

BPH Dance Consultation Report

By Lou Cope, commissioned by Bradford Producing Hub
February 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT, GOALS

1.1. Introduction

- This report was written by Dramaturg and Facilitator Lou Cope, as the result of a consultation process with the dance sector of Bradford, commissioned by Bradford Producing Hub (BPH).
- Lou Cope is a Dramaturg and Facilitator, working primarily in the dance sector, across the UK and internationally, at all scales and across all genres.
- Lou worked with BPH previously on Sustain – a bespoke support programme for mid-career artists.
- BPH decided that having someone who is not directly involved in the Bradford dance sector, but who has knowledge of and experience in how the dance ecosystem works generally, would be beneficial; thus allowing those directly involved to participate fully.

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1.2. Context

- BPH have run a number of projects that have included the dance community, but wanted to gain more understanding of who and what make up the Bradford Dance sector, and what their needs are.
- Specifically, BPH Director Lisa Mallaghan had more than once heard the comment 'There isn't really a dance sector in Bradford!' – and she knew that wasn't the case – so set out to find proof!

1.3. Goals

Together, Lou and BPH developed a brief for the consultation process:

- To create an opportunity for dance artists based in Bradford to come together.
- To give them the chance to get to know each other, to share what they do, where, how and who for.
- To understand what they want or need going forwards.
- To explore what Bradford can/should be for in this context, and whether there is a role for BPH.

1.4. Process

Lou and BPH together created the following process:

1. Initial Targeted Consultations - online

Two consultations / focus groups were convened - one aimed at the 'professional' sector, and one aimed at the 'community / education sector. Up to 8 artists or organisations were invited to a 2 hour zoom session, to discuss the opportunities and challenges of making dance in or from Bradford, with a view to shaping the nature of the events that follow. Participants paid.

2. A Dance Gathering

An 'away day' to bring makers of dance in or from Bradford together to get to know each other better; to understand the landscape better with a view to considering what, if anything, could be done to offer support; and to see how Bradford could position itself in relation to Leeds. Bursary available for those who needed it.

Guest speakers were: Alex Croft - Kala Sangam, Lisa Mallaghan – BPH, Cat Moon and Harry Jelley, BD25.

3. Report on findings/ideas – written by Lou Cope, supported by BPH

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2. OVERVIEW OF THE BRADFORD DANCE SECTOR

- The Bradford Dance ecosystem includes: Dancers, Performers, Choreographers/Makers, Technicians, Collaborators eg: Designers/ Composers, Teachers, Practitioners, Dramaturgs, Producers, Programmers, Funders, Rehearsal/Workshop Spaces, Venues, Marketeers and Audiences.
- 4 main sub-groups* can be identified within the Bradford dance sector: Commercial/Private, Community, Education, ACE-funded.

*It is recognised that this categorisation is reductive, this language is lacking and it does not tell the whole story. The sub-groups often overlap, and people often work across them.

- Bradford Dance Network ran for many years, primarily under the volunteer leadership of Deana Morgan, but is currently mostly dormant.
- There are a range of performance spaces, rehearsal and practice studios in the District.
- From the people who attended the Gathering (35-40 people):
 1. The largest proportion of people were Choreographers (30), followed by Dancers (26), Producers (23) and Dance Teachers (22) – nb people could fall into multiple categories.
 2. The average length of time working in the dance sector was 17.8 years
 3. Across the attendees, they employed 92 people full time in dance, with a further 63 part time and 174 freelancers / collaborators.
 4. Through this small sample of the sector alone, over 10,000 dance workshops are delivered per year, reaching nearly 59,000 participants.
 5. And nearly 900 performances are presented each year, reaching over 64,000 audience members. But of the people making performance, only 4 identified as making work at a large scale (with 26 making small scale and 16 making mid-scale work).

3. OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS

- There is a committed, diverse, imaginative and prolific dance community in Bradford – that includes professional, non-professional and retired dance artists.
- There is enormous belief in the power of dance: for participants and observers to enjoy it as entertainment, as a route to mental and physical health, as an accessible activity that brings people from diverse backgrounds together, as a highly skilled expression of culture and experience, and as an art form that goes beyond language.
- However, generally the community feels stretched, over-worked, under-recognised, under-supported and splintered.
- Individuals are struggling with isolation, finances, support and development.

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- Previous (paid and unpaid) attempts at bringing the sector together have faltered, leaving some disappointment and resentment.
- There is huge support for a new network to be developed. Any new network will need paid leadership and clear purpose.

4. FINDINGS

(please find notes of all of these in the Appendices)

4.1. Key Challenges & Obstacles

Good and viable work is happening, but several different elements over a long period of time have led to a splintered dance sector that would benefit from further support, including better communication, growth and self-advocacy, in order to maximise potential partnerships, collaborations and audiences.

Some of the challenges & obstacles shared were:

- Isolation
- Space
- Money and Funding
- Information
- Training, Support & Development
- Advocacy, Visibility
- Talent Drain

Of course, there is no single cause or effect, but reasons stated include:

- A lack of investment in and support of dance.
- Despite the numbers of people working prolifically and successfully, and despite the best efforts in years gone by of Bradford Dance Network, in recent years people have not been coming together to train, learn, collaborate, socialise.
- This, and of course the lasting impact of Covid, has led to people feeling isolated, as well as dance having a lack of visible presence in the wider cultural sector.
- Targeted support and funding have therefore been non-existent.
- Talent is leaving the city.
- As is well known, collaboration and sharing empowers those involved, and energy begets energy. The energy of the dance sector in Bradford has stalled in recent years, but there is will and desire to change that.

4.2. Wants & Needs

- Networking, a directory of professionals and relationship brokering.
- Space for class and creation.
- Visibility, to be valued.
- Sustained funding and investment.
- Training, Support & Development – including mentoring, pipelines and apprenticeships.
- Joined-up audience development activities.
- Better communication with strategic decision makers and people managing sector opportunities
- Increased staff and activity in deprived areas.

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Of course, many of these lie in parallel with the challenges and obstacles people are facing.

Connectedness is vital to sustain the dance artists currently working in Bradford, attract more, and grow the sector in terms of both reach and quality.

4.3 Time to Talk

In the final group discussion of the day, small groups were invited to set their own discussion agendas, though prompts were made available.

People talked about:

- The need for a network
*see Network notes in Appendix.
- Diversity as Bradford's USP.
- Finding a *home* for Dance in Bradford.
- The need for more communication with and from BD25.
- How to retain talent.
- How to grow the sector.
- Reaching beyond the centre of Bradford.
- Events to celebrate dance in Bradford.
- Personal barriers.
- Relationship brokering.

5. ANALYSIS, REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, QUESTIONS

In order to make my own reflections on and recommendations from the findings of the Dance Consultation Process I wish to refer to the following headings:

1. A New Network for Dance in Bradford
2. Dialogue, Training, Support & Development
3. 'Made in Bradford'
4. Bradford's USP?
5. Audience Development Initiatives
6. Retaining Local Talent
7. Other Comments

5.1. A New Network for Dance in Bradford

5.1.1. The appetite

We asked people how connected they feel to the Bradford Dance Community on a scale of 0-5. The average response was just 1.8. And when asked how much more they would like to connect: 4.95.

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It is clear that there is enormous appetite, and I would say, *need* for a new dance network in Bradford. It was moving how much people crave it. I was both inspired and surprised by the strength of desire to bring different corners of the dance sector (i.e. different disciplines, genres and roles) together.

While there is clearly work to be done on *how* this happens and *what* it does, the interest in it was overwhelmingly positive.

It was equally clear though, from the very beginning of this whole consultation, that the network will need to be independent and artist-lead, with dedicated and paid leadership, in order to succeed.

Previous Dance Networks:

Deana Morgan did an incredible (voluntary) job of running the Bradford Dance Network for many years, but energy dissipated and as Deana's own life changed – her ability and willingness to lead also, quite reasonably, changed. Covid also took its toll on the connectedness of the community. Deana's attempts to hand on the baton have not yet borne fruit.

There was a council-led initiative in 2022 that brought together a small number of partners to discuss development of Dance in the District. This BPH-led Dance Consultation was developed as a direct result of that initiative, however general progress has been slow.

There is very much the sense that dance artists in Bradford are working super hard and doing good work *despite* feeling undermined by financial difficulties, a lack of support and an ongoing sense of isolation, but that this is unsustainable.

It is crucial therefore, for the wellbeing of individuals and organisations across the dance sector of Bradford, not only that the BPH led Dance Consultation should lead to actual, positive action – but also that communication is clear and within reasonable timescales.

As the establishment and success of a new Dance network is so central to the findings of the Dance Consultation, I have provided further recommendations on how this could be set up and delivered in the following sections:

5.1.2. Leadership – A Network Facilitator

From the understanding gained of the Bradford sector, it is my recommendation that a new network needs to be established with paid, part-time leadership for 18 months, as a pilot project.

A pilot project would require funding to cover:

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- Network Facilitator Role
- Steering Group fees
- Ongoing costs (space, admin costs etc)

The Network Facilitator role: (job title and specific brief to be discussed)

Setting the Network Up (3 days)

- Refresh and complete a database of interested individuals and companies.
- Create a new name, identity and social media presence.
- Organise and promote initial events.
- Talk with and learn from other relevant Networks.

Getting going (3.5 days)

- Devise and lead 3 x monthly 2 hour network meetings to discuss the goals, form, membership, cost and operation (including establishing a steering group) of the network.
- Finalise and disseminate a strategy, form, plan and programme for going forwards.
- Seek partnerships and agreements with key venues and spaces.

Ongoing (equivalent of 1 day per month – for 9 months: 9 days)

- Admin of the network on an ongoing basis, produce meetings, working with steering group*, invite guests etc (4 hours per month).
- To include: 9 x monthly 2 hour network meetings* (4 hours per month).
- Hold 3 x 2 hour steering group meetings per year, incl prep (3 x 3 hours per year).
- *Include discussions about how to continue and move towards the network being self-sustaining.

5.1.3. Collaboration: A Steering group

A representative from each of the sub-groups – Commercial, Community, Education and ACE-funded (definitions and language to be agreed), alongside an Inclusion Lead (see below) – comes together as a steering group to take on different responsibilities including:

- 4 people x 4 days per year: 16 days
- Attending 3 x 2 hour steering group meetings led by Facilitator per year.
- Attracting people to the network (0.5).
- Organising 3 sub-group events per year, for example with a focus on Teachers or Choreographers (1.5).
- Co-curating and helping run some 2 Network events (1 day).

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5.1.4. Collaboration: An Inclusion Lead

One person (or a job share of two) 4 days per year: 4 days: works at the heart of all Network operations and events to ensure that inclusion, access and diversity are embedded into events, language, operation and facilities throughout.

5.1.5. Example costs

Fees (35.5 days @£250 per day) = £8,875
Costs = tbc

5.1.6. NB:

A couple of people expressed an interest in the network being non-hierarchical and collectively led. It is my opinion that this should be considered *after* this pilot project, and not before, as the community needs to find its feet before embarking on identifying a more ambitious structure.

5.1.7. Other Network Recommendations

- The network could explore forming a long-term relationship with Kala Sangam (soon to be Bradford Arts Centre), who have embedded the dance sector in its funding applications and development plans, but should also hold meetings at alternate venues across the city to maintain relationships and develop collaboration ideas.
- Members could pay a nominal subscription fee – to encourage commitment, and to go toward tea, coffee, costs etc.
- This subscription fee could be raised to an agreed figure after 12 months.
- The Facilitator role could be a job share.
- Partnerships could be sought with all venues, offering a reduction in ticket price and even space hire for all network members.
- A bi-monthly digital 'newsletter' or noticeboard sharing opportunities, performances, classes, jobs etc, along with special features about individual artists and companies would be beneficial.
- Continued mapping and research of the sector, for example ensuring all parts of the District are represented, mapping studios, gaining a deeper understanding of the sector in terms of (e.g.) age range, average earnings, etc
- The Dance Gathering showed significant existing collaborations, networks and reach outside of Bradford – Relationships could be developed with the wider sector and other dance networks in the UK. Initially to get advice, but ultimately to share information and opportunities or co-host workshops, performances, and events.

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5.2. Dialogue, Training, Support & Development

A healthy and thriving dance ecosystem is made up of performers, dancers, choreographers, makers, teachers, students, dance health practitioners, technicians, designers, composers, musicians, dramaturgs, producers, fundraisers, funders, venues, marketeers, and audiences (and more).

There is huge potential in exploring these roles and the relationships between them in the coming years, but I identify interest and potential in an initial focus on the following activities:

5.2.1. Dialogue with Producers

During the Dance Gathering there was some discussion about there not being enough dance producers in the city, though this was not borne out by the Mapping (See appendix). This may demonstrate a lack of connectivity and awareness, or perhaps there are not enough *dedicated* dance producers? (i.e. those who are full-time, not those who produce their own artistic work.)

There is more work to be done around attracting and developing producers, and increasing collaboration with Bradford based dance artists. This work should help to address perceptions of:

- A lack of funding, which leads to so many artists having to self-produce, whether they want to or not, and whether they have the skills or not.
- A lack of dedicated dance producers in the city/region – the reasons for which, if indeed it is the case, need to be understood.
- Dedicated dance producers in the region having to focus on working outside of the region, because of a lack of money, dance-welcoming/suitable venues, quality and reach.
- A lack of knowledge about what a producer does/ can do, what they cost, and whether they are worth it – in terms of exposure, reach, cost etc.

It is noted that BPH has offered producer training opportunities throughout the past 4 years and has supported a small number of new producers in Dance.

Recommendation: Coordination of an event/series of events aimed at bringing producers, emerging producers and dance professionals together – to learn about each other and explore needs, barriers and opportunities for collaboration. Mentorships, partnerships, apprenticeships and group training and joint bids etc could follow.

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5.2.2. Strategic partnerships

Communication and collaboration between artists and companies, and other vital parts of the ecosystem needs to be better supported.

As the dance community is beginning to find its feet again it is vital that they invite venues, possible partners, funders and the City into their journey.

Likewise, it is crucial that venues, possible partners, funders and the City are encouraged to reflect on what they can offer the dance sector, what they can do to support it and what they hope to see in return.

Practitioners from different parts of the sector (Private, Community, Education and ACE-funded) might collaborate to try to reach each other's participants. Eg: can private dance teachers go into schools more? And can those running courses make more presentations in private dance schools?

This should be one of the first activities of the new network – an introduction and invitation to all interested parties to step up and get involved.

Importantly, this report should be shared widely, and a strategic partnership pulled together of people with interest and power (e.g. companies, venues, producers, funders): Pooling resources (space, time, people power) to lead and deliver on the findings of this Dance Consultation.

5.2.3. A Mentoring Chain

It is clear that people at all stages of their career, and all levels of the sector want and would benefit from mentoring – be that creative or strategic.

Perhaps there can be a Mentoring Chain?

Financial support could made available to established practitioners, directors, and producers to receive top-level (national/international) mentoring – to help them shape their activities within as well as beyond Bradford.

And in return for that, these established practitioners and artists 'pass it on' – offering free or reduced cost mentoring sessions to younger, less established and emerging artists.

A brief online training session on mentoring could be offered to all.

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5.2.4. Dramaturgy

NB: Please note that as I am a Dance Dramaturg there is an obvious a conflict of interest here. To not reference the potential of engaging with dance dramaturgy, and dance dramaturgs, would however feel pointlessly remiss.

Dramaturgy – which I define as “intentional collaborative thinking (potentially with a dramaturg) to check, challenge and expand” – in relation to an artist’s practice, process, productions, and strategy – might be an efficient way to make a profound difference.

The desire to learn about dramaturgy and work with dramaturgs was expressed during The Dance Gathering, but it also relates to a conversation that came up in the first online zoom consultation, where there was a discussion about the quality of the work coming out of Bradford, and the support available for developing artists.

While of course it is clear that there is great quality work being created and presented in the city, it was felt by some that more investment is needed to ‘raise the game’ of some of the work.

There are several key reasons why developing a Dramaturgy programme might be a good idea:

- Dialogue with a dramaturg is a cost-efficient, time-efficient, and bespoke way for an artist to engage in CPD – with a view to deepening and expanding their practice, their productions and their reach.
- Working with a dramaturg does not represent a deficit on the part of the artist – it can be a brilliant way to identify and unleash an artist’s full potential and potency.
- Bespoke dramaturgy sessions can be with individuals and groups, of corresponding levels of experience, within and across dance forms, in person or online.

Any such scheme could, of course, include the training and supervision of emerging or potential dramaturgs.

5.2.5. Training

The Consultation identified a range of training needed by the sector. These fell into 2 areas:

Sustaining and Developing a Career:

- Fundraising
- Planning and Producing
- Marketing and promotion
- Fees and Contracts
- Business development

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Recommendation: BPH's existing programme of training and development to be more clearly open to and shared with the Dance Sector.

Sustaining and Developing Practice:

- Masterclasses
- Specific artform development (e.g. Pole, vertical dance)
- Pro-classes
- Producer support
- Partnerships and collaborations
- Scratch nights and performance opportunities

Recommendation: Venues and Companies to consider what opportunities could be offered within existing activity (e.g. shadowing, open studios, studio time, performance opps) and whether funding could be brought in to support a programme of development.

5.3. 'Made in Bradford'

As part of dance in Bradford beginning to advocate for itself and raise its own profile – perhaps artists and companies can agree upon an identity and branding that acknowledges where the art is made, and/or where the artists come from.

I'll call it 'Made in Bradford' for now, though of course it might be an idea to link it with the new network name, and certainly with the word 'dance'. (Although of course it could also be an initiative that spans across art forms, and could bring focus to all homegrown work in BD25 and beyond.)

In the initial stages this could just be an identity/logo/stamp that dance artists and companies choose to put on their marketing materials, but across time it could be an event in its own right.

Many participants spoke about a 'dance weekend' – with classes, workshops and performances being (initially) self-organised to encourage attendance and participation across the city, the sector and different dance forms.

This could of course become something bigger; funding could be sought and the identity of 'Made in Bradford' could become synonymous with professional dance, fun, health and coming together.

A larger-scale model of this is the one-day summer festival '[Benenwerk](#)' – which means 'Legwork', in the Belgian city of Bruges – where every corner of the city is taken over by different dance classes in the afternoon, which lead to different forms of dancing in the evening. Perhaps it's worth a visit!?!?

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5.4. Bradford's USP

From the conversations I have had and heard it feels like Bradford could define itself, as distinct from Dance in Leeds, in a number of key ways:

- **South Asian Dance:** Bradford is well placed to support a home-grown, high quality and far-reaching South Asian Dance company, as the jewel in the crown of the hugely vibrant and active South Asian dance scene. Can action be taken to support this happening?
NB: It is noted that South Asian dance artists were under-represented at the Gathering, more work needs to be done to locate and attract people from this sector.
- **Bradford – the place to scratch!:** Brilliant work is happening with regard to the development of a scratch night with a committed and discerning audience – see [BOLD! Bradford](#) - Can Bradford position itself as a cheaper, more honest, more collaborative, and more productive place to develop dance work?
- **Inclusion:** So much is already happening in Bradford with Mind the Gap and others leading the way in terms of inclusion in leadership and the arts – Can Bradford position itself at the centre of innovation and best practice with regard to inclusion?
- **Hip hop dance theatre:** Great work is also being done by Tranquil Productions to raise the level and profile of hip hop and breakin' in Bradford, is there a place for it to steal the crown from neighbouring larger, and more expensive, cities?
- **Socially Engaged Dance practice:** Bradford has significant, impactful engagement activity taking place, ensuring dance opportunity reaches across Bradford's diverse district and communities, by companies such as Dance United Yorkshire. Can Bradford make more of this work, positioning itself as a leader in genuine and meaningful community engagement in Dance?

5.5. Audience Development Initiatives

Judging by the number of classes being taught, and the number of participants attending them (see Mapping appendix), there is a committed base of dance participants in the city.

What can those leading these classes do, individually and collectively, to turn these participants into audiences?

If the network is pooling information about classes and performance events, can it also create a 'Dance Lovers' database and (e.g.) offer reward cards to those who come repeatedly?

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5.6. Retaining Local Talent

What more can organisations and individuals do to retain local, especially young, talent and reduce the talent drain that was repeatedly discussed?

Can companies take on mentees, or create apprenticeships? Can a scheme formally acknowledge a small number of local young practitioners to give them reductions on the cost of space, tickets, resources etc?

What can local individuals do to support those coming through now, at what everyone acknowledges is a particularly difficult time?

And what funding or strategic support might be accessible to enable this?

5.7. Other comments

- It feels necessary and appropriate to acknowledge that, in my experience through the zooms and the Gathering, some members of the Bradford dance community are confused by communications with and from BD25. While people were appreciative that BD25 producers attended the event, some felt that there was still a lack of clarity – e.g. about whether individual organisations could state that they were part of BD25, even if they hadn't received commissioning money. The commissioning process has felt difficult to access by some members of the dance community. There was also a concern that the dance sector, perhaps exactly because of the lack of advocacy, identity and exposure, as discussed, might not receive an appropriate allocation of funding/commissions – as compared to other art forms.
Recommendation: Arrange another meeting between BD25 and dance community/the new network.
- It was noted that artists, and in this case dance artists, are often asked to contribute ideas, knowledge and experience without being paid – most people were attending on a voluntary basis and not being paid (although bursaries were available and taken up by a small percentage of attendees, it is acknowledged that this is not the same as payment). All events and opportunities need to be clear whether people are / should be (e.g.) paid, offered bursaries, or provided as free and unpaid (e.g. for development opportunities).

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6. A FINAL WORD FROM LOU COPE

I would like to say thank you to BPH for inviting me to take on this consultation.

But more importantly, I'd like to say an enormous thank you to those who gave their time to this consultation. I am extremely grateful for the proper Bradford welcome I received, and for everyone's honesty, enthusiasm, and willingness to participate.

As I have said previously, I was blown away by everyone's commitment to and belief in dance, as well their keen-ness to come together – regardless of discipline, level of experience or role – to collaborate, co-operate and even, well ... dance!

This report is offered up, in good faith, as an honest reflection of what I heard, learned, and thought during this process. Of course, there will be important voices and ideas that I have not captured, and I apologise if that is the case.

I believe that this could be a real turning point for the sector. If past complexities and disappointments can be laid to rest, it feels like there is a hugely exciting future lying in wait. And with only a relatively small amount of financial and strategic support, the dance sector of Bradford can present itself to the world as the vibrant, hard-working, diverse, and life-affirming community it is.

GOOD LUCK!!

7. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Development of a new independent Dance Network**, with a paid facilitator, that meets regularly (monthly / bi-monthly).
2. **Development of a Dance Steering Group** that meets quarterly, to identify and maximise new opportunities to support and grow the sector, including new local, national and international collaborations and partnerships, mentoring, dramaturgy and performance platforms.
3. **Clarify Bradford's Dance USP.**
4. **Bring producers, emerging producers and dance professionals together** to support the development of more producer / dancer / dance company partnerships.
5. **Arrange follow up meetings with BD25** and dance community/the new network.
6. **Clarify BPH's existing programme of training and development**, to ensure it is clearly open to and shared with the Dance Sector.
7. **Venues and Companies to consider what opportunities could be offered** within existing activity (e.g. shadowing, open studios, studio time, performance opps) and whether funding could be brought in to support a programme of development.
8. **Develop clearer pathways to retain dance talent** in Bradford, and to turn Dance Participants into Dance Audiences.

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