

The project structure

Dialogue and democracy were at the heart of the project.

The groundwork for the project structure was laid by Ruth Clarke, Community Learning Manager, whose experience with community engagement projects at Sutton House, and her London-wide work with the Trust informed the planning and the aspirations of the project. Her understanding that the creative projects needed to be supported by research and training were key to the successes of the work.

Chloë Bird, Project Manager and Rose Swindells, Project Officer then developed a programme of work that would provide relationships that would open up the maximum possibilities for working with and learning about local families. The complexity of the project was revealed in a document outlining the tasks necessary to make the project happen. This was produced in order to make more transparent the mechanics of the work, at a time when properties were taking on more responsibility themselves. Its clarity reflects the level of detail that the core team were aware of, and is a record of their excellent organisational capacity. It is important to note that this fine network of actions and communications resulted in projects and general offers that were characterised by fun and enjoyment. The complexity resulted in simplicity.

At the working groups property staff, school staff, artists, volunteers, family representatives and the London Voices

core team, met to look at both the practical and structural issues of the projects, but also to think about future plans, to share information about opportunities and challenges, and to make decisions about changes. In the working parties I attended I saw a lot of important business being dealt with, but I also saw the partners growing in understanding of each other's language and priorities, and I heard people articulate what they were learning from the project.

The steering group was well attended by interested and committed members, representing the Trust but also associated fields. It actively engaged with challenges and concerns, sharing expertise and taking on responsibilities.

An exit strategy was presented midway through the project, allowing time for discussion and adjustment, but with no scramble for forward planning at the last moment.

All the properties needed the capacity added by the London Voices core team. This came in the shape of time, expertise, mentoring and support, but also energy and drive. There was a level of tenacity in Chloë's approach which was needed in order to be able keep the momentum going, not just at the properties, but also at the regional and national level.