Introduction

Living Places is an alliance of public bodies, including the MLA, who believe everyone should benefit from the arts, sport, public space, heritage, museums, libraries and archives, the built environment and the creative industries, regardless of where they live.

The aim of Living Places is to ensure that all communities, particularly those experiencing housing-led growth and regeneration, can benefit from cultural and sporting opportunities.

Research objectives

The aim of the evaluation was to assess progress in the establishment of Living Places and the Priority Place Partnerships and present recommendations to inform the development of the Programme and the Priority Places. For further information on the programme structure, please, click on the following link: http://www.living-places.org.uk/about-living-places/.

Methodology

We commissioned an independent consultancy to undertake a three-phased approach:

Phase 1 Document review;
Phase 2 Consultations with partners;
Phase 3 Support visits and presentations to priority places and national partners.

1. Document review:
This comprised a review of Living places programme and priority place documentation to establish written progress in the establishment of the programme to date.

2. Consultations with partners:
The consultations involved a range of face to face consultations and telephone consultations (32 individuals), and an e-survey with members of the National Partner Group and Living Places Network partners from each Priority Place (56 individuals). This phase sought answers on a range of evaluation questions with particular view to assessing partnership effectiveness.

3. Support visits and presentation of final reports:
The support visits, carried out throughout October 09, aim to report back findings from the evaluation to individual key partners and stakeholders from each Priority Place.
Key Findings of the Year 1 Evaluation

1. Perceptions on aims and objectives of the living places programme

At national level many stakeholders view the programme as being about relationships across cultural agencies, how these agencies can work more closely together.

Therefore, there is a perceived need to better join up culture and sport with Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and other key central government departments, particularly Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG).

At place level, the programme is perceived to be about assisting host communities in delivering elements that constitute cultural infrastructure with an emphasis both on growth, and increasingly, regeneration.

At the Priority Place level, the programme is seen as a good mechanism to increase national visibility and profile with DCMS, CLG and the cultural agencies, with resulting networking benefits and opportunities to influence national and (to a lesser extent) regional cultural policy makers and agendas.

The surveyed programme aims were ranked in the following order of preference:

- First: To provide those people who are shaping communities with information, advice and support on the use of culture and sport to create better places.
- Second: To empower communities to make culture and sporting activity and infrastructure a part of their lives.
- Third: To align investment from the sporting and cultural sector with sustainable communities funding across organisational boundaries so it works harder for people.

2. About programme progress at national level

Living Places Programme represents an early and tangible example of DCMS and the cultural agencies working together in partnership.

Evidence suggests that achievements in Year 1 were more towards developing the partnership and positioning it appropriately to be able to influence future policy and strategy, and act as an advocate for culture and sport with relevant key (national) policy developers.

The findings show that stronger partnership ties could be of benefit to the future development of the programme:

- The engagement of CLG in Living Places is seen as critical, as it provides credibility and allows Living Places to influence wider stakeholders in local authorities in terms of planning and development as well as culture and sport.
- The Academy for Sustainable Communities/Homes and Communities Agency Academy (HCA) is seen as a key partner given the fit with housing growth and place shaping.
• DCMS could play a larger role in the future: there is a view amongst some key partners that in Year 1 DCMS did not wholly grasp the opportunity that Living Places provides the Department in terms of collaborative working and agenda setting across the cultural agencies.

3. About programme progress at Priority Place level
The programme establishment was assessed against the following criteria:

1. Strategy and Plan Development
• Survey evidence shows that two thirds of respondents stated that their Priority Place/Living Place Partnership did have a strategy in place. Of those that said there was a strategy in place, the vast majority were involved in the development of it.

• Those Priority Places that are nested with established place based partnerships (such as Corby, PUSH and Pennine Lancashire) have tended to assess current activity, strategies and plans and respond accordingly in their First Stage Offers.

• PUSH and Pennine Lancashire in particular benefit from being nested within, or well linked, to a well established regeneration partnership with a wider agenda that includes regeneration, growth and the development of Multi Area Agreements.

• Each of the three Thames Gateway areas are at different stages of development, which makes capturing and balancing existing strategy and activity much more problematic.

2. Partnership Effectiveness
• Survey evidence highlights that the majority of partners involved had worked together prior to Living Places in other structures, suggesting that in most cases the partnership working did not start from scratch but is built upon either previous partnership structures or pre-existing partnership arrangements.

• Evidence from Corby, Pennine Lancashire and PUSH suggested that Priority Places which are nested in pre-existing regeneration partnerships tended to have clearer leadership and partnership arrangements, benefitting from being part of a wider local agenda with established governance.

• In addition, the engagement of local authorities is seen as a critical element of partnership effectiveness. In particular, Corby, PUSH and the Thames Gateway areas of London and North Kent seem to benefit from the levels of direct engagement with local authorities, whereas despite good partnership arrangements and Multi Area Agreement input, Pennine Lancashire does not have such good levels of engagement.

3. Influencing Policy
• Priority Place Partnerships all value the opportunity that Living Places provides in terms of being able to access and influence policy makers in Government and with the Cultural Agencies at the national level. These benefits cascade directly to the local level, where cultural partners are able use Living Places visits by the
MLA Chief Executive in particular, as well as Ministerial Visits, to enable discussions at senior level with local authority chief executives and senior politicians about the role of culture in regeneration and growth.

Key examples of policy influence in Year 1 include:

- Inclusion of culture and sport in the MAAs for PUSH and Pennine Lancashire (although views vary as to how much this is a factor directly attributable to Living Places).
- Development of cultural strategies at the local authority level in North Kent, and development of a cultural policy by Thames Gateway London Development Company which has influenced planning policy and frameworks at the Borough level.

4. Evidence Base and Best Practice

- Survey evidence suggests that many Living Places partners felt that the Priority Place/Living Places Partnership had added to the evidence base to date. Looking forward, there is a notable expectation of a shift towards the sharing of existing research as opposed to commissioning new work.

- The impact of the studies commissioned by Corby, Pennine Lancashire and PUSH will be best assessed in Year 2 of the Programme, where this research has helped shape the development of the Second Stage Offer and where partners will be able to attribute decision making to specific research recommendations.

- In particular, the research recently commissioned by PUSH into the role of spatial planning in providing for cultural infrastructure has the potential to support the engagement of planners and the take up of the CSPT.

- The sharing of best practice is more challenging in Thames Gateway and the South West, where Living Places faces barriers of scale and transferability. Generally, the key barriers to identifying and sharing best practice relate to finding the best way to disseminate and communicate information to key audiences (especially planners, regeneration professionals and key local authority officers).

Key Issues and Recommendations

The following list briefly highlights key issues and recommendations emerging from this review:

**Nationally** there is a need to have more
- Consistent representation from CLG on the NPG;
- Effective HCA future engagement;

**Regionally** there is a view that
- Regional partnerships could form the basis of place shaping sub groups in the new regional arrangements;
At Priority place level

• It is important to ensure that all Priority Places have strong and effective links with relevant existing place based regeneration partnerships; and that
• Effective engaging with local government will be essential for Living Places in terms of influencing planning and development policy.

• Adequate resources need to be put in place to achieve adequate capacity in each Partnership for development to be realised.

• A clear articulation of the expected programme outcomes is needed.

• And addressing challenges with respect to
  o scale, due to being a region-wide or pan-regional Priority Place, or
  o structural and partnership circumstances such as the prevailing level of Pan Gateway working across agendas wider than Culture and Sport as in the case of Thames Gateway.

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