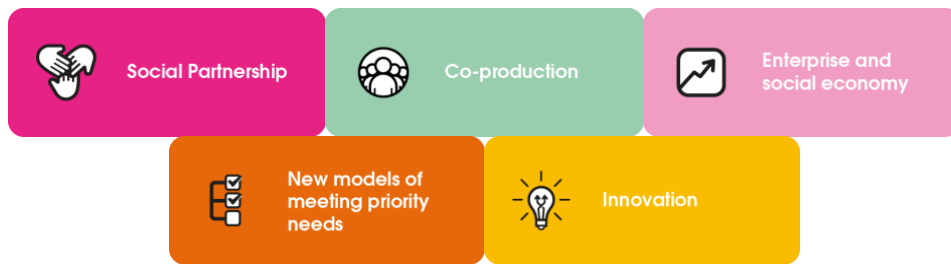




## COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING



Rochdale Council

### Taking a co-operative and community wealth building approach to culture

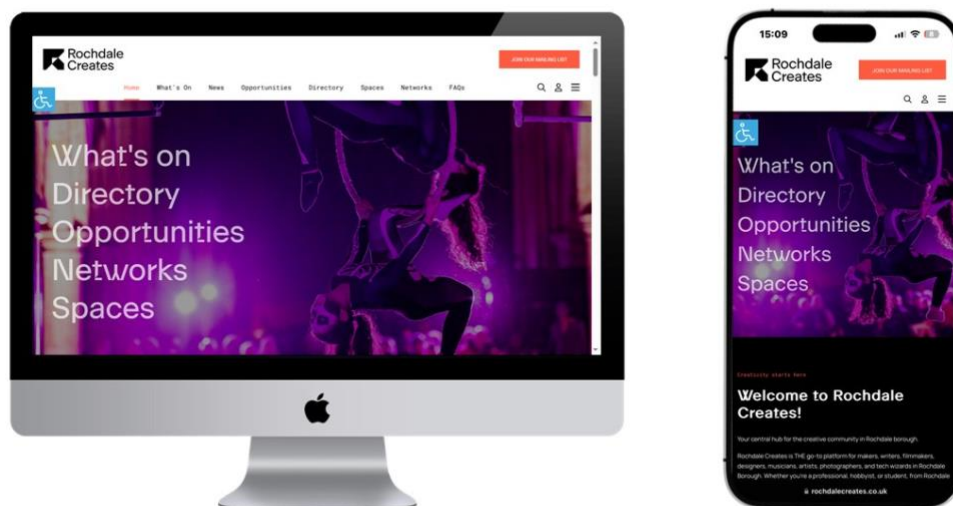
Rochdale is using co-operative and community wealth building approaches to plan, develop and deliver the infrastructure our culture sector and communities need. Our work is underpinned by our 'Cultural Compact', which brings together stakeholders from across the cultural sector and beyond to work co-operatively for the good of our borough, and is administered by Rochdale Development Agency. The Compact uses sociocratic principles to support collaboration around key priorities led by six working circles: children and young people; creative skills and business support; programming; audience development, community engagement; and communications. This case study shines a light on two key projects, which form part of a much larger programme of investment in the sector to deliver for our borough.

#### Digital infrastructure

One of the key priorities identified by our Compact was the need for a boroughwide creative sector website and regular mailout, needed to effectively communicate key opportunities including funding, training, and commissions – in addition to better showcasing our sectors combined offer to the wider public. The Compact's 'communications circle' brought together cultural and marketing specialists from different organisations to work in partnership with Rochdale Development Agency, and a local web developer to design and develop a website which would deliver the functionality creatives in the borough needed.

For the website to be effective, it was clear that it had to be run 'for the sector, by the sector', with content being provided directly by local cultural partners. Following a competitive process of Rochdale-based organisations, music sector development specialist 'Sound Roots' won the tender to deliver the contract to administer the website and newsletter. The contract enabled the organisation to employ an additional local Rochdale artist.

The website ( [www.rochdalecreates.co.uk](http://www.rochdalecreates.co.uk) ) and sector-facing monthly newsletter, launched in September 2024 and has already proved crucial in strengthening communications and access to opportunities across our borough. It is also set to serve as the digital home for Rochdale's year as 'Greater Manchester Town of Culture' in 2025-26. As such, it will provide the mechanism for partners from across the borough to access resources, be part of our Town of Culture programme, and communicate the exciting range of activities and programmes to the wider public.



Rochdale Creates Website

## Richard Street Studios

Our cultural strategies, underpinned by extensive engagement with our cultural sector, highlighted our borough had a significant lack of creative workspace. Like the website, we knew that for the studios to be operated in a way that was best attuned to the needs of the sector, the ideal scenario would be for the studios to be run by a local creative organisation with a complimentary focus on skills and talent development.

Different operating models and business plans were considered. This work highlighted that the best solution for giving agency was to use a property let model - whereby a local organisation would take on the tenancy of the building on a peppercorn rent, using income from studio spaces to cover overheads and as importantly to re-invest in programming using earned income for additional funding bids. In order to facilitate this an initial start-up grant was included alongside the property-led agreement to enable the studios to mobilise, appoint a studio manager, and run an initial training and development programme.

Following a review of potential tenants, local creative organisation, 'Breaking Barriers', came forward as the organisation keen to take on the property let agreement for Richard Street Studios. They are a proud, diverse-led Rochdale-based community interest company (CIC) who whether working locally, nationally or internationally always use their Rochdale roots to inspire and inform their projects. Their vision for the studios was fuelled by the desire to give new creatives the opportunities they wished they'd received - to have somewhere to meet, work, and create with other creatives. Breaking Barriers operation of the studios also supports diverse leadership in our sector – in a borough where the cultural leadership doesn't currently represent our population.



Richard Street Studios

Richard Street Studios has 7 studio spaces accommodating around 18 artists, but has become more than just a building for its resident artists. It is a place to create, rehearse, exhibit and run events, and has become a hub for the development of artists across the borough - with on-site networking events, development programmes, and regular funding advice surgeries to support creatives to grow and flourish.

The official opening took place in September 2024 and it is already proving to be resounding success. The studios were oversubscribed by 100%, and a wide range of training sessions, networking events and exhibitions have been held. There has also been strong engagement with the local communities, where Breaking Barriers consciously reached out to the surrounding neighbourhoods where they themselves grew up, hosting community open days with activities for children and opportunities to learn new creative skills. Critically, this could not have been achieved if we ran the studios ourselves – and stands as a reminder of the value in devolving power to our communities.



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## Much more is planned

The website and studios are just the start of a much larger programme of investment in the cultural and creative sector and our communities. Further creative workspaces are being developed, a community led 'Town of Culture Outdoor Gallery' is being planned for our year as Greater Manchester Town of Culture, and new approaches to community consultations are being implemented that invest in local creative organisations that have already built trust with local communities to do work that used to be commissioned with external agencies.

These are exciting times for the cultural and creative sector in the borough of Rochdale as we use our pioneering past to inform how we work today, and there is much more to come!

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