talk to each other."

She went on to say that the success of work with local authorities comes from building trusting relationships, so the more access to the various departments you are allowed, the more cohesive the project delivery can be.

## 5.5 Cultural commissioning

Cultural commissioning – the use of, say, health care budgets to commission arts projects that can improve well-being for participants – was recognised as an important and exciting potential new area of support. In April 2013, local government regained its responsibility for public health, giving it direct responsibility for co-ordinating actions to improve the health of local communities. This creates scope for councils to integrate public health with the work of other council departments.

Some of the arts organisations were starting to be commissioned by, for instance, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) to deliver projects with health-related outcomes. While it is still early days for such schemes, those who had been part of them felt it was not altering their artistic approach – rather, it provided a new business model for the organisation. One attendee sounded a small note of caution. Commissioning is tied to a specific location, which differs from her organisation's Arts Council-funded model, where they work across the country. Over time, that may affect the 'offer' of her organisation.

The paperwork and evidencing associated with commissioning was not thought to be any more onerous than that required for grants. However, one participant said she went to a commissioning workshop a few years ago and was daunted by the complexity of it. She has shied away from it since, but would welcome a more 'human-friendly' training. Others too

had still to find a 'way in'. Again, the opportunities around this work seem to vary significantly from borough to borough.

One commented that it would be helpful if the local authority could provide guidance if they decide to go down the commissioning route; for example, what is the structure in the council to deal with it. Another person said that the recent Arts Development UK seminars on cultural commissioning were very helpful: "more like that would be good".

“ Diversifying funding is an issue for us. The costs of room hire and transport is rising – we don't get help with this at the moment. It would be good to know more about how to access personalisation budgets.

## 5.6 Regeneration and economic development

The report from NGLN cited in chapter 3 suggested that the most important justification (in the eyes of local councils) for supporting arts and culture was their effects on economic development.

Previously, much of the collaboration between arts and culture teams and regeneration ones concerned the implementation of cultural projects supported by planning gains from Section 106 agreements (S106). The use of S106 is likely to decline in future as more boroughs adopt the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).<sup>17</sup>

It was felt that departments across local councils need to communicate more about the role of culture and arts in Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy opportunities.

---

<sup>17</sup> Section 106 agreements are legal contracts made under the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act. They are usually made between councils and landowners to provide compensation for the effects of a new development. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge introduced first in 2010 that allows councils to charge developers and landowners the CIL for new developments. These CIL funds can be collected together to pay for new infrastructure in the area.



Participants suggested that arts organisations could work more effectively with local authorities, but achieving this would require effort from both arts organisations and councils. Participants were clear that working with local authorities had the potential to be very productive for both: arts groups can benefit from the organisational capacity of councils, while councils can benefit from the cultural sector's contribution to regeneration and to improvements in the social or cultural life of a borough.

Working with business improvement districts (BIDs) is seen as an important opportunity for arts groups to get involved in regeneration. It has the additional benefit of presenting arts organisations with a chance to work and network with businesses, potentially building relationships that might lead to corporate philanthropy.

# 6. Case studies

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at four case studies of arts organisations and artists working in London. Each has a different type of relationship with local councils, and between them they illustrate some of the challenges, opportunities and assumptions that shape the working relationship between such organisations and local authorities.

The **Bureau of Silly Ideas (BOSi)** is a Brixton-based company that primarily produces outdoor street entertainment. It is an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) with a full-time team of four people. Its clients are mostly festivals or local authorities.

**Julia Vogl** is an American-born artist who moved to London to study at the Slade School of Fine Art. Her work is mostly public art, and she often has to engage with local authorities over issues around permission to use public spaces and health and safety concerns, among others.

**Watermans** is an arts centre in Brentford in the borough of Hounslow. It includes a theatre, a cinema and two exhibition spaces. It also delivers an extensive participation programme and outdoor arts. Its mission is “to bring communities together through cultural participation”.

**Janett Plummer** is a writer and poet. She runs Aspire Creativity which delivers training, workshops and consultancy on poetry, arts, diversity and performance skills for children and adults. It is based in Lewisham.

## 6.2 Bureau of Silly Ideas, Roger Hartley

The nature of BOSi's work means that it needs to work with local authorities and it has had some success in doing so. However, the pressure on land usage in London, driven by its booming property market, is putting BOSi's business model under strain, and local councils are struggling to address the challenge.

BOSi's relationship with local authorities began with a successful arts commission from Lambeth Council (supported by Transport for London) during the re-paving of Brixton High Street. The project aimed to ease some of the irritation caused by the extensive roadworks through a six-week long series of construction-themed street theatre shows along the high street. Other successful BOSi projects have taken place in Kew Gardens (the Royal Society of Plant Whisperers), Brighton's Jubilee Square (The Burst Pipe Dream) and Wandsworth (The Toast Temple).

Much of its work with local authorities is focused on addressing practical issues like traffic management and regeneration: for example, how arts projects can help with the movement of people through town centres or increase footfall in a locality.

The primary challenge for BOSi is finding the space in which to work, both for their permanent base and to host their individual projects – the pressure on land use in London is always growing. BOSi is currently based under a railway arch in Brixton, but the arch's owner, Network Rail, is looking to regenerate the area, which may force BOSi out. A number of other outdoor arts companies have already found themselves pushed out to the fringes of London.

BOSi initiates around half the conversations it has with local councils about projects, while councils initiate the other half. Some just ring up or email out of the blue: sometimes it is the events department, sometimes the regeneration one, arts or traffic planning. Most of the time it is a referral by word of mouth, but occasionally it is a consequence of an article in a trade journal. Hartley, BOSi's artistic director, goes to seminars, conferences, and meetings to network and build relationships,

but doesn't feel he has a definite, solidified relationship with local authorities or a system to engage with.

BOSi, as its name implies, tries to encourage eccentric or unusual ideas in its work. BOSi's best relationships tend to be with council officers who grasp the name and the concept behind it - it acts almost as a filter. However, others don't understand BOSi's ambitions.

As a result, BOSi has a complicated relationship with local authorities. Hartley says "We've had projects die because of local politics ... You could start one project and then another department will crush it internally." Project planning can be lost during restructuring; BOSi's vision for a project may no longer appeal to the new teams or people in post after an internal restructure. Alternatively, the loss of a key council contact may mean that wider partnerships fall apart: BOSi has lost tours, ACE funding and many tens of thousands of pounds from private companies because the local authority could not send confirmation letters of acknowledgement after someone has moved on.

A lot of their work with councils depends on good communication and councils' continual restructuring makes this hard: power, budgets and control are always changing. Hartley says it would be useful to have someone who was in a specific post to get in touch with them, to reach out and disseminate information.

He is worried about the effects of 'silos' within the council - arts officers don't seem to talk to planning and property people. The result is that councils don't realise the value of the assets and the power they have. If local authorities were willing to use, say, their powers over planning regulation and space licensing, they could use the planning process to ensure that land is set aside for culture. Hartley believes that as more land is sold to become Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) and licensed for change of use, the condition of sale should include continued provision and investment in creative activity. Such arrangements should be part of large Section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy deals.

Hartley says the London property market is "really cut throat in terms of development". While there is huge pressure on councils to allow building wherever they can, given London's booming population,

Hartley warns that councils are "killing culture by selling off land": they need to think about ways of retaining ownership.

Councils could help by identifying space for the creation of outdoor arts projects in their area. Non-building based forms of culture are being overlooked and will collapse if not supported, he believes; the outdoor arts sector is reliant on its existing spaces. Much of BOSi's work happens on derelict or unfashionable sites, but its business model was never designed for a market with fast-rising property prices, and will have to be adapted in response to this change.



*Phil and Danni sitting reading, Brixton High Street. Photo courtesy of Bureau of Silly Ideas*

**Understanding the value arts and culture organisations place on support from local authorities**

[www.bop.co.uk](http://www.bop.co.uk)

## 6.3 Julia Vogl, artist

Setting up public art projects in London is time-consuming and demanding. Building relationships with a council and wider communities in a locality is key, but there are no formal processes for doing so – it's a question of persistence and making connections.

A piece of Julia Vogl's, HOME, was shown in Peckham Square in 2012 as a self-initiated project that sat alongside the Cultural Olympiad. It was what she calls a "public living room", examining Peckham's residents' thoughts on why London is their home. Audio interviews were recorded and then embedded into the structure, which other people could then listen to on headphones.

Julia is a recent graduate and this was one of her first major projects. She spent nine months trying to build connections with people and find a suitable site somewhere in London. Eventually she found a site in Peckham but then needed to find a community in which the work could be rooted.

She went to the Peckham Settlement, a local community centre, and it advised her that a good group of people to work with would be the Hour Bank, volunteers who share skills in lieu of money. "That's the way I got connected", says Julia. She was then passed to Southwark Council to see whether she could use the site.

A contact of hers at the Mayor's Office (whom she had met earlier while searching for a site) suggested she attend an information event Southwark ran. At that event Julia met a woman from Southwark's events team and got her direct email address. Julia feels she wouldn't have got very far with Southwark without this information: "If you don't know specific people in a local authority others don't take you seriously."

Julia's contact in events helped her with logistics, paperwork, getting a key to the gate [to the square] to build the installation, and some PR on the website, for which she is very grateful. It can be quite a time-

consuming process. "We first talked in February and the project ran in July. I definitely felt that face-to-face meeting was more effective."

Southwark were helpful in a number of ways. "In my initial conversation with Southwark about locations/siting, they provided a good lay of the land and were honest up front about the feasibility of different sites – where would be successful and where would not."

Julia partners with private and public groups to make public art. The project in Peckham was sizeable by her standards (costing around £20,000). While most of the funding came from Arts Council England, the project was also part-funded by a Kickstarter campaign, though Julia says the partnership with Peckham Settlement and Peckham Space (a local arts organisation) came first. Only when there is a strong partnership is the public prepared to back such a scheme, she believes. "You need to get people to talk about your project in order to successfully crowdsource funds. And that is when partnership helps."

The project had to be built first in a studio, to be tested by an engineer for health and safety. Julia then had to take it down and rebuild it on the site itself. She has done a number of such projects, and says you need to find the right people to work with: it is "definitely important to find a Project Manager who works on the ground, knows the space, knows the people and protects you. Collaboration is the best way forward to do things safely and effectively."

While the project had its difficulties, Julia is sanguine about the time and effort involved. She has worked in New York and says projects take at least as long there.

Understanding the value  
arts and culture  
organisations place on  
support from local  
authorities

[www.bop.co.uk](http://www.bop.co.uk)



HOME. Photo courtesy of Julia Vogl

## 6.4 Watermans, Jan Lennox

Watermans is a well-established arts centre in Brentford which has built up a strong relationship with its local authority (Hounslow) as well as many of its neighbouring authorities. Nevertheless, while it is good at drawing on 'non-funding' support, these are additional benefits – it is funding support that is the key.

Watermans has built up successful relationships with local authorities, and these shape much of what Watermans tries to do. Almost half its income is derived from public sector contracts, with box office (26 per cent); Arts Council funding (8 per cent); and trading (8 per cent) being the other principal sources of support.

Watermans' main relationship is with the London Borough of Hounslow, its home local authority. It has two 4-year contracts with it, including the main arts contract for the borough. It also works quite regularly with Ealing, having multiple smaller contracts with that borough, mostly for work with children and young people. In total, Watermans works with ten local authorities in West and South West London, which is Watermans' predominant target area. It says it would be unlikely to work outside them.

Arrangements have changed over the last five years. Grant funding has moved to contracts, and councils also outsource more services now, which Watermans is often able to deliver for them.

The number of contracts Watermans has with local authorities means that it works with a wide variety of council departments: arts and leisure, children's services, adult services, economic development, regeneration, and health & wellbeing. Jan Lennox, Watermans' director, is in frequent contact with council officers, meeting one or more of them once a week on average. Relationships with Hounslow are particularly good, and Lennox says she finds officers there easy to talk to. This includes the chief executive and department directors, so she feels she can always ask them for contacts if she doesn't know the correct person to talk to about something.

Watermans' venue is owned by the local authority and leased to it on a peppercorn rent. This has considerable value for Watermans. The authority is working with Watermans to plan for a re-location to a new, purpose-designed venue in the medium term. The cash funding and the building are the key elements of support from the council. That said, the council also offers advice, access to training, and introductions to other possible funders. It also sometimes pays to hire space at Watermans for meetings or events.

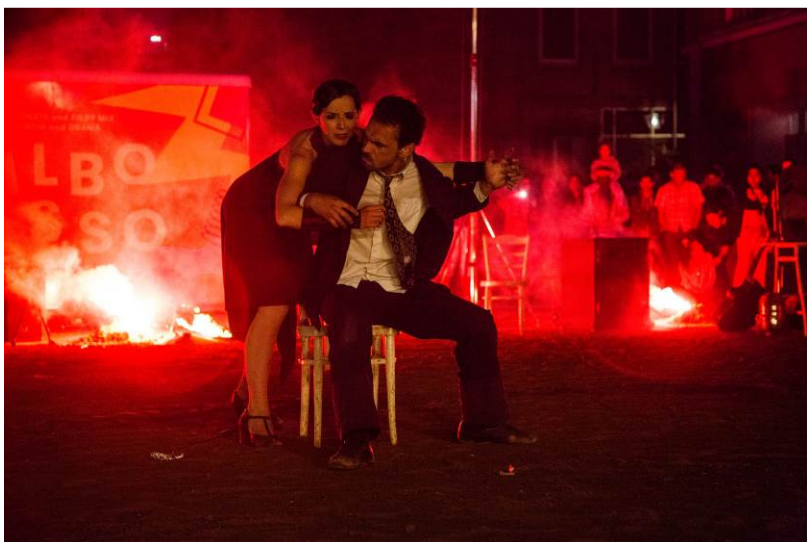
Lennox says that networking events and information opportunities are "added value [but] will not keep services going" – it is the funding support that is crucial.

Watermans has been successful in winning commissions to use arts to deliver outcomes for children/young people, learning disability programmes, mental health, and regeneration, among others. It keeps



tabs on future development opportunities through checking forthcoming tenders on local authority websites, and through regular meetings with officers to understand the authority's future plans. It does find, however, that evidence and evaluation requirements for commissioners are considerably more robust than are, say, the Arts Council's.

Watermans has, however, prepared carefully to deal with this. It was able to secure a Social Investment Business grant to support its organisational development and contract readiness, which included working with KPMG to develop efficient monitoring and evaluation systems which meet the needs of commissioners. In addition, it employs a Business Manager to run this side of the business. Quality assurance is a more explicit requirement of local authority commissioners and Watermans has developed a broader set of policies supporting consistency of service delivery and obtained official quality management accreditation (ISO:9001) in response to this.



Cie Bilbobasso performing Polar at Bell Square, Hounslow (June 2014). Photo by Vipul Sangoi, courtesy of Watermans.

## 6.5 Janett Plummer, Aspire Creativity

Local authority funding is becoming increasingly competitive and scarce. A few years ago, seven out of ten of Plummer's grants applications were successful, now this ratio is more like 1:10. Aspire Creativity's main challenge is a lack of workspace to organise and deliver projects, a reflection of the difficulty of finding core funding to support operational costs.

Plummer has been working in the creative sector for more than 14 years. She works most closely with, and receives the most support from, Lewisham Council. She also often works in partnership with other organisations, such as Olivespring Dyslexia Matters, charities and organisations in the education or health sectors.

Over the years, Plummer has developed good relationships with the arts officers in her local authority, Lewisham, as well as with the neighbouring authorities of Greenwich and Southwark. This is in part because she has worked for a local authority, and has some understanding of internal working processes. She works most closely with the libraries officers, followed by the arts officers, and then the regeneration team. She finds different departments helpful individually, but feels that they do not communicate internally to other teams within the council.

What arts organisations need is a long-term commitment from local authorities in order to deliver projects with consistency. Plummer's concern is that without long-term core funding to support everyday operational needs "somewhere along the line that affects quality". The projects she is funded for do not offer full cost recovery: they don't cover organisational costs, accountancy, insurance and premises hire. She has moved three times to find workspace because of the lack of core funding.

The absence of such support means arts organisations like hers are not able to offer staff permanent employment, just irregular contracts. It also limits the physical resources and space organisations have with which to deliver projects. In-kind support can also be problematic. Libraries, for



instance, offer cheap or free space for events, but the *quid pro quo* is that then they can't charge participants to take part. In her eyes, continuity and commitment equal quality.

One example where the NHS and local authority might have helped the sector more was in the development of the Waldron Health Centre and Kaleidoscope Children's Centre, which initially had plans to have hot-desking space for voluntary sector organisations. This would have greatly helped Aspire Creativity (and other arts organisations), especially those engaged in arts and health work. At the final stages of planning this use of the space was dropped. Plummer says this is not the first time this has happened, and there seems to be little regard for how building developments could accommodate the voluntary sector. Other local authorities have made one central space available and this has been well utilised by a range of voluntary organisations. One option would be to establish the local Community and Voluntary Services (CVS) umbrella organisation in larger premises with a central hot-desk space. This would have the knock-on effect of allowing CVS to assist other groups with meeting space or venue hire at an affordable rate.

These problems are compounded by the fact that there is little free training available. Many very small groups struggle to pay even a nominal fee and so do without training that could ultimately benefit them in the long run. There is no process for pulling projects together into a coherent arts offer across the local authority.

Despite all this, and even though the number of arts officers and community development officers within the council has decreased, she feels that the support offered is still very good. She has, for instance, received exemplary service from the libraries service development officers in Lewisham and Southwark. The arts team [in Lewisham] work well with arts organisations and this provides some form of validation and support. The community development team connect organisations and provide networks and contacts where possible. However, contact tends to be intermittent: arts organisations approach individual arts or community development officers when there is something particularly significant which requires their support and direction.

Plummer feels that organisations working with minority ethnic groups may not have the same knowledge and access to funding, and often

receive piecemeal support. Sometimes there is a lack of awareness of the difficulties of working with such groups. She highlights the example of a Somali women's group she knows. Many participants don't have access to the internet or phone, making it harder to access and apply for internet-based grants. Having a computer and funded internet access would help this group greatly. Ongoing IT and training costs are not reflected in its funding.

Plummer says that diversity has dropped off the agenda, and this needs to change. This would involve local authorities thinking about how they "engage with new communities, increase their offer to people with disabilities and work with service providers to change perceptions about what clients want and need". They need to think creatively about equalities issues, and most importantly support those umbrella organisations that can then support others in relation to equalities.



Creativity workshop. Photo courtesy of Janett Plummer

# 7. Conclusions

This research has examined the attitudes of arts and culture organisations to working with councils in London.

The pre-eminent challenge to successful relationships is the tough spending climate in which local authorities operate. This poses an obvious challenge in that funding resources are increasingly constrained, which reduces the scope for direct support. More than that, though, it has triggered moves in local authorities to restructure and reshape in ways which art and cultural organisations do not necessarily understand or feel comfortable with.

Nevertheless, arts organisations are realistic about the changed landscape, and some even see it as an opportunity to diversify their sources of income.

A number of themes have emerged from this research.

- Direct funding support is often not the most important form of support arts organisations receive from local authorities.
- Those arts organisations that get help from local authorities value the support they get. In some cases such support is crucial to survival of the organisation – this is especially true where premises are being provided by the council at reduced or peppercorn rents.
- It is clear that many arts organisations find it hard to navigate the changing structures of councils. Their contacts with the council tend to be intermittent, and they struggle to know who to approach, especially if a previous contact has left. Those who do succeed in navigating their way through report that having a personal contact is very helpful.
- Another quirk of the London arts scene is the different approaches adopted by each council, reflecting political and demographic differences. Internal structures also differ from one to another and there is little co-ordination of, say, cultural strategies even between neighbouring authorities. Some of the new bi- and tri-borough

services being pioneered by Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham may help to address such problems, if adopted more widely.

- Pressures on land use in London are a concern. London's booming population and the associated growth in demand for services such as education and health is generating ever greater demand for land. The arts sector has often relied on subsidised or cheap spaces to plan, rehearse, exhibit or perform in – these are getting increasingly hard to find.

## Regeneration/economic development

Evidence from other sources suggests that regeneration/economic development is seen as the primary motivation for local authorities to support the arts. Commissioning appears to have had little effect on arts and culture organisations in this field, so far at least. Instead, those who succeed do so because of their skill in working across council departments, such as regeneration, transport and logistics. Arguably, this will tend to favour larger, more experienced organisations.

The opportunities for arts and culture in the new Community Infrastructure Levy were not widely understood, and might be an area where further advice and guidance, either from councils or knowledgeable third parties, would be helpful.

## Health and wellbeing

The health and wellbeing agenda was rated by local authorities as the second-most important avenue through which arts and culture organisations can make a difference. Commissioning is already starting to have an effect here, and is seen by many arts organisations which work in the health and social care fields as offering great potential. While such projects are still relatively new, those who have succeeded in securing commissions report generally positive experiences – their artistic practice has not been distorted by the demands of the process. Nevertheless, only a minority of organisations have been commissioned to deliver work to date, and some of those who haven't are still intimidated by the apparent complexity of the process.

## Facing the future

Arts and cultural organisations recognise the difficult funding landscape councils face (and will continue to face), and there is an acceptance that things will not stand still. A number of the arts organisations see opportunities in the new landscape, and are already adapting their business models as a result.

The majority, however, are still feeling their way into this new world. The organisational changes made by many councils in response to budget cuts have left many arts organisations struggling to keep up with changes in council personnel and structures. The importance of having personal contacts at a council is widely recognised, yet reductions in council staff mean that arts and culture officers (if they still exist in a council) are under ever greater pressure, and are harder to get hold of. Some organisations are already somewhat wary of trying to engage with councils on the grounds of the time and effort involved – these changes are adding to those worries.

There is also concern that the changing landscape tends to favour larger, more well-established arts organisations. Council staff have less time to seek out and encourage newer and smaller organisations. A few organisations thought that such pressures were making councils less willing to try different things in culture. Again, this attitude may favour working with more established organisations.

Nevertheless, arts and culture organisations, of whatever type, often share similar goals to councils, and have much to contribute to the achieving of council agendas, especially if they are better able to master the language of social outcomes in explaining what they do. The following recommendations suggest some ways in which local authorities might be able to work with the cultural sector to help it realise its potential.

## Recommendations

The great majority of respondents to this research are realistic about the pressures under which councils operate. In this climate they felt that councils could usefully offer help in the following areas:

- networking and brokerage – arts organisations welcome such opportunities, especially when they offer the chance to meet potential funders or commissioners of work, either from other departments of the councils or outside bodies. These opportunities also need to be extended beyond the ‘usual suspects’ to newer or smaller arts organisations
- publicity – many arts organisations would also welcome councils’ help in raising awareness of local arts events and activities, especially to new audiences
- information sessions – arts bodies would like to know more about councils’ approaches to, for example, commissioning of the Community Infrastructure Levy. There may be a case for councils to host information sessions on such subjects for the sector
- websites – some council websites give no information about who to contact to propose or find out about arts projects. Even very basic contact information – a named individual, a phone number or an email address – would be useful
- cross-council working – there are opportunities for arts officers to strengthen their work in partnership with other departments of the council, such as regeneration and planning, to benefit the arts. The sector realises that arts officers are under considerable pressure, but such links can unlock significant funding and other support
- access to subsidised or free workspace – this can be hugely beneficial to arts organisations, whether it be for exhibitions, rehearsals or administration. Councils need to be aware of opportunities stemming from under-used space in council buildings and ‘meanwhile’ or ‘pop-up’ uses of vacant property, and could offer support to the sector in negotiations with private landlords
- evidencing or evaluating projects – many respondents feel that the methods councils use do not fully capture the value of arts projects to the communities they work with. It may be worth exploring opportunities for co-ordinating or standardising evaluation methods, either with other councils (perhaps through umbrella bodies like London Councils) or with the Arts Council. This would both reduce the

administrative burden on arts and culture organisations and enable councils to understand the benefits of projects more easily.

It should be noted that many councils offer these services in some form or another already. However, the apparent lack of awareness of them suggests there is scope to increase the take-up of the support local authorities offer, especially around the 'soft' areas of information, networking and brokering, and advice. Building networks and connections is hugely important for arts organisations in the current climate, as it enriches the potential set of relationships and services they can draw on for support. Local authorities' efforts in this regard can therefore provide real benefits to the arts and cultural sector.

# 8. Appendix

BOP Consulting and London Councils would like to thank all those who took part in the focus groups or were interviewed as part of the research for this. Their names are listed below. We would also like to thank those who took the time to fill in the online survey run by GLA Intelligence.

## Participants and interviewees

- Marcel Baettig, Bow Arts
- Miranda Baxter, Dulwich Picture Gallery
- Michael Chandler, Cardboard Citizens
- Sarah Cole, artist and academic
- Pauline EtimUbah, Raw Material Music & Media
- Kathy Everett, Oily Cart
- Veronica Franklin Gould, Arts 4 Dementia
- Ju Gosling, Together! 2012
- Roger Hartley, Bureau of Silly Ideas
- Kate Harvey, Artichoke
- David Johnson, The Albany
- Jan Lennox, Watermans
- Edward Mackay, The Ministry of Stories
- Janett Plummer, Aspire Creativity
- Julia Ruppert, Collective Arts (Art and Soul)
- Vicky Tweedie, Spare Tyre Theatre
- Mark Vincent, Key Changes
- Julia Vogl, artist