

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP,  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport,  
100 Parliament Street,  
Westminster  
London, SW1A 2BQ

14 May 2020

**Dear Secretary of State,**

### **Recreation and leisure taskforce membership**

I am writing to you on behalf of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, to request a place for councils on the main recreation and leisure ministerial taskforce being established in response to the coronavirus pandemic. With councils spending over £1.1 billion on museums, theatres and libraries, as well as investing over £1 billion a year on sport, leisure and green spaces, we believe it is crucial that their views are represented when the Government starts planning to reopen the sector.

Local government makes a critical contribution to the country's public recreation and leisure offering. They run over 3000 libraries, over 350 museums, public archives, numerous theatres and galleries, and are responsible for many monuments. Councils also run tourism attractions, including castles and historic buildings, parks, piers, amusement parks, and destination management organisations. They are responsible for much of the critical sport and leisure infrastructure which is essential to keep our nation active and mentally well. Their business support, planning, environmental health and trading standards teams are also critical to the smooth running of our leisure and tourism businesses and the reputation of the visitor economy.

In these unprecedented times, councils have continued to do their utmost to support crucial local assets the best they can. For instance, to ensure residents stay fit and healthy throughout the outbreak, councils and partners are expanding the promotion of parks and green spaces as low-risk areas to leave the home, providing social distancing principles are followed. We have urged councils to only close their parks where absolutely necessary, particularly as parks are known to positively impact residents' physical and mental wellbeing, which is particularly important during this time.

Residents are also still able to access library resources online, despite library closures, meaning people still have access to ebooks and audiobooks. Councils are providing additional online access to resources under the hashtag #LibrariesFromHome, extending online memberships for no extra fee, and all fines incurred as a result of the closures will be waived. As we progress through the pandemic, councils are also looking at ways they can eventually safely reopen cultural services including libraries, museums and galleries.

While councils' main funding department is the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), a range of our services fall directly under the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) remit, and our ambition for a thriving cultural, leisure, and visitor economy means that it is our aim to work closely with DCMS around its priorities and responsibilities as we come out of the pandemic.

We look forward to collaborating with the Government and other stakeholders who will make up the taskforce. We will also contribute to the various sub-groups we have been invited to, but it is

critical that we can connect this work at the top table too. Laura Johnson ([Laura.Johnson@local.gov.uk](mailto:Laura.Johnson@local.gov.uk)) would be happy to work with your officials to find a suitable date for a call to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerald Vernon-Jackson".

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson,  
Chair of the LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board