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## **Museums Improvement**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion

### **Summary**

This paper summarises the MLA-led Renaissance in the Regions programme that invested in regional and local museums. Members are invited to discuss the programme and the future improvement of museum services in the context of the announcement, on 26 July 2010, that the Museums, Libraries and Archives council will be wound up by April 2012.

### **Recommendation**

That members note the report and discuss the issues raised

### **Action**

Subject to members' comments, officers to take forward any suggested actions.

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**Museums improvement**

**Background**

1. The Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, on 26 July 2010, released a written statement on DCMS arms length bodies. Amongst other announcements, the statement confirmed that the Museums Libraries and Archives Council would be abolished, and its activities wound up by April 2012.

**Renaissance Programme**

2. The Renaissance in the Regions programme has invested around £300 million of central government funds to improve and develop museums in England. The programme added about 13% to the revenue budgets of participating museums, and was the first time that central government had contributed revenue funding in this way. It accounts for over half of the MLA's funded activity.
3. The programme was delivered through regional "hub" museums, which supported the development of smaller museums within their regions. The only formal monitoring of performance associated with investment was in relation to hub museums. An independent evaluation of the impact of Renaissance between 2001 - 2008 found that the investment programme could claim several achievements:
  - Visits to museums in England, which were in decline at the turn of the millennium, began to recover at the same time that Renaissance funding became available;
  - From 2003 to 2007 hub increases were in line with, or exceeded, those museums [that received funding directly from DCMS];
  - The general trend has been for hub museums to out-perform their counterparts in Scotland and Wales, where there is no equivalent to Renaissance;
  - The increase in visit numbers reflects more visits by people from the immediate local authority area;
  - There is evidence of a stable and heavily-used schools service;
  - Hub museums' visitor profiles of people from ethnic minorities broadly match their proportion in the population in all regions except London. There is also a correlation between museum visits and the proportion of the population receiving Disability Living Allowances.
4. However, the evaluation criticised the performance monitoring and reporting embedded in the programme, and was critical about the MLA's engagement with local authorities: "*MLA's relationships with hub museums' primary funding partners, the majority of which are local authorities, appears to be more*

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*theoretical than actual. It has largely ignored the realities of working within local government structures.”*

5. The evaluation also made several recommendations for improving the programme. These included:
  - structural and cultural change within the museums sector should be accelerated, for example, through a greater commitment to partnership working, both within and outside the sector; the greater sharing of expertise, experience and resources;
  - the programme should engage in high level partnerships with primary funding partners – namely local authorities and universities, and within the context of those arrangements, Renaissance should contribute to the realisation of local policy goals;
  - the programme should both extend and simplify its current practice of partnership working to embrace other organisations including social entrepreneurs, health trusts and the voluntary sector;
  - the programme should actively explore other models of delivery, including the more effective development of museums as the providers of services commissioned by others – for example, by Children’s Services or Primary Care Trusts;
  - there should be a dismantling of regional hubs and they should be replaced by flexible partnerships, centred around a small number of core museums;

**Future of Renaissance**

6. The Government have currently made no firm commitments about the future of Renaissance funding. Were it to be continued however, the demise of the MLA means that new administrative and governance structures would be required. In the new context of public spending reductions, local and national public subsidy to cultural institutions needs to work more efficiently together, and councils will want to play a central role in the further development of the programme.
7. Drawing on the Boards’ recent discussions around libraries improvement and the above recommendations of the independent evaluation, **members are invited to comment on potential future models for the further development of the Renaissance programme.**

**Financial Implications**

8. None for the LGA arising from this report. Changes to Renaissance programme will have significant implications for funded museums.