

## **Creative Councils Update**

### **Purpose**

For discussion and direction.

### **Summary**

This report updates the Board on progress made by Monmouthshire County Council and Cornwall Council with their respective Creative Councils projects and raises discussion points from each project for consideration by members.

### **Recommendation**

Members are invited to comment on the project updates and to discuss points arising from the presentations to be made by Monmouthshire County Council and Cornwall Council.

### **Action**

Officers to reflect Members' suggestions in the design and delivery of future support to councils, communications and lobbying activity derived from the Creative Councils programme.

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## **Creative Councils Update**

### **Background**

1. The Creative Councils programme is a joint programme between NESTA and the LGA. As reported at previous meetings of the Improvement Board, the ambition is to work with a small group of creative, pioneering councils and their partners throughout England and Wales in developing, implementing and spreading transformational new approaches to meeting some of the biggest medium and long-term challenges facing communities and local services.

### **Programme Progress to date**

2. Six Creative Councils were selected to go forward under Phase 2 of the programme and are receiving financial and non-financial support to help them progress their work. Monmouthshire and Cornwall are attending to present their respective progress and to raise discussion points for consideration by members.
  - 2.1 Monmouthshire is implementing 'Your County Your Way', a cultural transformation programme within the council to listen and respond more creatively to the needs of its communities. Central to this approach is an internal training programme, the Intrapreneurship School, which seeks to introduce council employees to the concept of innovation and what it means for service delivery.
  - 2.2 Cornwall is implementing 'Shaped by Us', a technology platform and open innovation approach which makes it easier for local communities to put forward creative ideas to solve the county's biggest challenges, a number of which will be co-produced with the council.
3. Rotherham and Stoke are to attend a meeting of the Economy and Transport Board on a date to be confirmed.
  - 3.1 Rotherham are developing 'Rotherham Ready', a council-backed social enterprise that works with the teachers of students aged 4-19 to engage them and their schools in the development of an enterprise-based curriculum, ensuring young people have skills relevant for the future.
  - 3.2 Stoke are developing their goal to become an energy sufficient 'Great Working City', pushing the boundaries of energy regulation and localism by moving towards local ownership of energy supply and re-imagining the role of the council as a strategic broker of resources.

4. Derbyshire are to attend Children and Young People Board on 21 January.
  - 4.1 Derbyshire are developing 'Uni-fi' a bespoke package of support aimed at developing aspiration amongst young people in care. This will include a guaranteed entitlement to financial support on leaving care to be spent on the pursuit of self-selected goals, which might include further education or training.
5. Wigan are to attend a meeting of the Community and Well-Being Board on a date to be confirmed.
  - 5.1 Wigan are creating a new economic model for social care to meet their service and financial challenges, by harnessing underutilised and untapped resources within the local community through volunteering and the development of micro-enterprises.

#### **Progress by Cornwall and Monmouthshire**

6. Cllr Bob Greenland, (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Modernisation and Enterprise) and Kellie Beirne, (Chief Officer for Regeneration and Culture) will present Monmouthshire's 'Your County, Your Way' project.
7. Cllr Alec Robertson, Leader of the Council and Paul Masters, Assistant Chief Executive will present Cornwall's 'Shaped by Us' project.
8. Presentations from both councils will cover their respective progress and will raise discussion points to be considered by members, in particular any asks of the LGA in supporting the resolution of any identified issues or barriers. Further details of Cornwall's project are included in **Appendix A** and that of Monmouthshire is included in **Appendix B**.

#### **Conclusion**

9. This is an exciting and interesting programme that offers many lessons for the local government sector in how best to innovate.

**Appendix A - Cornwall Council – ‘Shaped.By.Us**

1. Shaped.By.Us was established in 2012 by the Council with the support of the LGA and NESTA under the Creative Councils programme. Shaped.By.Us is a web portal that is designed to encourage communities to come up with new ways of delivering services in their immediate locality. The Council is actively supporting the concept by working in partnership with local communities to overcome current and future challenges.
2. The concept of Shaped.By.Us is based on people listing a challenge or problem that they need assistance with under the following themes:
  - Homes & Neighbourhoods;
  - Public Services;
  - Environment & Infrastructure;
  - Education & Skills;
  - Work & Economy;
  - Health & Care; and
  - Cross Themed
3. In addition, there are a range of over 50 tags (sub-themes) e.g. sports, health, energy saving, that users can attach challenges to.
4. Visitors to the website can search for challenges by either theme, tag or geographical area (based on Localism area). The aim is for a solution to the challenge to be identified, this can be achieved in various ways, namely:
  - Organic growth of ideas, via increased visibility of your challenge as ‘critical mass’ of following increases as more people visit the website. This can then result in on and off-line support to overcome a challenge (in the form of events, activities, petitions etc);
  - Generation of sponsorship (monetary or ‘in-kind’) to deliver an idea to overcome a challenge. One example of this could be for a community and the council to work together in partnership to realise economies of scale and generate bulk savings e.g. implementation of a community green energy scheme.
5. The challenge the Council (and the rest of the public sector) is facing is to find better ways of delivering local public services for significantly less, as budgets are shrinking. This scenario makes the task of improvement significantly more difficult to implement.
6. Our experience at Cornwall Council is that by developing innovative schemes such as Shaped.By.Us, in partnership with Creative Councils, has positively energised our teams in these difficult times to work in partnership with our local communities to overcome the challenges that face us. As a result of our experiences so far, we have identified the following recommendations around what has worked so far and also what has not.

**7. Keep it simple and do it now**

In terms of implementing innovative solutions, it is best to be practical and deliver methods for sharing ideas as quickly as possible. We have called this approach 'Thinking Room' – where we create time and space to think and thus share ideas to generate new solutions to problems. We have found this to be an effective way of channelling energy and ideas to create optimal solutions, rather than jumping into radical new solutions - which although well intentioned may not be effectively delivered due to insufficient planning.

8. This approach flows from our work with the Design Council, through Dott Cornwall to bring together local communities and world-class designers to work on projects that improve how we live, work and play. It is also based on best practice from both the public and private sectors, where the two way flow of information between management and the floor has often resulted in innovative solutions to long-standing problems.

**9. Turn conventional wisdom on its head**

By turning things on their head you can get a new perspective. For example, it is commonly accepted that to solve a problem, we need to target additional resources to overcome the particular challenge. However, in the current economic climate, this approach is often not practical. A lack of investment can then lead to much greater propagation and sharing of ideas. This capability is probably always with us but it is probably the lack of organisational infrastructure allowing us to 'channel' our ideas and allow them to be transformed into positive solutions.

10. It is our view that the Shaped.By.Us portal will fill exactly this void and act as a hub for people to share problems and generate solutions to overcome them.

**11. Don't set up an innovation unit**

We believe it is not a good idea to set up a team of specialist innovators. This can lead to innovators outside of the specialist group feeling marginalised and possibly less integration of novel ideas across organisational boundaries.

12. Previous organisational structures have been based around centralising specialist expertise in one place. This approach has often worked well but not necessarily in a prompt manner. To be successful we recognise that a culture of innovation within the Council needs to be created, so we can take a leadership role and work as skilled equals in innovation with community partners, partner contractors and suppliers. This should then enable solutions to problems to be cultivated in a rapid manner, as befits the challenging environment we now find ourselves in.

**13. Don't invest in innovation, invest in fresh thinking**

Rather than focus our attention on the final innovative solution, it is more important to focus on the organisational and social culture that has facilitated the development of the innovation. It is easy to generate ideas; however it is much harder making them happen unless the organisation's culture supports the change as part of its everyday

business. It is vital that this culture is extended to allow the Council to work effectively with our community partners to make good ideas happen.

**14. Common sense, honesty and passion are critical ingredients**

We believe that all Council staff should be encouraged to be innovative where appropriate, in their day to day duties. Fresh thinking and appropriate risk taking by staff can enable both transition to be realised and an enhanced level of satisfaction for our customers and partners. In the future we will need staff that can be creative thinkers, willing to be bold and take responsibility for making change happen.

**15. Broaden your horizons, seek diverse viewpoints and build alliances**

We are extremely fortunate to live in a networked age. Networks support like-mindedness but also encourage experimentation and diversity regardless of boundaries – the Creative Councils programme is an excellent example of this.

16. We believe that we will become much better at understanding the problems our communities and service-users face, by providing a hub which brings all of these parties together and enables innovation to be devolved and shared.

17. By developing portals such as Thinking Room and Shaped by Us, we have created platforms for innovation that are open to all and thus enable us to build alliances and broaden our horizons so that ultimately we can make Cornwall one of the best places in the world to live work and play.

## Appendix B - Monmouthshire County Council - 'Your County, Your Way'

1. *The problem.*

As society has evolved so demand has increased for 24-7, accessible and personalised services which they, as users, can help shape and influence. Often however, where there is a combination of hierarchical structures and risk-averse culture it may result in difficulties to adapt at a pace to fulfil such expectations of 21st century public services. Energy is often internally focussed with an assumption that every service user wants or needs the same services with a pre-occupation of *how* to get things done rather than with *what* gets done. This can result in a dispiriting and frustrating existence for both service users and providers where often the services fail to transform people's lives.

2. *The solution.*

In Monmouthshire, we recognise the onus is on us to make the first move and to narrow the gap between our council and community. To improve our relevance and vitality to our community, we are trying to create an organisational culture that institutionalises innovation, supports flexibility, responsiveness and networks and enables us to build a meaningful connection with all communities, so we can better understand their needs and priorities. Cultural transformation is at the heart of our programme because we recognise the problem cannot be tackled with a service change or improvement. Our programme seeks to tackle the root cause of the problem and not just the symptoms, making it inherently replicable and repeatable.

3. We are changing our internal system to ensure communities can access and shape their county on their terms, because re-positioning our organisation as an agent for change on things that matter today, will prepare our organisation to be relevant in responding to the things we can realistically foresee as being important tomorrow. This means unleashing the intrinsic motivation of our people and creating a permissive environment focussed on enabling delivery of outstanding outcomes and 'new ends'. We believe that building a light and permeable organisation that has torn down the walls between 'in' and 'out' and makes success more likely to happen at the required pace and scale.

4. We have therefore developed 'new means' which are helping to transform the way we work. We call these our **5 positive interventions** and they are:

- **+Creating an agile and networked organisation** that sees the right people working on the right things at the right time. To help do all staff have access to social media in order to create a fully agile working environment and we have adopted the Open Government Licence;
- **+Promoting the spread of systems thinking and doing** because our experience tells us operating in silos does not deliver and things work best when we understand whole-systems linkages. We have done this through programmes

of cross-cutting reviews which instead of focussing around departments or themes, focus on place;

- **+Establishing a new Intrapreneurship School** that provides mixed cohorts of officers with the innovation tools, techniques and training to engage in developing the creative solutions needed to transform key areas of our business;
- **+Encouraging our people to 'go find, come play'** and seek out global best practice in order to develop next practice through developing new networks, participating in trade missions and working more collaboratively; and,
- **+Establishing effective listening tools** such as 'open space technology' that allow us to take part in more meaningful community-led engagement

5. *The evidence*

The principal evidence-base underpinning our project is the voice of our communities. We have, therefore, developed our programme from evidence accumulated through our learning and have backed it up with intelligence from other public sector organisations where their experience resonates with ours.

6. We are getting positive feedback from those officers who have been encouraged to adopt this new way of working and there are strong signs that the 'new means' are creating the conditions in which outstanding outcomes can be consistently and repeatedly delivered. Tangible results include;
- MonmouthpediA, a world first in partnership with the Wikimedia Foundation;
  - Our wholly owned £3m community interest company CMC<sup>2</sup> focussed on working with partners and places to create a new value proposition around green and digital economies;
  - Our eco-farm joint venture with celebrity Kate Humble;
  - Technology-rich learning programmes in our schools which see our children learn with IPADS not chalkboards and;
  - Our Respite Opportunities Service co-designed with scheme residents.
7. Such new tools are enabling us to engage service users much more deeply with our work and co-deliver the outcomes that matter most to them.
8. Our work so far demonstrates that the 'new means' are about giving our staff both space and permission to do better things rather than just continuing to do things better. Improvement is a given - but not enough. Our journey tells us that testing, developing and implementing the positive interventions are helping us to get into and occupy the space between local government and society, enabling us to work more effectively with our community to establish shared purpose.
9. *Making the links*
- The simple connection we have drawn is that when you apply one or more of the +positive interventions ('new means') to a manifestation of the problem, it provides staff with the permission; tools and desire to deliver the best possible outcomes.



These 'new ends' will, over time, see us closing the gap between Council and community so that we travel a parallel path and bring about the gradual restoration of our relevance and viability to them.

*10. Economic and social business case*

The potential to scale and replicate our programme is what makes our business case so compelling and robust. We believe:

- The scale of the problem is vast and therefore our model can apply widely in all public service contexts;
- The costs associated with projects, plans and schemes that are not built upon the 'new means' to tackle the fundamental underlying problem, will always be at best partially abortive and waste will continually feature;
- Working closely with community to design and deliver services that really make a difference, helps us to frame challenges in new ways and therefore unlock new resources and income generation opportunities;
- We have begun to redefine 'human resources' as all the people who work with us to deliver value – not just the people on our payroll; and,
- Creating a permissive environment in which people are free to have a go means they engage more deeply with their work. They bring their whole self to the task.

11. Fundamentally changing the way in which we collectively create value requires a new way of measuring the results and impact we generate. Our work as the first Council to test its progress within a new 'Social Exchange Index' led by the Big Society Network, alongside industry names in the private and third sector, will enable us to openly measure for the first time, how social our social impact really is. As importantly, we will disclose it as one number which will enable our progress over time to be totally transparent. We believe that this will improve our validity and vibrancy - making us more accountable for the work we do.

*12. Implementation*

We believe we are already seeing strong signs that the positive interventions are capable of delivering repeatable and sustained success. However, our implementation plan is not predicated on just doing more of the same. We understand that as we scale up, we will uncover different challenges and this will undoubtedly call for different tools and techniques. Replicability is at the heart of our business case and so we want the opportunity to develop and codify the range of materials and grow our 'cookbook', so it can readily apply in a range of public service contexts. We also believe there are ways to grow our knowledge of what works by engaging with other thinking around things like community engagement because a multiplicity of methods will increase our chances of widespread success.

13. Our programme is one of innovation insurgency. The clear sense of purpose that 'Your County, Your Way' provides means that our staff does not need to check in and seek permission - they just get on and do better things. The new means and ends are all powerful contributors to our story. The real power comes when viewed as a whole

rather than in discrete parts because we are building out a story that makes sense over time. When you capture this thinking, this mind-set and desire to work meaningfully with community, into a programme of positive interventions, it explains why things are gaining traction.

14. For further information see [www.yc-yw.co.uk](http://www.yc-yw.co.uk)