

## **LGA Culture and Tourism Conference 2021**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion and direction

### **Summary**

This report highlights issues associated with the planning and delivery of the Culture and Tourism conference 2021 in the context of COVID-19. Given the uncertainty surrounding the immediate future of in-person events, and our recent success in reaching new audiences via online events, it is suggested that the conference is delivered virtually using one of several models outlined below. Board members are invited to discuss potential conference themes and different ways of delivering the event and offer a steer on their preferred approach.

### **Recommendations**

In order to reduce uncertainty about the event and to maximise attendance, our recommendation is that next year's Culture and Tourism conference is held remotely in March 2021. The Board is invited to discuss and offer direction on the format and theme of the event.

### **Action**

Officers to progress as directed.

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## **LGA Culture and Tourism Conference 2021**

### **Background**

1. The LGA's Culture and Tourism Conference 2020, took place just before lockdown on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> March in Portsmouth. The event had a theme of 'making the most of your heritage' and received positive feedback from participants. It attracted over 70 delegates over the course of two days and featured study trips to heritage sites across the city.
2. The conference has focused on culture and tourism in recent years on the basis that we hold separate sport conferences, often in partnership with Sport England. We are currently planning two such virtual events in 2020/21. We would welcome the Board's views on whether the current approach is the correct one, or whether the 2021 CTS virtual conference should also incorporate sport and leisure.
3. As a result of COVID-19, the future of in-person events is uncertain. In response, the LGA has re-evaluated its approach to events and adapted its delivery accordingly, developing a full programme of virtual activity.
4. Some of the work delivered by the CTS team includes the following:
  - 4.1. A full programme of webinars and workshops for Sport England as part of our improvement offer. We have so far delivered 22 events as part of this programme.
  - 4.2. A series of six webinars focusing on the immediate impact of COVID-19 on culture and tourism, including two events specifically on coastal tourism.
  - 4.3. A conference on rethinking the future of sport and leisure. This was run as a webinar, featuring speakers from Sport England and attracted **293 attendees**.
  - 4.4. A launch event for our publication on the creative economy, featuring speakers from the Creative Industries Federation, Golant Innovation/the Audience Agency, Kent County Council and Leeds City Council. The event attracted **231 attendees**.
5. These virtual events have received high levels of positive feedback and have allowed us to reach far greater audiences than would ordinarily be the case with their in-person equivalents.
6. Hosting a physical event in March would be potentially challenging for most local authorities, even if the current restrictions are lifted. We have received notification from one of the potential hosts of next year's event that they will no longer be able to provide space as a result of the pandemic. Many members of culture and leisure staff and councillors may find it more difficult to travel, either as a result of barriers to using public transport or due to restrictions in travel budgets.

7. Bearing in mind these considerations, in order to reduce uncertainty about the event and to maximise attendance our recommendation is that next year's Culture and Tourism conference is held remotely.

### Options for delivery models

8. There are various options for delivering a virtual conference of this kind. None reproduce the intangible networking benefits of a physical event, but potentially offer delegates the opportunity to hear from a wider range of speakers.

8.1. *Reproducing the agenda of a traditional Culture and Tourism Conference in digital format.* The event would take place over a single day, or day and a half and feature a series of presentations, workshops and panel sessions on topics addressing the theme of the event. To avoid video-conferencing fatigue, we would recommend an absolute maximum of three sessions (two webinars and a workshop) in a day with reasonable gaps in between. One session would either comprise:

8.1.1. **Webinar event.** Three presentations, followed by a panel discussion lasting up to two hours in total.

8.1.2. **Workshop.** One presentation (or potentially a virtual tour of a facility) from a council delivering against a topic highlighted by the webinars, followed by discussion with a smaller group/breakout groups lasting up to one hour.

This format has the advantage of reproducing most faithfully the feel of a traditional event and could be accompanied by social media activity to reproduce some element of the 'buzz'; however, in the current climate some officers and councillors may find it hard to commit to a full day event.

8.2. *Spreading the conference out over the course of a week.* In this format, we would cover the same material, but over a longer period of time. We would suggest three **webinar events** over the course of the week, each lasting one and a half hours, followed by a short break and a **workshop** of one hour, focusing on a best practice example. This would reduce the likelihood of video-conferencing fatigue, but may also be likely to result in different audiences attending each of the events.

8.3. *Holding the conference as a series of once weekly events over the course of the month.* This would follow the format of 8.2, but take place over a month, rather than a week. This would potentially provide a more manageable format for busy officers or councillors who want to attend all the sessions, but may be unable to commit to a full day or the same amount of time within the space of a week. However, it would not provide the same sense of a conference and could be more difficult to brand as such.

### Options for conference theme

9. As noted earlier, the annual conference has traditionally focused on Culture and Tourism, with separate events held on the sport and leisure side of the portfolio. We are currently planning two sports conferences in 2020/21, one focusing on public leisure and another on football in partnership with the Football Association. We would welcome a steer from the Board as to the topics included in this year's annual conference.
  
10. We would recommend that the theme of the conference links directly to the impact of and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The themes below are offered as a framework for Board discussion.
  - 10.1. *Culture, tourism (and sport) and sustainable economic recovery.* This theme would bring together some of our recent work on creative regeneration, Cultural Strategy in a Box and the creative economy. Topics within this theme could include:
    - 10.1.1. How can culture/leisure support the levelling up agenda?
    - 10.1.2. How can councils support the growth of the creative economy (following on from our recent publication)?
    - 10.1.3. What next for cultural regeneration?
    - 10.1.4. What does the visitor economy need in order to recover?
  - 10.2. *Culture and health.* Topics within the theme could include:
    - 10.2.1. How can culture support social prescribing (linked to our upcoming report on this subject)?
    - 10.2.2. Learning from best practice. Reflections on how cultural and leisure activities and green space supported mental and physical wellbeing during lockdown.
    - 10.2.3. What is the role of the cultural sector in supporting the recovery of better mental health outcomes in the aftermath of COVID-19?
  - 10.3. *Supporting our cultural infrastructure.* The conference could be used to explicitly build a cross local government manifesto or campaign on the value of culture, with sessions focusing on the different contribution culture can make to relevant policy outcomes. For example:
    - 10.3.1. Culture and public health
    - 10.3.2. Culture and economic recovery

10.3.3. Culture and education/skills

**Financial Implications**

11. Virtual events have the advantage of being considerably cheaper to run than their physical equivalent and we would anticipate costs associated with the conference to be minimal.

**Next steps**

12. The Board is invited to discuss the options above and offer a steer on the proposed format and theme of the 2021 conference.