

Item 3(c)

Culture, Tourism and Sport Board – report from Cllr Flick Rea (Chair)

Meeting with Ed Vaizey MP, Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries

1. I met with Ed Vaizey MP, Culture Minister, on 19 December for the latest in our regular series of meetings. We discussed the importance of positioning public libraries as central to encouraging more people to get on-line and the implementation of Universal Credit. I also raised councils' serious concerns about the progress of the ultra-fast broadband programme and secured the Minister's agreement to work with us to resolve blockages and keep the programme on track. We also discussed the centrality of the arts to economic development and the visitor economy and agreed to work together on advocacy for the arts within government.

Visitor Economy

2. On 4 December Cllr Doreen Stephenson and I met the Chief Executive of Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) to discuss councils' serious concerns about changes to the Blue Flag Scheme, which could result in 30 per cent of beaches currently in the scheme losing the coveted status in 2013. We emphasised that councils are very concerned about the potential impact this may have on the visitor economy at a time when many local businesses and communities are facing economic hardship. We secured KBT's agreement to work more closely with the LGA on communicating the changes to councillors and supporting them to improve bathing water quality in partnership with the Environment Agency and water companies.

Heritage and growth

3. I was delighted to welcome Baroness Andrews, Chair of English Heritage, to the November Culture, Tourism and Sport Board meeting. We had a very positive discussion about how we can support councils to maximise the economic impact of their investment in heritage; UK heritage tourism accounts for £4.3 billion of GDP and creates employment for 113,000 people. We agreed a new partnership with English Heritage that will see us developing a leadership offer for portfolio holders and heritage champions, and sharing different and more efficient ways of delivering local historic environmental services.

Libraries

4. I spoke at the latest in a series of joint LGA / Arts Council leadership seminars for library portfolio holders on 12 December. Ten councillors attended and shared innovative delivery models. The seminar increased awareness of how members can re-design their libraries, alongside a better understanding of the tools and support available to help them from the LGA and Arts Council. We are on track to support nearly all library portfolio holders through seminars or peer support by the end of this financial year.

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Sport

5. At the invitation of Meg Munn MP, a strong advocate for increasing participation in tennis, I met the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and Tennis for Free (TFF) on 20 November to discuss strengthening local partnerships with councils. The number of people playing tennis at a grassroots level has been falling. I emphasised the importance of early engagement with councils who, despite budget pressures, are committed to supporting participation and key to strengthening local connectivity. We also agreed to share examples of councils who are signed-up to Tennis for Free and the outcomes it has achieved.

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