

Item 5

Arts Council England – working in partnership on the arts, libraries and museums

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

As part of the Government's plans to rationalise non-departmental public bodies, it was announced in July 2010 that the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) would be abolished. In December 2010 it was confirmed that Arts Council England (ACE) would take on MLA's functions relating to museums and libraries. This came into effect in October 2011.

Alan Davey, Chief Executive of ACE, will attend the Board to discuss the implications of ACE's expanded remit for local authorities and the LGA.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the report as background for a discussion with Alan Davey.

Action

To be taken forward by officers, as directed by Members.

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Item 5

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Background

- 1 As part of the Government's plans to rationalise non-departmental public bodies, it was announced in July 2010 that the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) would be abolished. In December 2010 it was confirmed that Arts Council England (ACE) would take on the following functions relating to museums and libraries:
 - 1.1 the Renaissance in the Regions programme for regional museums, including completing the re-design of its content and operation;
 - 1.2 regional museums improvement and development agenda, including the Accreditation Standard and the Designation Scheme and projects relating to the 2012 Cultural Olympiad;
 - 1.3 libraries improvement and development agenda;
 - 1.4 cultural property functions including, for example, export licensing, Government Indemnity, acceptance in lieu and security advice.
- 2 These changes came into effect in October 2011. Whilst ACE has a body of expertise and experience in the arts, taking on responsibilities for supporting public libraries (a statutory service for county and unitary councils) and museums is a significant challenge. ACE consulted widely with partners, including the LGA, to understand what unites the arts, libraries and museums, the key differences and the opportunities presented by closer collaboration. ACE has also had to make significant savings.
- 3 Outside London, ACE and local government are the biggest public funders of culture.
- 4 The LGA's priority has been to ensure that ACE supports a sector-led approach to improvement for the arts, museums and libraries that enables as much funding as possible to reach the frontline to keep services open.

The implications for local government

- 5 There are significant implications for local government's relationship with ACE nationally and locally and for the support that is available to councils to drive up and maintain high quality libraries and museums at a time of unprecedented budget pressures.
- 6 Council funded and supported arts, museums and libraries are incredibly diverse and innovative services, encompassing different sizes, delivery models and partnerships across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Councils want to access coherent support from ACE that enables local cultural services

Item 5

- to become more efficient, to better meet local priorities and to exploit opportunities.
- 7 Inevitably there will be challenges as ACE and councils get used to a different relationship, move on from past difficulties or even work together for the first time. But there is an important opportunity for a single cultural conversation nationally, to mirror the joined-up approach that councils already take.
 - 8 There are four key programmes which will be major sources of improvement support:
 - 8.1 The Libraries Development Initiative - a £200,000 fund that will build on the MLA and LGA's Future Libraries Programme. The Initiative is a partnership between LGA and ACE and will support around 10 projects in 2012/13. Projects will explore the benefits of embedding arts and culture in libraries and new ways of working that will enhance libraries' sustainability and relevance as vibrant hubs in their local communities. Learning will be captured and shared.
 - 8.2 Renaissance in the Regions – a £43 million fund for museums improvement. £20 million will be allocated to key regional museums to lead long-term change for museums in their area, £15 million will provide transition funding in 2012/13 for existing Renaissance Hub museums (after this it will support improvement projects that address specific issues for a time limited period) and £3 million will support improvement for smaller museums who do not get access to the other funding.
 - 8.3 National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) – ACE will distribute £950 million to 606 arts organisations between April 2012 and 2015. Councils co-fund around 60% of the NPOs. In addition, £440 million of National Lottery and strategic funding will be invested over the same period to target particular challenges, opportunities or gaps in the National Portfolio.
 - 8.4 Grants for the Arts – an open-access funding programme for the arts, funded by a lottery budget of £202 million.
 - 9 In addition, ACE is investing in 10 organisations (plus four associate organisations) to create a network of Bridge Organisations. Between them, they will receive £10m in 2012/13 and in each of the subsequent years of this funding round. Their purpose is to make a step change in improving the delivery of arts opportunities for children and young people, acting as a bridge between the arts and education sectors.

Item 5

Issues to explore with Arts Council England

- 10 We attach great importance to our ability to work closely and productively with ACE at the national level. It is vital that this close working is replicated at the local level. Strong partnerships are essential in a tough financial climate. We believe we share three key priorities with ACE:
 - 10.1 Self improvement, innovation and modernisation. We want to ensure that the public continue to have access to high quality arts, museums and libraries. This means driving down costs whilst maintaining front line provision. ACE can help by actively supporting councils to develop imaginative solutions that are locally appropriate, and owned and driven by councils themselves. Working with LGA, we can capture and share that learning with other councils.
 - 10.2 Realising the potential of a single conversation spanning the arts, museums and libraries. 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 also needs to encompass archives and close working with The National Archives.
 - 10.3 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.
- 11 We welcome the constructive dialogue we have had with ACE on its new programmes, particularly our partnership on the Libraries Development Initiative. However, there are some important challenges we need to address together:
 - 11.1 On libraries, we need to balance the desire to explore longer term models of excellence in public libraries with the urgent need to support councils to respond to budget challenges and modernise libraries. We also want to understand how ACE views its role in the context of the Secretary of State's powers under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act.
 - 11.2 On museums, we need to make sure ACE funding is targeted to make the biggest difference and gets to the front line. We want to understand how the different strands of the Renaissance Programme come together in a coherent offer for local government funded museums.
 - 11.3 On the arts, councils co-fund 60% of the National Portfolio Organisations and we need to move towards shared funding methodology and criteria,

Item 5

and shared approaches to appraising the performance of funded organisations.

Conclusion and next steps

- 12 We have an opportunity to forge a new national partnership with ACE that exploits the opportunities presented by ACE's wider remit and empowers councils to lead their own improvement. This is the best recipe for enabling publicly funded arts, libraries and museums to flourish in tough financial times.
- 13 It is suggested that ACE and LGA maintain regular contact at the political and officer level.

Financial Implications

- 14 None.