

# Local Government Association briefing

## Debate on local museums

### Westminster Hall, House of Commons

7 March 2018



#### Key messages

- Councils are the biggest public sector investor in culture, including museums and galleries, spending over £1 billion per year, despite reductions in council funding from central government.<sup>i</sup> There are 350 local authority-run museums in England, and more are supported through grants or contracts.
- Councils recognise the valuable 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.
- We welcomed the findings of the Mendoza Review, but we are concerned that it identified local authority-run and supported museums as most vulnerable to funding pressures.<sup>ii</sup> The current consultations on future strategies by Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund must acknowledge this serious pressure on local museums and reflect this in their final strategies.
- Councils report particular challenges with raising capital funding for major projects and developments, as well as simply maintaining the historic buildings which often house collections. This is compounded by increased competition for external funds and difficulty in finding match funding.
- The LGA's survey of museums found that many councils identified European funding as a source of existing or potential income<sup>iii</sup>. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DDCMS) must consider the impact of Brexit on the local cultural sector, and whether alternative provision needs to be made.
- In order for local arts and cultural services to continue to thrive, we need the Government to recognise the need for investment in these services, to advocate the economic and strategic value of museums cultural services, and to steer national policy in a way which reinforces collaboration between sectors, and between national and local museums.

# Briefing

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## **Further information**

### ***Councils' contribution to local museums***

Councils are the biggest public sector investor in culture, including museums and galleries, spending over £1 billion per year, despite reductions in council funding from central government. For spending specifically on museums, local authorities are second only to DDCMS. There are 350 local authority-run museums in England, but more are supported through grants, contracts or in-kind support such as peppercorn rents.

There is strong evidence that arts and cultural activities can attract visitors, boost local economies, and help residents come together through shared experiences<sup>iv</sup>. In many areas, councils have partnered with local businesses, arts organisations and charities to create stronger local identities. 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.

Councils have been creative and innovative in responding to a changing financial situation facing local cultural services, in recognition of the value they provide to local communities. They have adopted a number of solutions to maintain excellent services, including: merging museum and archive provision; employing apprentices and increasing the use of volunteers; and partnership working with other arts and community organisations.

New models of service delivery are being developed, including cultural trusts, within the context of a stronger commissioning role for councils, more focus on the contribution of museums to economic growth and wellbeing and a 'whole place' approach to investing in culture. These have the potential to offset the impact of the financial challenges, but need initial investment in resource and skills if they are to succeed.

The LGA has developed excellent working relationships with Arts Council England (ACE). This has led to jointly commissioned work to support councillors with portfolios for culture and sport, cultural peer challenges to support councils with service reviews, as well as emerging initiatives to support officer development. The LGA has also established a Culture Hub, with ACE funding, to share council best practice and innovative delivery models in a context of limited budgets.

We have also commissioned new research into culture-led regeneration. It will include advice on how to make the case for the role of museums in delivering the strategic vision for an area. The research will bring together over 15 case studies of how councils have used some form of cultural activity to stimulate regeneration in their area. Most relevant to museums will be the examples that show how councils have used a particular asset, such as a museum, as an anchor organisation to build cultural quarters around.

This builds on earlier work to showcase how councils have been using culture to help shape their places and create a sense of community, published in *People, Culture, Place* in 2017<sup>v</sup>.

However, more can still be done to share learning and skills between nationally funded museums and local museums. This is particularly true for digital and fundraising skills, where smaller museums face a significant challenge in developing or attracting those with the skillset to reach new, often younger, audiences. In recent years, the Arts Council has encouraged their National Portfolio Organisations to work more with councils and communities to widen participation and, whilst there is still some work to do in making the cultural offer truly inclusive, this is moving in the right direction and needs to continue.

### ***The Mendoza Review***

We welcomed the findings of the Mendoza Review, but we are not surprised that it identified local authority-run and supported museums as most vulnerable to funding pressures.

It is concerning, however, that the review revealed that local authority museums are the least able to raise their own income. National museums raise an average of 46 per cent of their own income, and independent museums around 70 per cent. In contrast, council-run museums raise around 13 per cent of their own revenue<sup>vi</sup>, although some have successfully experimented with charging and donation policies to help off-set costs, as in Bristol.

Councils also report particular challenges with raising capital funding for major projects and developments, as well as simply maintaining the historic buildings which often house collections. This is compounded by increased competition for external funds and difficulty in finding match funding.

The LGA's survey of museums found that many councils identified European funding as a source of existing or potential income. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DDCMS) must consider the impact of Brexit on the local cultural sector, and whether alternative provision needs to be made.

One of the key recommendations for local authority museums in the Mendoza Review focused on giving these museums increased freedoms and flexibilities when it comes to retaining commercial profits, procurement, and running their own communications, including social media accounts.

There are legal limitations about what councils can do when it comes to allocation of commercial profits and procurement exemptions, until some of the existing European legislation changes, but there are real opportunities that could be realised by giving more freedom to museum communications. The LGA has developed some principles of best practice for social media, and we believe that allowing museums to run their own digital communications campaigns could unlock real potential.

In partnership with ACE, we will be publishing a new guide to best practice and key points to consider when running a museums service. This is in response to

the Mendoza Review's recommendation for the LGA and ACE to publish guidance on setting up a trust. The guide will cover topics such as strategic planning, digital freedoms, and taking collections and experiences out into the community.

While many museums, libraries and galleries are located in impressive historic buildings, these buildings can be intimidating for some people. Effective marketing and communication can be instrumental in persuading people to cross the threshold for the first time. The Mendoza Review revealed that there are challenges when it comes to creating unique media accounts for council-owned venues. The LGA will also be working with ACE to address this point.

### **Case studies**

#### **Barnsley**

In Barnsley, an area with traditionally low engagement with culture, designing the new museum and archives discovery centre called 'Experience Barnsley' involved more than 15,000 people in events and roadshows.

Footfall has exceeded expectations, with 150,000 visitors in the first year and around 75,000 a year since then (the projection was 50,000).

Many visitors say the museum has made them proud of their town or inspired by its stories; 96 per cent of those surveyed said they would return and 67 per cent were planning to visit other cultural venues.

#### **Blackpool**

In Blackpool, 128 local residents worked with professional artists to create the Blackpool Treasure Trove, a heritage resource of seven pop-up museums.

The council now has a resource of seven pop-up museums which have given a focus to community heritage events and are used in venues such as schools, shopping centres, day care centres, community groups and at heritage open days.

By late 2016, more than 12,000 people had seen at least one pop-up museum. Participants contributed 3,055 hours to the project (509 days). Twenty heritage volunteers got involved in the project, contributing a further 1,122 hours.

#### **Suffolk**

Mapping Suffolk's Stories is a community engagement project helping people to explore their shared history through historic maps and records. Groups will share their work through exhibitions, pop-ups, publications and online, and the project will culminate with an 'Archives Fest' for schools in 2021. It will also act as the template for a new way of working for the Record Office, delivering engagement and education in communities rather than in-house.

The project will take place while a new visitor attraction, The Hold, is built in Ipswich to house the bulk of Suffolk's archives collection. The Hold will eventually house almost nine miles of material, spanning nine centuries, in state-of-the-art facilities with a café, exhibition space and teaching spaces. It is a partnership between Suffolk County Council's Record Office and the University of Suffolk.

The Hold is expected to attract 36,200 visitors in the first year when it opens in 2020, compared to 9,000 a year in the current location. It will help to maximise the role of heritage in supporting education, training, leisure and lifelong learning, and

will widen the reach of the archives service, for example through increased digitisation of material.

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<sup>i</sup> Please see the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government revenue outturn figures for cultural services - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing#2017-to-2018>

<sup>ii</sup> The Mendoza Review: an independent review of museums in England, November 2017 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-mendoza-review-an-independent-review-of-museums-in-england>)

<sup>iii</sup> Please see Please see <https://www.local.gov.uk/museum-survey-heads-cultural-services>

<sup>iv</sup> Please see [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Contribution\\_arts\\_culture\\_industry\\_UK\\_economy.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Contribution_arts_culture_industry_UK_economy.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> Please see [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/12.3%20-%20culture%20and%20place\\_v4\\_1\\_1.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/12.3%20-%20culture%20and%20place_v4_1_1.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Mendoza Review: Page 34