

## DCMS Museums Review

### About the LGA

1. The LGA is the national voice of local government. We work with councils to support, promote and improve local government. We are a politically-led, cross party organisation which works on behalf of 350 English councils to ensure local government has a strong, credible voice with national government.

### Key messages

2. Councils 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.
3. 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 £1.0 billion per year, they also have an important leadership role to play, bringing schools, voluntary/community arts sector organisations, National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), health, and the private sector together to forge partnerships, unblock barriers to cultural and museum/galleries participation, and grow visitor numbers.
4. However, councils have experienced a 40 per cent budget reduction since 2010, and the recent financial settlement for local government will continue to pose challenges for councils in managing and delivering their museum and cultural services with reducing budgets. European funding has also 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.
5. New models of service delivery are being developed 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.
6. The return of public health policy to local government also offers an opportunity to shift from a system that treats ill-health to one that promotes wellbeing. Demand for costly health and social care interventions could be reduced by enabling locally-led approaches that lead to higher participation rates in cultural activities, maximising the wider benefits from investing in museums and galleries.

## **LGA response**

7. During September 2016, the Local Government Association (LGA) conducted a survey of heads of cultural services in order to inform the LGA's official response to the Department of Culture Media and Sport Review of Museums. The survey was fully completed by 83 councils, a response rate of 30 per cent.
8. These responses have been used to inform the LGA response to the DCMS call for evidence on museums.

## **Q. Top three challenges and how these can be addressed?**

### **Funding**

9. Councils have been creative and innovative in responding to a changing market and difficult financial situation. They have adopted a number of solutions, which include:
  - merging museum and archive provision
  - employing apprentices and increasing the use of volunteers
  - partnership working with other arts and community organisations
  - increased fundraising
10. Despite this work, funding remains one of the biggest challenges facing the sector. The recent financial settlement for local government, following a 40 per cent budget reduction since 2010, will continue to pose challenges for councils in managing their museum and cultural services with reducing budgets. Reducing budgets have had a direct impact on service delivery, due to the loss of trained or specialist staff.
11. 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.
12. Many councils identified European funding as a source of existing or potential income, so DCMS will need to consider the impact on the sector of the decision to leave the European Union and whether alternative provision needs to be made.

### **Managing change**

13. Councils are exploring new methods of service delivery, in part as a response to budget pressures, but also to increase participation and enhance their offer. This can include the development of new governance models, and support could be provided on how to do this. These changes are seen as positive opportunities to reach and engage new parts of the community, attract national or international exhibitions, and work more closely with local partners. However, there is limited capacity to develop and explore these opportunities at the same time as maintain the existing service.
14. Councils are therefore challenged to manage expectations of users, maintain free access, and the quality of services while these new opportunities are explored. The LGA's Leadership Essentials courses and productivity advisers exist to provide support to councils on this, and other areas, but there is more demand in the sector than can be met. These challenges are similar to those faced by library services, and there could be a useful interchange of knowledge between DCMS' support for museums and the joint LGA/DCMS Libraries Taskforce.

15. Further support that helps councillors and officers to understand new delivery models and access advice on implementing them would enable the sector to transform more rapidly. Links should also be developed with the mutual and spinouts work of the Office for Civil Society and Innovation, recently transferred to DCMS.

### **Communicating the offer**

16. The third main challenge identified by respondents to the LGA survey was ensuring that museum services were recognised for their contribution to wider corporate and community priorities and regeneration opportunities, despite not being a statutory service.
17. In particular, the potential role of museums and cultural organisations in place-shaping and creating a sense of place could be explored further. Devolution is fundamentally changing English governance and the LGA is supporting the cultural sector to consider how it plays into that very different landscape. A small number of deals, such as Liverpool and the North East, highlight the role of culture in regeneration, attracting visitors and boosting growth. Museums run as trusts are very keen to understand the implications of 100% business rate retention on discretionary rate relief.
18. However, respondents to the survey also noted that museums services were not yet fully engaged in the discussions around opportunities offered by the devolution agenda. Government messaging on this and a strong narrative would assist in embedding this across the country.

### **Q. Top three opportunities and how these can be exploited?**

19. The LGA's museums survey revealed close links between the challenges facing the sector, and the opportunities identified to place it on an increasingly relevant and sustainable footing. This indicates that the sector is already responding to the challenges facing it and, rather than retread points from the 'challenges' section above, we have focused instead on areas where DCMS could focus support with a reasonable expectation of achieving significant value and a multiplier effect.

### **Repositioning museums within the community**

20. In recent years, the Arts Council has encouraged the NPOs 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. More recently, the Arts Council has been working with councils and its partners to develop the impact that culture has on wider society. This partnership working between all organisations, including institutions and services in neighbouring authorities, is critical to developing a sustainable museums offer.
21. A key focus must continue to be encouraging greater collaboration between cultural services and beyond. We need to support wider networks of portfolio holders, such as those leading economic growth, public health and children's services to understand and value the contribution of museums to local political priorities. More joined-up conversations on issues like assets, commissioning, digitisation and reaching marginalised communities will result in better outcomes and a more efficient allocation of resources. This needs to be underpinned by strong partnerships between museums professionals and councillors founded on a shared vision about the wider contribution of museums.

22. However, partnership working goes further than collaboration between organisations and the best museums have been increasing partnership and collaborative working within the community. This helps museums to help develop a sense of place/cultural identity and places them at the centre of the cohesion agenda, as well as enhancing the area's offer to visitors from elsewhere in the UK and abroad.
23. DCMS 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. DCMS also needs to be working with those council areas considering a devolution deal to explore how museums and a cultural offer can be included.
24. We also need DCMS Ministers to advocate the economic and strategic value of museums (as part of a wider cultural offer) across Government and to steer national policy in a way which reinforces collaboration between sectors and the wider contribution of museums to political priorities.

### **Diversifying funding streams**

25. Although reducing funding is perceived as a major challenge for the museums sector, there are also felt to be opportunities to diversify funding streams. This includes funding sources such as the Lottery, Arts Council grants as well as deriving income through the establishment of a charitable arm to initiatives such as special exhibitions, hiring out venues and collections.
26. One local councils has established a local lottery to fund local events and activities and it is possible that more councils will look at this route. DCMS should consider whether there is scope at the national level to promote endowment funds and increased philanthropy, similar to the support that has been provided to the charitable and voluntary sector. These models offer the potential to leverage in additional match-funding and place it on a sustainable footing.
27. European funding was identified as an opportunity by a number of respondents to the survey. The UK's future access to this funding remains unclear, and DCMS will need to work with the new Department for Exiting the European Union to clarify this picture and identify where the sector may need additional support.
28. Commercial opportunities also exist for charging to access special exhibitions, or for loans to other institutions or businesses, but these require new skills in developing costing and pricing models, as well as evaluating the impact that any charges may have on accessibility and attendance. DCMS will wish to consider investing in skills provision.

### **Digitisation**

29. 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.
30. DCMS should consider ways to invest in further digitising collections, but also the way in which digital and electronic media can be used to more effectively engage younger

generations who seek a more interactive experience. There are excellent examples of this taking place in larger museums, but smaller museums and stretched services are finding this shift a challenge, even where identified as an opportunity.

**Q. What needs to be done to ensure the financial sustainability of the museum and galleries sector in England over the next decade?**

31. 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
- develop links with 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
- reducing staffing levels
- reducing museum and gallery opening hours
- removing physical museums and move towards a more outreach option

32. The Arts Council's cultural commissioning project in conjunction with the NCVO has been an excellent example of the Arts Council working with partners to support councils and arts organisations to consider and develop alternative income streams. The project has also enabled council cultural services (including museums) to develop commissioning ideas where culture is embedded within other council work areas, for example Kent County Council's internal commissioning work whereby its waste management services incorporated an arts element in their tender contracts. The LGA strongly supports the Government (and Arts Council England) to further support councils to develop alternative income streams beyond a sole reliance on public funding.

33. Local Government, along with central government and Arts Council England need to undertake further work to incentivise and encourage philanthropic and corporate giving to the cultural sector, particularly outside London and in areas of economic disadvantage.

**Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement 'Government should fund museums and galleries'?**

34. Councils recognise the value of continuing to invest in museums and cultural services, and have protected these budgets as far as possible. However, councils have reached the end of transactional savings and, in comparison to services such as social care and children's safeguarding, museums must be considered among the most vulnerable services to further cuts within councils, and a number of councils have consulted on reaching zero budgets for cultural services.

35. In many places the funding crisis has prompted closer working between councils and the local culture sector, a shared focus on different delivery models such as trusts, sharing services, a more entrepreneurial approach, greater community involvement and more partnerships with business, health and other sectors.

36. The LGA encourages the Government (and Arts Council England) to focus on supporting councils to develop new investment models, commissioning opportunities and integrating the museums into the achievement of wider growth and wellbeing priorities.

### **Case studies**

The speed with which the sector is responding to change has left little time for evaluation, and this is something that needs investment in the future. It is therefore difficult to say what constitutes 'best practice'. However, the following examples illustrate innovative approaches to museums delivery:

### **Partnership working**

- Cambridge Council has taken a corporate approach to arts and culture based on their arts plan, which has adopted the vision for arts and culture developed by Cambridge Arts and Cultural Leaders, a group of arts and cultural organisations based in and around Cambridge. This alignment is starting to come to fruition through for example the development of their local cultural education partnership, My Cambridge.
- Plymouth Council has been developing the Plymouth History Centre project, which brings together four partners (the council's arts & heritage service, Southwest Film & Television Archive, Southwest Image Bank and Plymouth University to create a new £32 million cultural attraction in the heart of the city.

### **Sharing assets**

- Hertsmere Council has co-located Elstree and Borehamwood Museum in a local library and community facility. Potters Bar Museum has also co-located with a theatre, with devolved management to voluntary organisations and Community Interest Organisations.
- Sandwell Council has established a 5-10 year plan for the development of their museums as key local authority assets contributing across the wider agenda, seeking to define a new model for local authority museums which is community rather than collections focussed.

### **Diversifying income**

- Derby Council has enhanced their commercial offering by having flexible galleries and hosting events like Comicon and vintage fairs to bring in a different audience
- Nottingham City has invested to bring back properties on sites back into use to help create holiday lets and enable new income streams.

### **Digital**

- Doncaster – The Heritage Lottery Funded Doncaster 1914-18 project is getting out into communities, helping to train people in research and writing skills and encouraging the crowdsourcing of information from the general public so that they can upload their own stories online.

- Eastbourne Council is combining ideas such as sculpture, traditional interpretation and digital technology to provide more stimulating and inclusive ways of engaging with heritage.

### **Diversifying workforce**

- Colchester Council has developed a combination of traditionally separate collections knowledge and education skills roles in a new hybrid Collections & Learning Curator role. The council has also developed 'The Training Museum' which encourages a more diverse workforce to enter the museum sector with opportunities to work more closely with the University to complete vocational course.