

Dame Liz Forgan
Arts Council England
14 Great Peter Street
London
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2 March 2011

Dear Liz

Arts Council England and local government: working in partnership on libraries and museums

Thank you for your letter updating me on your plans for the Arts Council to assume wider responsibilities for museums and libraries with effect from April 2012. This is an opportunity for local government nationally and locally to form a new relationship with the Arts Council, based upon the shared principles you set out in your letter.

That new relationship will also need to respond to the radically different service landscape that we all face, not least the challenging financial situation. Local government faces a £6.5 billion funding gap in 2011/12 between what they need to spend to meet current frontline provision and the income they will be able to raise from council tax and other sources. As a result councillors are taking tough decisions about the local cultural services they can afford to support. But we also have a very strong track record of modernisation and self improvement to build on. Our sector has pioneered the use of trusts and social enterprises, embraced the digital revolution and works with an army of committed volunteers.

Our priorities in the transition from MLA to Arts Council are to secure a way forward that is based on the following:

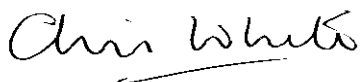
- **Partnership** – the biggest prize has to be what you refer to as a “single conversation” between the Arts Council and local councils, spanning libraries, museums and the arts. More joined-up conversations about key issues including commissioning, assets, reaching marginalised communities and the contribution of culture to the overall priorities of a place will lead to a more efficient use of resources and better outcomes. This partnership approach also extends to the local cultural organisations who play such a vital role in sustaining vibrant cultural offers. In particular, as local government adopts a stronger commissioning role, the Arts Council can help to support and build the capacity of local cultural organisations, and encourage the joint commissioning of cultural activity – with the Arts Council where appropriate.

The Arts Council will bring much expertise and a fresh perspective to museums and libraries. And we want all councils with libraries and museums to have the opportunity to access a core offer. Councillors have also told me that it will be important to capture existing knowledge during the transition phase to ensure continuity in understanding the full cultural story of places.

- **Self improvement, innovation and modernisation** – we want to ensure that the public continue to have access to high quality local museums and libraries. This means driving down costs whilst maintaining front line provision. The Arts Council can help by actively supporting councils to develop imaginative solutions that are locally appropriate, and owned and driven by councils themselves. Working with the LG Group, we can capture and share that learning with other councils. The Future Libraries Programme, which Ed Vaizey and I are persuaded needs to continue into a second phase, provides an excellent model to build upon.
- **Leadership** – we need to harness political and professional leadership to ensure that culture has a strong voice at the top table. The Arts Council can help to build leadership capacity and visibility by supporting councils to break down silos and encourage the development of a ‘whole culture’ approach to strategic planning and investment in culture.

I am pleased that you have recognised these priorities in your letter. I look forward to building on this shared understanding as you develop more detailed plans for the transition and undertake further consultation with local government.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Councillor Chris White
Chair Local Government Group Culture, Tourism and Sport Programme Board