Local Government Association briefing
House of Lords debate on protecting and improving local arts and cultural services, including museums, libraries and archaeological services
30 March 2017

Key messages

- Councils and their local partners are well placed to lead a step-change in cultural participation. Not only are councils the biggest public sector investor in culture (including museums and galleries), spending over £1 billion per year, they also have an important leadership role to play. Councils can bring together schools, voluntary and community arts sector organisations, National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), health services, and the private sector to help forge partnerships, unblock barriers to cultural participation, and help to improve visitor numbers.

- Major change is underway as councils seek to transform the provision of cultural activity, working closely with their communities and partners. Against a backdrop of reduced funding, councils are taking a strong lead on activities that reach beyond their traditional role as cultural service providers. European funding has been an important source of income for museums and galleries, and the recent decision to leave the European Union may require alternative provision to be made.

- In order for local arts and cultural services to continue to thrive, we need the Government to advocate the economic and strategic value of museums, libraries and cultural services and to steer national policy in a way which reinforces collaboration between sectors. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport can enhance this work by working with the Office for Civil Society and Innovation to ensure that local museums are able to access volunteering and engagement opportunities offered by the National Citizens Service, and comparable civic engagement initiatives. The Department also needs to be working with those council areas considering a devolution deal to explore how museums and a cultural offer can be included.

- We have already begun to see progress on this. The Culture White Paper, published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2016, acknowledged the role played by cultural activity in an individual's physical and mental health, education and life chances, as well as in driving local economic growth and community cohesion. The paper called for "more local leaders to grasp the potential of culture to achieve their vision for their community, and to put culture at the forefront of their strategies."[i]

- This can be seen by an increasing number of councils developing cultural strategies because they see the real value of culture in achieving so many of their key goals: in economic growth, promoting public health, and community cohesion. Particularly, in the 11 cities that are bidding for the next UK City of Culture 2021 and EU Capital of Culture 2023 awards.

Briefing

Local arts and cultural services

There is strong evidence that arts and cultural activities can attract visitors, boost local economies, and help residents come together through shared experiences. In many areas, councils have partnered with local businesses, arts organisations and charities to create stronger local identities and improve the environment in which their residents live and work.

Cultural services can also have a positive impact of people's health and wellbeing. People who have been to a cultural place or event in the previous 12 months are almost 60 per cent more likely to report good health compared to those who have not. Seventy-six per cent of older people say art and culture is important in making them feel happy; 57 per cent say it is important in helping them meet other people; and 60 per cent say it is important in encouraging them to get out and about.[ii]

Local government remains the largest funder of culture and is most attuned to local needs. Councils are well placed to lead local action around culture and help people to identify with, understand, appreciate, engage with and feel a sense of 'belonging' in their local area.

In 2016, the Culture White Paper called for "more local leaders to grasp the potential of culture to achieve their vision for their community, and to put culture at the forefront of their strategies."[iii] Councils are rising to this challenge by leading placemaking efforts and finding innovative ways that use cultural activity to deliver key outcomes around:

- tackling disadvantage and social isolation
- raising levels of aspiration and educational attainment
- local economic growth, job creation and training
- creating stronger, more cohesive communities
- improving people's health and wellbeing

The LGA has also jointly produced a report, '*People, Culture, Place: The role of culture in placemaking'* with the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association, which shows how ten councils have used arts and culture to create a sense of place and enhance their communities.[iv]

Libraries

Libraries are as popular as Premier League football, the cinema and the UK's top tourist attractions. In 2014/15, libraries in England received 224.6 million physical visits almost as many as visits to Premier League football games (13.8 million visits), the cinema (171.5 million), and the top 10 UK tourist attractions (42.7 million) combined. Nearly 60 per cent of people hold a current library card, and libraries received 96 million website visits in 2014 to 2015, more than three every second.[v]

Councils are doing everything they can to support libraries, however, local government funding from central government reduced by 40 per cent over the last parliament alone, and serious funding pressures continue. As a result, many library services have considered alternative governance models, such as trusts, as well as working with local volunteers, introducing self-service machines and reducing opening hours.

However, councils are responding to these challenges by ensuring libraries play an increasingly important role as community hubs, empowering local people to

use them for a wide variety of services ranging from homework clubs to public health and business advice. This includes:

- Coding clubs to equip children with the skills needed for tomorrow
- Google Garage tutorials to help local businesses maximise their online presence
- Redesigning their spaces to welcome those with autism, Alzheimer's or dementia
- Making 3D printers and other tools available, turning them into mini-workshops and makerspaces

The Leadership for Libraries Taskforce, which is jointly accountable to the LGA and Department for Culture, Media and Sport, published its vision for the future of library services in December 2016.[vi]

Our shared ambition is for everyone to:

- choose to use libraries, because they see clear benefits and positive outcomes from doing so
- understand what library services offer, and how they can make the most of what's available to them
- be introduced to new ideas and opportunities, then given confidence and quick and easy access to tools, skills and information they need to improve their quality of life
- receive trusted guidance through the evolving information landscape and build the skills needed to thrive in a changing world.

Library services have so much to offer on all our key objectives: economic growth, public health, community cohesion. To help deliver this, the LGA is producing two tools to help councils develop their offer:

1. **A needs-mapping tool** to help services to identify the greatest levels of local needs, whether that is qualifications and skills, health issues, or employment, and target their resources accordingly; as well as to help demonstrate the impact they are making to reduce that level of need.

2. **A benchmarking framework** to help councils think critically and constructively about their library offer and identify areas where councils may wish to improve, based on sector best practice.

Museums

We recognise the tremendous role that museums play in helping to create places where people want to live, work and visit. This includes attracting tourists, involving residents in local heritage, providing volunteering opportunities and valuable outreach work that can, for example, support older people's wellbeing.

Councils have been reviewing their museum and gallery services in order to ensure their financial sustainability and many councils are introducing or exploring a range of ways to achieve this, including:

- new capital development and proposals for change of governance, for example Trust model
- linkages with other services e.g. housing, libraries, culture, arts, archives, sport and parks and the health and wellbeing agenda
- more use of digital provisions to make service more responsive to customer needs

- merging museum provision with another museum and/or cultural service
- introduction of charges for services
- removing physical museums and move towards a more outreach option.

Digitisation and an enhanced digital and electronic offer provide the opportunities for museums to increase their accessibility and reach new audiences. It can also shift the conversation on service provision away from the concept of a building, and all the associated costs, and onto a discussion around the reach and depth of the service. This can be of particular relevance to smaller, specialist collections.[vii]

Further information can be found in the [LGA's response to the Department for Culture, Media and Sports Museums Review 2016](#).

Archaeology

The ability of councils to positively shape the quality of the historic environment rests upon the valuable knowledge and expertise of conservation officers, planners and archaeologists who know the individual buildings and places and the styles, techniques and materials that are characteristic of a place.

For example in Wiltshire, the council has helped the Archaeology Service to evolve into a modern and innovative service. The Archaeology Service sits separately from the Planning Service, within the Communities directorate. Good communication and links with the planners is maintained by regular contact between officers, joint site visits and training seminars provided by the archaeologists.

Co-located with Arts and Heritage within a purpose built History Centre, the Archaeology Service is public-facing and one of most accessible archaeology services in the country. The Wiltshire Buildings Record is hosted by the Service and helps to provide a holistic approach to historic environment advice and information. Within the History Centre the Service holds two annual open days and regular archaeological walks, tours and talks. It is the only Archaeology Service in the country to have a weekly slot on the local BBC radio station.[viii]

Case studies

Barnsley, a museum and archives discovery centre is designed to share the stories of Barnsley and its people and create a sense of belonging through local history. Barnsley's communities worked with councillors, officers and other partners for eight years to create the museum, which is located in the historic town hall. A new town square has also been created.

'Mapping Suffolk's Stories' is a community project helping people to explore their shared history through historic maps and records. The project will take place while a new £20 million visitor attraction, The Hold, is built in Ipswich to house the bulk of Suffolk's archives collection. This will house almost nine miles of material, spanning nine centuries, in state-of-the-art facilities. It is a partnership between Suffolk County Council's Record Office and the University of Suffolk.

Manchester Museums and Galleries have joined forces to take part in 'Not so grim up North'; a research project exploring how museum and gallery activities can make a difference in terms of health, and in terms of wellbeing. This builds on the success of their *Who Cares? project,* a health and wellbeing project (2009-2011) run by health professionals, researchers, and six museums in North West of England including the Whitworth Art Gallery which created a therapeutic space within the gallery, providing a stimulus for curiosity, exploration, reflection and meditation, and *Culture Shots*, a week-long programme of creative events run in

five Manchester University Hospitals, which supported the enhancement of professional practice and patients' health and wellbeing.[ix]

In **Tunbridge Wells**, the museum and art gallery has appointed two artists in residence to create a new body of work, with the working title, *Shelved,* in response to their experiences of residency within the cultural quarter at Tunbridge Wells. They will survey the collection of 60,000 or so objects held in the archive to discover some of the borough's untold stories and contribute creatively to the development of the borough's new Cultural and Learning Hub, the realisation of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's and Kent County Council's plans for a combined cultural offer. Serving as project team members, they will input their creative thinking to the planning, concept and realisation of the Hub, helping to ensure that the arts remain at the core of the redevelopment of the current museum, library and adult education buildings in the civic centre of Tunbridge Wells town.[x]

The **Salford Sporting Memories** project is funded by Salford Clinical Commissioning Group's Innovation Fund and local funder The Booth Charities, and is a year-long project aiming to bring sport back into the lives of those that may have lost touch with their sporting heritage. Working with older people in Salford living with dementia, depression or other mental health issues, or who may be experiencing loneliness or isolation, Sporting Memories seeks to introduce them back into healthy social and physical activity.[xi]

[i] DCMS: Culture White Paper 2016

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/510798/DCMS_The_Culture_White_Paper__3_.pdf

[ii] http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Value_arts_culture_evidence_review.pdf

[iii] DCMS: Culture White Paper 2016

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/510798/DCMS_The_Culture_White_Paper__3_.pdf

[iv] Joint LGA report: *People, Culture, Place: The role of culture in placemaking'*

http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/8150261/12.3+-+culture+and+place_v4_1_1.pdf/9a4dabf6-189a-47b1-8bb4-3c185910607b

[v] https://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2017/feb/22/libraries-community-hubs-survive-council-budget-cuts

[vi] https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2016/12/01/introducing-libraries-deliver/
[vii] LGA response to the DCMS Museums Review 2016
http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11443/DCMS+Museums+Review+-+LGA+response+FINAL.pdf/670e8dab-d405-45cc-abd1-ebbfa20b3c64

[viii] Making the most of your heritage assets: The future of local historic environment services

http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=5607c46f-1dc8-4f69-86cf-b81d0905751d&groupId=10180
[ix] http://www.healthandculture.org.uk/
[x] http://www.tunbridgewellsmuseum.org/cultural-hub/artist-in-residence
[xi] Joint LGA report: *People, Culture, Place: The role of culture in placemaking'*
http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/8150261/12.3+-+culture+and+place_v4_1_1.pdf/9a4dabf6-189a-47b1-8bb4-3c185910607b