

## **Cultural improvement update to the CTS board**

### **Purpose of report**

For information.

### **Summary**

This report provides an update to the board on the LGA's cultural services improvement programmes. An update on the sport and physical activity improvement offer was included at the last CTS board. A further update will be included at the next board.

Is this report confidential? Yes  No

### **Recommendation/s**

Board Members are asked to note the report.

### **Action/s**

As instructed by Board Members.

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## **Background**

1. The LGA works with Arts Council England (ACE) to deliver improvement support to local authority cultural and library services. Since May 2021, the improvement offer has been managed by the LGA's Productivity team, which sits within the improvement division of the LGA. The team continues to work in close collaboration with the LGA's policy team to ensure that the latest policy content is included within the improvement offer to councils. This transition has enabled the learning and approaches from other successful LGA improvement programmes to be built into this offer. We have also made strong links with complementary programmes such as the LGA's economic growth and behavioural insights programmes.
2. The LGA's 2021-22 cultural services improvement programme comprises:
  - 2.1 Leadership Essentials training for elected members
  - 2.2 10 Culture and library peer challenges
  - 2.3 A senior officer training pilot for lead culture and library officers
  - 2.4 Retrospective evaluation of peer challenges from previous year
  - 2.5 Councillor sounding board for libraries – led by policy team
3. To ensure programme continuity during changing national COVID guidance, these programmes are all currently being delivered online.

## **Leadership Essentials: Culture**

4. This programme ran in November 2021, comprised of four sessions plus an online icebreaker.
5. The tone of the sessions was creative and interactive, which was reinforced by the online informal icebreaker designed to replicate the networking and introductions attendees may experience at face-to-face events.
6. Ahead of the main sessions, attendees received a topical briefing note which ensured that all attendees began the session with the same base level knowledge. The session themes were:
  - 6.1 Collaborative placemaking
  - 6.2 Pandemic recovery
  - 6.3 Innovation, disruption and change
  - 6.4 Culture contributing to cross-cutting agendas
7. Briefings and content were co-created with Arts Council, policy colleagues and the facilitator. The session speakers were:

- 7.1 Collaborative placemaking - Cllr Luthfur Rahman, Deputy Leader, Manchester City Council, and Cllr Aga Dychton, Portfolio Holder for Community, Watford
  - 7.2 Pandemic recovery - Cllr David Shepherd, Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, Leann Buchan, Head of Creative Programming and Engagement, Rotherham Council, and Sarah Hassan, Assistant Head of Service, Norfolk County Council Library and Information Service
  - 7.3 Innovation, disruption, and change - Cllr Keith Cunliffe, Deputy Leader, Professor Kate Arden, Director of Public Health, Wigan Council, Cllr Tim Cheetham, Cabinet Spokesperson - Regeneration and Culture, and Sue Thiedeman, Head of Culture and Visitor Economy, Culture and Regeneration, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
  - 7.4 Culture contributing to cross-cutting agendas - Cllr Louise Gittins, Leader, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Cllr Victoria Wilson, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture, and Catherine Mann, Libraries and Arts Manager, Staffordshire County Council
8. The programme had 13 attendees. In post session surveys 100% of respondents found the content relevant and the speakers knowledgeable. Councillors valued the opportunity to learn from each other: “The stimulus of seeing what other councils were achieving; the opportunities taken up to involve the communities; understanding of how to develop council resources and assets”.
  9. The biggest area for development was more time in breakout groups, which we will be actively building into future programmes.
  10. In response to a suggestion raised by the CTS lead members, we are arranging to directly contact all councillors with the responsibility for culture and libraries, to ask what content would be most useful, practical and relevant to include in the improvement programme for the year ahead.
  11. We will update the CTS board updated when new training dates are released.

### **Peer challenges**

12. This year we will deliver 3 cultural services and 7 library services peer challenges. The peer challenges will be conducted online and will last 1.5 days. The participating councils have been confirmed and are listed below:
  - 12.1 Culture: South Oxfordshire District Council, Reigate and Banstead Council, and Mole Valley District Council

12.2 Library: Suffolk County Council, Liverpool City Council, Lincolnshire County Council, Newcastle City Council, Essex County Council, Bristol City Council, West Berkshire Council

13. All peer challenges will complete by the end of May, with the relevant peer challenge report being sent to the council 4 – 6 weeks after their peer challenge.

14. Five key themes have emerged as areas that councils want support with:

- 14.1 Post-Covid recovery/sustainability of cultural venues
- 14.2 Engagement and consultation with the local community regarding the future of cultural services
- 14.3 Re-procurement of services
- 14.4 How can culture contribute to the wider council agenda for example, economic growth and health of local communities
- 14.5 Better use of data

15. As the peer challenge dates are confirmed with the councils, we will work with LGA political group offices to source appropriate peers.

### **Retrospective evaluation of peer challenges**

#### **Peer challenge evaluation survey – culture services**

16. The report is currently being finalised, but early key findings include:

- 16.1 Half of the respondents said that they felt as though the outcomes that they wished to achieve because of taking part in the peer challenge had been achieved to a great extent.
- 16.2 All respondents reported that their council had sustained the changes put in place following the culture peer challenge to a great or moderate extent.
- 16.3 All four respondents said that the culture peer challenge had, to a great or moderate extent, had a positive impact on recognition at a senior leadership level of the role that culture services can play in supporting the delivery of corporate strategic activity.
- 16.4 75 per cent of respondents reported that the culture peer challenge has had a continued positive impact on the council's performance to a moderate extent with 25 per cent saying it had to a small extent.
- 16.5 50 per cent reported that the culture peer challenge has had a continued positive impact on the delivery of the council's priorities to a moderate extent with the remaining 50 per cent saying that it had to a small extent.

#### **Peer challenge evaluation survey – library services**

17. The report is currently being finalised, but early key findings include:

- 17.1 60 per cent of the survey participants thought that the outcomes that they wished to achieve from taking part in the peer challenge had been achieved to a great

- extent, and the remaining 40 per cent thought they had been achieved to a moderate extent.
- 17.2 Some examples that respondents provided of changes to the library services as an outcome of the peer challenge included: the re-design of library services and library strategies, increased partnerships, and higher engagement with senior staff.
  - 17.3 Four-fifths of respondents thought that their council sustained the changes put in place following the peer challenge to a great or moderate extent.
  - 17.4 Some factors that respondents cited as impacting the ability of councils to sustain these changes included: perceptions on the value and role of libraries within councils, the availability of resources, communication with stakeholders, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
  - 17.5 More than 90 per cent of respondents thought that the library peer challenge had a positive impact to a great or moderate extent on: the external reputation of the library service, relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders, and the internal reputation of the library service.
  - 17.6 Almost three-quarters of respondents thought that the library peer challenge had a positive continued impact on the delivery of their council's priorities to a great or moderate extent.
  - 17.7 Some developments in the library service that respondents said would not have happened without the library peer challenge included: the development of strategic partners, the development of annual reports and strategies, and increased training and development for staff.
18. The senior officer training pilot is in development and we will provide an update at a future CTS board regarding this programme.

### **Councillor Sounding Board**

19. As part of our in-kind contribution to the Arts Council/LGA Improvement Programme, the policy team is working with the libraries team at ACE to build a Councillor Sounding Board for libraries. This group mirrors the existing Heads of Service Sounding Board established by ACE and its purpose is to test new library policy with a representative group of councillors drawn from councils across the country, and to ensure their perspectives are incorporated in ACE and LGA programmes.
20. The first meeting of this group took place in January and included a discussion with the British Library on the [Single Digital Presence for Libraries](#) programme. This group will meet every six months.

### **Implications for Wales**

21. The cultural improvement offer is provided to councils in England.

### **Implications for inclusion, diversity and equality**

22. Throughout the programme (and ongoing) we have been actively trying to source speakers and attendees from a range of backgrounds and continually reviewing our processes

### **Financial Implications**

23. The Leadership Essentials: Culture, peer challenges programme and lead library members sounding board are funded by a grant of £95,852 from Arts Council England.
24. The senior officer learning pilot is funded by a grant of £30,000 from Arts Council England.
25. LGA costs are covered by the grants.

### **Next steps**

26. Deliver 3 culture and 7 library peer challenges.
27. Develop and deliver the senior officer training pilot.
28. Deliver the next Councillor Sounding Board for libraries in June/July.