Explore with others

1. Leaving nobody behind

Evidence through a range of sources suggests that a large proportion of vulnerable people, people with long-term conditions and older people continue to remain uncertain about returning to community activity.

Supporting communities to respond to this is likely to require flexibility, innovation and greater resource.

Q. How can communities be supported to ensure that no person is left behind, as community activity provision begins to re-start and re-open?

darts is a participatory arts charity, delivering creative opportunities in Doncaster. darts deliver a diverse portfolio of opportunities, including the Sport England funded Dance On programme in Doncaster's most deprived communities. In summer 2021, darts telephoned 22 Dance On participants and asked them a series of questions:

- 11 said they would return, 5 said maybe and 6 said no
- Reasons for not returning: mobility issues, new injuries, finding alternative activities, other volunteering commitments, and apathy *"I'm 92 and don't feel up for it'"*
- Reasons for being unsure about returning were widely associated with a decline in physical health, unable to get to venue, other engagements and concerns about safety in the session. One participant has recently been diagnosed with dementia *"so things are up in the air"*

Insight from participant research in other community programmes highlights that there is a diverse range of individual circumstances that will affect the support they require:

"[I'm] feeling worried about seeing other people; I would only be worried in the sense that it would be like starting all over again and the first session is always hard. Once I'd been once or twice, I think I would be ok. Pre-booking could be a problem depending on how we needed to do it. If the instructions were clear I should be ok."

"I was wondering how many people would be expected at a face to face session? I know you'll take all the correct precautions, but I just need to reassure myself (I have only left the house once since March so anxiety leaving now is very high)."

"I miss it. I'm looking forward to getting back. I speak to other participants and they're really missing it. For some, especially with mobility issues, Creative Directions was the only thing they did."

"The doctors now send me a text 3 days before then 1 hour before my appointments. I think that would be a useful thing to do if you could send a text reminder - especially for the first couple of months while we get used to the new format for sessions."

"Afternoon sessions preferred because I'm struggling with sleep and an easy way to book into sessions with enough notice. I don't have the internet so I couldn't book online. I could do it over the landline, on a telephone call."

"I was used to the drop-in session. I'm not always able to make it every week as sometimes I'm ill. If I had to book a place, I could end up losing it. I'm only interested in drop-in sessions."

"I've got a bad memory, as long as I have information a phone call would be best, but a text or post would work. I'd also need to be able to sit down if I had to wait."

2. The value of skills, services and materials

Over the course of our pilot, we have undertaken a range of recruitment and procurement exercises for various specialist skills, knowledge and expertise. Our experiences are starting to identify that on the whole (with some exceptions) the financial value we are placing on this work does not align with the quality of skills, knowledge and expertise that we require to deliver our intended outcomes.

We feel that our experiences are teaching us something about our perceived value of skills, knowledge and expertise and that it may not currently be financially high enough within the market place.

Q. Are other pilots experiencing this? How can we collectively learn about the value of the skills, knowledge and expertise needed to do this work?

Q. Is there a conflict between financial value that we have traditionally put on this work, and what we should put on this work? Do we need to re-evaluate the financial value that we put on the fundamentals of this work?

Q. What does our learning about financial investment tell us about the challenges that other places may have, where this type of investment is not available to them?

3. Investment models and distribution of leadership

We have been testing different ways of using our investment to contribute towards our outcomes. This has included procurement routes for contracts of various sizes, traditional grant awards (including our Active Communities Grants) and participatory budgeting in collaboration with Well Doncaster (including a recent Dragon's Den-style event). How we use investment matters, just as much as what we decide to do with it.

Q. How do we decide the most appropriate way to distribute funds in order to achieve distributed leadership? How do we decide what method to use, and when?

Q. How might mixed-method investment models affect our 4th challenge (next slide)?

4. Leading a complex approach: negotiating a tension between momentum and speed

As 'business as usual' resumes, we are experiencing a tension between maintaining (and capitalising on) momentum but not rushing decisions, tasks and outputs. The team are feeling and experiencing 'pressure to progress' which is conflicting with the need to take time. This manifests itself in all areas of work, for example:

– Strategic work: can be slow, but need to keep momentum. Can take time.

– Communications campaign: pushing back on things that aren't right but taking more time in the process.

– Resident engagement: there is an expectation of faster progress and visible outputs, particularly when issues have been brought up historically. Having key members of the community onside can help with this.

Stacey's (2007) Complexity Matrix is helping us to understand how the tasks carried out by the GDM team vary across 'simple', 'complicated' and 'complex' environments. The Matrix identifies a 4th category of 'anarchy' which has been excluded for the purposes of this discussion.

Traditionally as a sector we have worked in the 'simple zone', where we are able to move quickly and need less time to deliver a number of different tasks/projects. Moving out of this zone is important to our work because we think the most impactful and sustainable systems change will happen when our tasks operate across all 3 zones.

We experience tension when trying to maintain and respond to the varying demands of pace and visibility across the three zones.

Complexity Matrix
(adapted from Stacey, 2007)

Far from agreement

Complex

Complicated

Simple

Complicated

Close to agreement

Close to certainty

Far from certainty

1. Simple
The GDM Team are leading and supporting a range of discrete projects, where delivery, outputs and outcomes are clearly defined, visible and quantifiable. Perceived as being 'quick' to establish and deliver and are generally led or strongly influenced by the GDM core team. Likely to meet traditional expectations. In this space we can work with pace and speed. We can work at pace and the LDP team can generate momentum

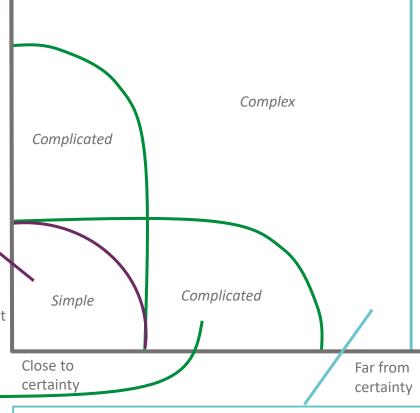E.g. delivering the Doncaster Future Parks Programme (DFPP)

2. Complicated
The GDM Team are aiming for integration and connectivity between the discrete projects. This starts to become complicated as there is increased likelihood of greater distance from agreement and certainty between project leads. Working in this space becomes less visible but more valuable and impactful. It includes more project leads where momentum across all of them is needed?

E.g. Connecting DFPP with Active Travel, Leisure Facilities, Active Communities projects

3. Complex
The GDM approach aims to be led by communities while also being flexible/responsive to connect with wider system outcomes such as those included in the Team Doncaster Borough Strategy. Tasks in this zone are largely invisible to residents. Momentum is dependent on many conflicting factors/stakeholders and is not solely in the gift of the GDM Team e.g. connecting and embedding the vision, practices, learning and other intended outcomes of DFPP with residents and across the priorities within the Borough strategy.