

The future of local cultural decision making

An open policy development programme

Culture Commons



Summary

This paper sets out an overview of a new open policy design programme that Culture Commons will run in partnership with local and national partners over the next 12 months.

‘The future of local cultural decision making’ is led by Culture Commons, in partnership with local governments, creative and cultural sector representative bodies and researchers. The programme is part-funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. We are also working with a series of universities and research institutions from across the UK.

We’re delighted to invite you to join the programme as a founding partner to help us kick-start a structured dialogue about how places with different levels of control over policies associated with the creative and cultural sectors will affect the development of communities across the regions and nations and the UK.

As an increasingly salient policy area, we see many challenges and opportunities ahead. The partnership will help shape a suite of policy positions that could support the future flourishing of culture and creativity in different kinds of places.

About Culture Commons

Culture Commons is an independent and not-for-profit organisation specialising in bringing the creative and cultural sectors together with the research community to co-design policy and influence decision makers at the local, regional and national levels.

Since 2020, we’ve been having tangible impacts across a range of policy areas for our clients and partners, including improving the policy landscape for freelance, self-employed and atypical workers in DCMS subsectors; reframing economic models of culture-led regeneration to encompass social and community impacts; and supporting cities to develop ground-breaking health and wellbeing strategies.

Our small but highly experienced team is made up of policy professionals, former political advisors and civil servants who have worked in local, national and international governments and parliaments, as well as the creative and cultural sectors.

You can find more about us at www.culturecommons.uk

Programme Objectives

This 12-month open policy development programme will see us convene a ‘coalition of the willing’, drawing in partners from across local, regional and national governments, academia, arm’s length bodies and key sector organisations and networks to:

- Identify the challenges and opportunities that increased decision making responsibilities for local government might mean for the creative and cultural life of different places across the UK;
- Arrive at a new shared language to better articulate how the creative, cultural and heritage sectors interact with, and can support, local place-based development in a new policy landscape;
- Co-design a suite of initial policy positions that could serve to support a more equitable and sustainable flourishing of creative and cultural activities in all parts of the UK.

The Outputs

As a founding partner, we anticipate that by the end of the 12-month programme, you will have:

- Been part of a first of its kind dialogue exploring the impacts of increased local government decision making through the lens of the UK's creative and cultural ecosystem alongside different tiers of government, the creative and cultural sectors and academia
- Produced a co-owned suite of innovative policy positions for your internal and external advocacy plans, strategies and programmes
- Shaped a new shared language around the future of place-based policy and 'devolution'
- Spotlighted your own best practice and innovation locally on the national stage
- Accessed high quality knowledge exchange and expert thinking from leading thinkers and practitioners across four inter-related themes including:
 - local decision making
 - models of culture-led regeneration
 - funding mechanisms and approaches
 - best practice for public engagement
- Supported the smaller organisations and freelance, self-employed, and atypical workers within the creative and cultural sectors to engage in a national policy making process

Rationale

There is a large body of evidence that demonstrates how many infrastructures and outcomes associated with the creative, cultural and heritage sectors are: unevenly distributed across and within the regions and nations of the UK; are less available to certain groups in society; and that communities do not have a meaningful say on how they are being developed.

All major political parties at the UK level have set out several new policy positions in recent months that centre the creative and cultural sectors in economic growth strategies. This has come alongside increased promises from the UK Government, leading UK opposition parties and the devolved administrations to offer further and deeper decision-making powers to local governments.

With the need for less decentralised decision making now widely accepted as a policy imperative across the UK, we propose that attention must now turn to how new local governance models might be harnessed to have the best possible outcomes for the creative and cultural sectors. If policies are not designed strategically and equitably with appropriate oversight mechanisms, we risk several direct and indirect impacts on the creative and cultural sectors which could exacerbate geographical inequalities and result in a further fragmentation in growth between the regions and nations.

Organisations such as The Institute for Government and The Bennett Institute, University of Cambridge have long investigated the distribution of power to local areas as a phenomenon;

however, the creative and cultural sectors, and different tiers of local government at different stages in the journey, have not yet come together to explore what this might mean from a creative and cultural ecosystem perspective. As things stand, there has been no clear articulation of the kind of local policies, strategies or funding profiles that work, or could work, well for the creative and cultural sectors and local authorities with different kinds of responsibilities and controls.

Given the current political context and fiscal environment, we believe that now is the moment for experts and practitioners to come together to inform future policy thinking in this policy area. We believe that there is an elevated risk that without a robust evidence base drawing on the practical insights of those implementing policies at the local level, new models to offer increased local control over cultural policy and spending decisions could be ill-conceived and poorly deployed. We also know that stakeholders in devolved administrations and combined authorities can provide invaluable insights into how devolution is already playing a role in shaping creative and cultural policies locally.

We have concluded that a new programme of collaborative dialogue and deliberative policy thinking is now needed to unpack the opportunities and risks that the creative and cultural sectors face in 2023 and put forward possible ways in which gaps in central government and opposition party proposals might be narrowed.

Proposed themes

Recognising the clear political direction of travel set out by each of the major political parties in recent months, as well as key research, projects and case studies from leading partners with the sectors, we have identified four possible and interrelated thematic areas that programme partners could meaningfully help shape proposals in:

Proposed policy theme	Indicative considerations
Local decision making	<p>We will consider some of the practical implications and mechanics behind the increasing control over policy, programme and spend that local areas will have over the creative, cultural and heritage sectors.</p> <p>We'll explore such questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What new powers relevant to the creative, cultural and heritage sectors might best be given (or 'devolved') to which tiers of local government? • How do we ensure an accountable, strategic and equitable approach to cultural policymaking in an increasingly local policy context? • What can we learn from the 'trailblazer' combined authority devolution deals in England and the three devolved nations of the UK?

<p>Culture-led regeneration</p>	<p>Within the context of an increasing interest in the role of the creative, cultural and heritage sectors in local regeneration approaches, we will explore the best models and approaches across the UK.</p> <p>We'll be posing questions like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which existing models of ‘culture-led regeneration’ work best in which types of places? • How might local and national governments work together to grow more sustainable and inclusive creative ecosystems while benefitting the local communities they are part of? • How might local leaders strategically and sustainably grow creative networks that irrigate a wider geographical area? • Could new inter-regional bodies/governance arrangements help address the disparities in the creative and cultural sectors and local economies?
<p>Local Cultural Funding</p>	<p>Drawing on progressive funding approaches that are designed to redress inequalities in regional investment (for example, see the ACE's 'Priority Places' methodology), we'll explore the future of funding for culture in the context of the previous two themes.</p> <p>Amongst other things, we'll consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can existing funding mechanisms be harmonised to better cater to different types of places? • How might new funding mechanisms help address 'application fatigue' and unnecessary rivalry between places and regions? • How are grant-giving and arm's length bodies responding to increased local decision making, and how might local authorities work with them during this period of considerable change? • What might further local fiscal control for culture look like in the future?
<p>Local Voice</p>	<p>With all major political parties committing to giving more decision-making powers closer to communities, we intend to explore case studies of pioneering co-design.</p> <p>We'll explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which areas are already innovating when it comes to listening to the needs of local citizens? • What additional mechanisms at the local level could help members of the public to make their voices heard on the

	<p>development of the creative and cultural life of their area?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might citizens views be meaningfully translated into action by local decision makers? • What national level policies and funding mechanisms might be needed to support sustainable local decision-making processes? • How can local areas tackle systemic issues of exclusion under-representation within the creative and cultural sectors using such approaches?
--	--

Note: one of the first tasks of the project partners will be to refine and set the starting themes the programme will work to. In line with open policy development principles, we nonetheless anticipate an iterative approach which will see an ongoing enhancement of the themes as the programme progresses and new findings or areas of enquiry arise.

Project Partners

The creative and cultural sectors consist of a rich tapestry of subsectors and stakeholders, each acting in unique ways with specific powers and responsibilities operating at different levels. Therefore, we believe that no one organisation can explore the themes we have identified above by working alone. This is why Culture Commons have proposed to convene an open policy development programme using a collaborative partnership model.

Throughout Q3 2023, Culture Commons has been reaching out to potential partners across the UK from within our existing networks. In addition, we have activated wider networks of trusted partners and national umbrella bodies and made several public facing invitations for expressions of interest, to broaden the reach.

We have successfully confirmed several local government and representative body partners for the programme already, as well as secured grant funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Arts Council England. In addition, we have confirmed several leading university and research partners to ensure our work is always evidence-led.

We are now in advanced discussions with local and combined authorities, sector support organisations and arm's length bodies in different parts of the UK who we hope will join the programme too.

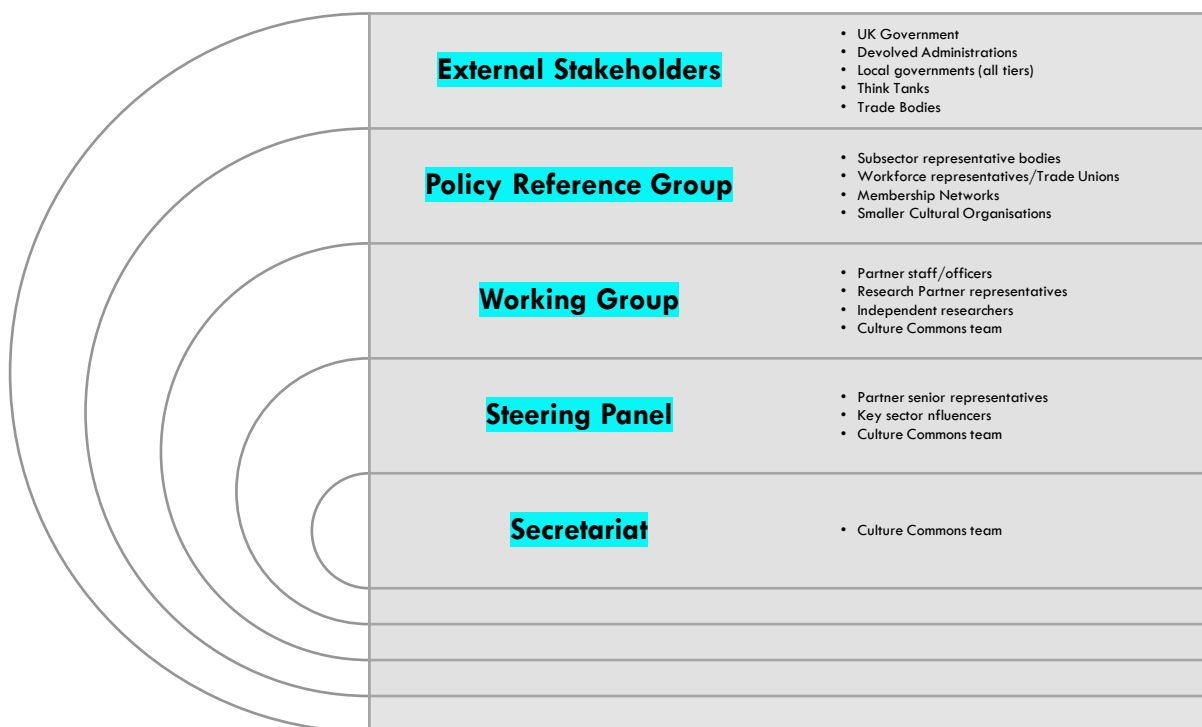
Further, we are exploring strategic partnerships with sector bodies and networks who can help us to ensure voices from the creative and cultural sectors, who are often excluded from policy making processes, are at the table along the way.

By building a coalition of stakeholders across different institutions and organisations responsible for the growth and flourishing of the UK's creative and cultural sector's, we'll be well-placed to draw together expertise from across the research community, the creative and the cultural sectors and local and national governments to address the policy and operational delivery questions that our sectors face.

Working in an iterative and reflexive partnership model will also aid us in any advocacy efforts that may follow the policy design programme (see the 'Impact' section below). To land policy positions, we must demonstrate to central policy makers that we have not only formed evidence-based proposals with a clear rationale, but that the ideas are widely welcomed by the key stakeholders who stand to benefit from them.

Along the way, we must consider the potential barriers and perceived risks associated with the policy positions we put forward to decision makers, recognising the political constraints placed on them as the 2024 General Election nears; this is a central component of the kind of work we do at Culture Commons, distinguishing us from other research and policy development organisations.

Governance



Note: Party political politicians will not be invited to participate in 12-month policy development programme itself.

Steering Panel

The policy co-design process will be guided by a Steering Panel consisting of senior officers from each of the contributing partners, as well as 'observers' from key stakeholder groups across policy, the creative and cultural sectors and academia.

We anticipate that Steering Panel members will be influential and command the attention of policy makers across a variety of sectors and help put a public face to the programme within their own areas and networks.

The Steering Panel will agree the themes at the start of the programme (the 'Terms of Reference') and refine them in an iterative way as the programme progresses, directing a Working Group through research and structured dialogue work as necessary.

The Steering Panel will ultimately hold collective responsibility for any final policy positions that emanate from the programme and sign off on any report/publication that is intended to be placed in the public domain.

All intellectual property (IP) created during the programme will be co-owned equally by each of the partners and placed in the public domain via a Creative Commons licence.

Working Group

The Steering Panel will be informed by a Working Group, consisting of policy experts, practitioners, researchers and members of the Culture Commons team, and will explore each of the policy themes identified in more detail.

The Working Group will be where our Research Partners come into their own: expert speakers and contributors will be invited along to the Working Group sessions to ensure discussions are benefitting from the most up to date knowledge and experience.

The Working Group will be convened semi-regularly across the 12-month period to explore pre-briefed subjects consistent with the themes of the programme, as well as help identify areas where additional secondary research might be required to ensure the policy conversation is appropriately evidence-informed.

The Working Group may wish to present briefing papers, policy proposals or other materials to the Steering Panel for consideration, supported by the Culture Commons team.

Secretariat

Culture Commons will act as the project Secretariat to the Steering Panel and Working Groups over the 12-month period, guiding all the partners through the process from start to finish, as well as leading on the translation of findings into policy proposals for consideration.

We'll take partners through some of our tried and tested policy co-design processes and make our in-house research and policy team members available to the Steering Panel and Working Group too. We will table papers, briefing notes, agenda and decision-making trackers ahead of each session.

Culture Commons will also manage the programme budget, commission the research needed by the Working Group and/or Steering Panel, and hold and manage contracts, project staff and Partnership Agreements.

Culture Commons will lead on external strategic engagements on behalf of the partners, including public affairs, policy communication and advocacy activities as necessary.

The Offer

In joining the programme, you will work with Culture Commons' team of experienced policy professionals and a diverse range of programme partners over a structured 12-month period.

You will be at the table for a first of its kind conversation exploring the impact of increased local government decision making through the lens of the UK's creative and cultural ecosystem.

We will ensure that you are able to focus on specific and clear policy areas and/or research tasks that fit with your own area of expertise and working knowledge. We will also open up moments for knowledge exchange that can help inform your current and future work.

As a partner, we ask that you/your organisation work collaboratively throughout the programme to:

- Share any existing research, insights and views on the policy areas being explored where you can;
- Respond to other partners research, insights and views with care and sensitivity, recognising that different stakeholders may have different starting points and needs;
- Share any findings and/or policy positions emanating from the programme with your sector and associated networks to maximise influence and impact.

Culture Commons will work with you/your organisation to spotlight your previous relevant work within the programme and identify how any programme outputs might dovetail with policy, research and reputational objectives you may have in your own area, organisation or research disciplines.

Drawing on the [core principles of 'open policy making'](#) and recognising time and resource constraints our partners are likely to face, we propose to provide partners with several ways to contribute to the 12-month policy dialogue that go beyond standard meetings. We will facilitate digital processes to help that help keep online meetings to a minimum and only assemble the Steering Panel for key decision-making moments in the project timeline. Culture Commons will also pick up much of the legwork associated with planning and coordinating research activities and translating findings from meetings into policy proposals for consideration by the Steering Panel.

Once we've formalised programme partnerships and confirmed Steering Panel members, we'll be in touch to collectively agree the exact schedule of meetings and the timeline for the programme, clearly detailing the moments we'd require input from you.

The Impact

The programme will culminate in a publication outlining the policy positions we want to collectively communicate to key decision makers. The programme will therefore help you to reach and influence decision makers involved in influencing legislative agendas.

Following the programme, Culture Commons will take up a period of advocacy, designed to ensure the outputs are received by key stakeholders and the creative and cultural sectors. As co-owned work, all partners will also be free to use the outputs to support their own advocacy activities internally or externally and locally or nationally under a Creative Commons license.

Furthermore, Culture Commons will identify opportunities in the policy calendar to embed any agreed policy positions into policy making processes by utilising existing networks, as well as the networks of our partners, to share the programme's emerging findings and recommendations.

Our ambitions are to:

- Amplify agreed policy positions and the principles behind them with key creative and cultural stakeholders beyond the partnership - promoting consensus, new ways of working, shared language and relational capacity between sector stakeholders;
- Identify and secure opportunities to inform the design of future policy in UK Government departments after the 2024 General Election on behalf of the partnership;
- Instigate new research programmes and partnerships to fill in any gaps in understanding identified throughout the programmes;
- Garner recognition and publicity for the programme and policy positions from key sector-relevant networks, policy institutes and research organisations (including PEC, RSA, AHRC)

Culture Commons will maintain a ‘policy impact tracker’ which will be made available to all programme partners.

For local government officers considering this proposal, we believe that this is a moment for your organisation to come together with others around the UK to help shape future policy at the national level in a way that works for all, ensuring that policy commitments to local culture in your area fit for purpose now and into the future.

For sector representatives considering this proposal, we believe that now is the time to be around the table with the decision makers in local government who will hold more power and responsibilities for culture and creativity in future to co-design policies that work for your subsectors.

For researchers, universities and think tanks considering this proposal, we hope you feel the programme offers an exciting opportunity for you and your organisation to deploy existing and ongoing research in a live policy context, as well as identify new lines of enquiry for future research activities.

Timeline

Our draft programme activity timeline follows a basic sequence:

Q3 2023	Gather strategic partners; secure funding; design a framework of the open policy development programme.
Q4 2023	Convene preliminary meetings with a Steering Panel; identify individuals to join the Working Group; assign preliminary research tasks.
Q4 2023 – Q3 2024	Convene Working Group sessions; invite experts and researchers to present to the Working Group and Steering Panel meetings; commission secondary research tasks.
Q2 2023	Outreach to key policy teams and decision makers to seed policy direction and update on emerging findings; begin stakeholder mapping for future policymaker engagement activities; convene Policy Reference Group sessions.

Q2 2024	Begin seeking agreement on final policy positions from the Steering Panel; sense check with Policy Reference Group.
Q3 2024	Publish a final suite of findings and policy proposals; consider a launch event with partners.
Q4 2024 onwards	Conclude programme; Culture Commons to begin advocacy activities to maximise impact of policy positions.

Note: this proposed timeline will be refined and agreed at the first Steering Panel meeting in Q4 2023. A more granular timeline will be tabled in advance of the first Steering Panel session.

The Ask

Recognising that the benefits that would accrue from the policy that the partnership will design together, we propose that each partner contributes equally to the programme; this will ensure that the programme is appropriately sustained through to completion and that the entire process will be underpinned by a sense of equity and cooperation.

Culture Commons has a minimum 'to-start' target of £100k, at which point we can proceed with confidence to finish the design and delivery stage of the programme, including the production of the final policy paper ready for publication.

In summary, we ask that:

- **local government partners contribute £15k**
- **grant giving partners and arm's length bodies contribute £30k**
- **research community partners contribute a package of cash and in-kind research capacity equivalent to at least £15k**

In addition to the above, all contributing partners will be asked to provide:

- **one senior member of staff to sit on the programme Steering Panel**
- **staff/officers to attend a series of Working Group meetings ad hoc**