

LGA submission to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport inquiry into Cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda

18 March 2022

1. About the Local Government Association (LGA)

- 1.1. The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We are a politically led, cross-party membership organisation, representing councils from England and Wales.
- 1.2. Our role is to support, promote and improve local government, and raise national awareness of the work of councils. Our ultimate ambition is to support councils to deliver local solutions to national problems.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Councils play a vital role in developing their places, levelling up the economy and tackling inequalities in every region. They recognise the importance of culture in shaping vibrant places that people want to live, work and visit and many are already successfully placing culture at the heart of plans to deliver economic and social recovery.
- 2.2 Councils are the biggest public funders of culture, spending over £1 billion a year on culture in England alone, as well as a further £1 billion on related services in sport, parks and green spaces and tourism. To continue investing in these services and make a coordinated and strategic contribution to the objectives of Levelling Up, councils need the powers and long-term sustainable funding to deliver the meaningful change that is needed.
- 2.3 We are pleased that government has recognised councils' key role in delivering on the levelling up agenda by placing councils at the heart of the delivery of the Levelling Up Fund and Community Renewal Fund, and that culture has been prioritised within these funds
- 2.4 However, competition between authorities or regions for these and other limited pots of funding is unhelpful and does not deliver the best long-term outcomes or value for money. Councils whose culture teams already have the least resources, often in smaller towns and rural areas, have an inherent disadvantage in developing successful bids. We look forward to working with Government on the plan announced in the Levelling Up White Paper to streamline growth funding and ensure that capital investment is accompanied by adequate revenue funding. This will be essential support places without established artistic infrastructure and avoid the development of unsustainable cultural facilities.
- 2.5 The Government should also consider providing programme development grants to accompany large funding programmes to ensure culture can be successfully incorporated in council bids where capacity in culture teams is low.
- 2.6 A thriving cultural offer will become ever more important in driving footfall to the high street as changes in consumer behaviour make traditional town centre retail less sustainable. Councils are essential in delivering this, both in their role as conveners of place and as a major funder and provider of cultural services.

Submission

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- 2.7 We welcome that the importance of culture is recognised in the Levelling Up White Paper, with ‘engagement in culture’ acknowledged as a key driver of ‘Pride of Place’. However, if we are to achieve levelling up it will be essential to also recognise the contribution culture can make across the Levelling Up Missions, to tackle inequalities and deliver on wider social, economic and health objectives. It is particularly relevant to Missions 5, (improving education outcomes) 6 (boosting the number of people with high quality skills), 7 (decreasing health inequalities and improving life expectancy), 8 (improving wellbeing), and 9 (restoring pride in place and building a sense of community).
- 2.8 To successfully capitalise on culture to deliver levelling up, the [Government should build on the success of local authorities cultural initiatives and regeneration projects](#), as well as schemes like the Creative Industries Clusters Programme, and back a pilot programme of place-based investment and incentives in the creative economy. We are calling on Government to unlock cultural investment by match funding councils’ own investments and providing a package of incentives for areas which are designated as a creative cluster area.
- 2.9 Creative involvement in place-making is not simply about incorporating art into new designs, it is about recognising the value of creativity in the design process and in the engagement process with the local community. Creatives working within the cultural sector have an advantageous skillset and experience in community outreach which can add significant value to local decision making.
- 2.10 The Government should look to extend the success of the UK City of Culture programme by considering how the principles of the scheme can be applied to deliver similar benefits outside of urban centres.
- 2.11 Collaboration between councils, local cultural organisations and national funding bodies is critical to supporting the growth of the cultural and creatives sectors across the UK. That is why we are calling for an extension of Arts Council England’s programme of cultural compacts, [which been shown to represent a step-change](#) in partnership working across sectors, bringing together local authorities, businesses, education providers, cultural and community leaders. This approach will turbocharge culture in the investment plans required under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- 2.12 The LGA supports its members to use culture to support local economies including through a range of resources focused on the role of culture in local strategic planning. We are also supporting councils to revitalise their town and city centres and help struggling high streets in the wake of COVID-19, through a number of resources which set out practical guidance, emphasising the importance of leadership and strong partnerships, the value strategic planning and a good understanding of place-based data. They also highlight examples of innovative practice.

3. How can culture reanimate our public spaces and shopping streets?

- 3.1 As traditional town centre retail [becomes less sustainable](#), in part due to a long-term trend towards online shopping which has been accelerated by COVID-19, a cultural and hospitality offer will become ever more important in driving footfall to the high street. Community demand increasingly focuses on experience, requiring high streets to compete on a new footing. Culture and leisure venues and organisations can act as ‘anchor institutions’ that drive footfall to high streets and support the wider retail, hospitality and night life sectors by creating an attractive and vibrant offer.
- 3.2 Councils have a vital role to play in using culture to reanimate town centres, both as major funders and providers of cultural services and in their role as place-shapers and leaders of local economic development. Many councils have already effectively used a culture-led regeneration approach to drive sustainable growth in their town centres and there are plenty of successful local models for this approach, as we explored in our [2019 report on culture and economic growth](#). The benefits of culture-led regeneration are also

acknowledged in the Government's approach to the Towns Fund, while the [High Street Action Zones](#) have made a particular impact by integrating local heritage into this offer.

- 3.3 The LGA is supporting councils to revitalise their town and city centres and help struggling high streets in the wake of COVID-19. We have produced a number of resources, including [Dealing with Empty Shops](#), the [Revitalising Town Centres toolkit for councils](#), and a [Local Economic Recovery Planning: Playbook for Action](#). These reports emphasise the importance of leadership and strong partnerships, the value strategic planning and a good understanding of place-based data. They also highlight examples of innovative practice.
- 3.4 The LGA also supports its members to foster culture in their local economies, including through a range of resources focused on the role of culture in local strategic planning. These resources include [Culture-led Regeneration: achieving inclusive and sustainable growth](#), our guide to place-based cultural strategies [a Cultural Strategy in a Box](#) and the LGA/Arts Council England [Culture Hub](#), which highlights case studies from local government culture teams.
- 3.5 An increasing number of councils have made use of empty commercial units on high streets to establish 'meanwhile use' or 'pop-up' cultural attractions and creative workspaces, which have the advantage of making temporary use of a unit, and allowing its return to retail or other functions when required. For example, Cheshire East Council and their cultural forum have successfully worked with the owner of a local shopping centre to host [Macclesfield ArtSpace](#), where empty properties in the local shopping centre were used as temporary gallery space. Making capital funding available to convert more disused retail units on the high streets into creative studios would enable councils to support their local creative industries to thrive, drive footfall to high streets and increase pride in place. This must be coupled with ensuring local authorities have the planning powers they need to effectively curate high streets.
- 3.6 Investment in culture can have a ripple effect across the wider local economy. For example, Banksy's 2015 Dismaland show in Weston-super-Mare, hosted by North Somerset Council, delivered an immediate £20 million boost to the local economy. But more importantly it helped to change people's perceptions and engender a new-found confidence in the town, which has led to significant further investment and the renewal of the town's visitor economy.
- 3.7 The creative industries alone hold huge potential to reanimate our local town centres. Before the pandemic, [Government statistics](#) show that in 2018 the UK's creative industries contributed more than £111 billion to the UK economy, equivalent to £306 million every day or £13 million every hour – more than the automotive, aerospace, life sciences and oil and gas industries combined. This was a 7.4 per cent increase on 2017, with growth in the creative industries more than five times larger than growth across the UK economy as a whole.
- 3.8 More than two million people work in the UK's creative industries and, before the COVID-19 crisis, the sector [was projected to create another million jobs by 2030](#). Jobs in the creative economy tend to be higher value, better paid and be more skilled than the average in the wider economy and compared to other sectors, are less likely to be replaced by automation. Crucially for high streets and areas outside major urban centres, the creative industries are also highly distributed across the UK [in over 700 micro-clusters](#), offering the potential to deliver quality jobs in every area. As such, supporting local creative organisations will be an important part of making the benefits of levelling up widely available.
- 3.9 The LGA's recent guide to [Culture and the creative industries](#) sets out how councils can best support the creative economy in their local area, including mapping their local creative sector, creating a shared consensus around goals and implementing a

programme of support using local policies, assets and investment. The report also includes local authority best practice case study examples, such as Warwick District Council's work to stimulate a creative quarter based around the gaming industry and Kent County Council's development of a 'Cultural Transformation Board'.

- 3.10 We are currently working on a new publication, which will explore the role of Combined Authorities in this agenda. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority has worked in partnership with The Centre for Local Economic Strategies to develop Creative Improvement Districts, offering rate relief and start-up support to creative entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, the North of Tyne Combined Authority and Creative England have launched a £2.625 million investment programme to stimulate culture and creativity in the region, including a combination of grants, loans, equity finance and business advice.
- 3.11 To deliver on its levelling up agenda, the [Government should build on the success of these and similar initiatives](#), as well as the programmes like the Creative Industries Clusters Programme, and back a pilot programme of place-based investment and incentives in the creative economy. Government should match funds councils' own investments and provide a package of incentives for areas designated a creative cluster area. This should include consideration of how clusters can work outside of urban centres.
- 3.12 We are concerned about the impact of the Government's extension of permitted development rights (PDR) on councils' ability to shape their town and city centres and drive culture-led regeneration. Permitted development rights result in an ad hoc, disconnected approach to planning that undermines councils' ability to plan strategically and bring about positive change by limiting their ability to repurpose town centre assets. Permitted development rules could undermine the delivery and outcomes of councils' existing high street recovery plans, including the 72 recipients of the [Government's recent £830 million Future High Streets fund](#). We welcomed the removal of permitted development rights for demolition of theatres, concert halls and live music performance venues announced in July 2020, which risked the irreparable loss of flagship and historic cultural institutions. The Government should now revoke remaining permitted development rights, and any proposed extension.
- 3.13 We are concerned that councils and communities will have even less opportunity to have a say on developments should the Planning White Paper proposals go ahead. The proposals seemingly limit engagement as residents would not be able to influence individual applications as is the case now, with the local plan making stage being the only opportunity for residents to comment on the development. A local, democratically-led planning system underpinned by ongoing community engagement must remain in place. This will ensure trust and transparency in planning decisions and enable councils to meet the levelling up ambitions of delivering the right types of development in the right places and shape vibrant places that meet communities' needs. We will continue to work with the Government on the Planning reforms as they are introduced in Parliament.

4. How can creatives contribute to local decision-making and planning of place?

- 4.1 Culture can play a significant role in creating vibrant places in which people want to live and work. It brings people together, promotes civic pride and can be used to support meaningful discussion about what people want from their places. Creative involvement in place-making is not simply about incorporating art into new designs, it is about recognising the value of creativity in the design process and in the engagement process with the local community.
- 4.2 Creatives working within cultural organisations have an advantageous skillset which can add significant value to local decision making. Through their work they are familiar with delivering complex ideas to people through the medium of creative activity. Community

outreach also forms a key pillar of many cultural organisations work, so they are well placed and experienced in engaging with their local communities.

- 4.3 For example, the work of [Julie's Bicycle](#) with Arts Council England has demonstrated the tangible effect arts and culture organisations can have on reducing environmental impact, and the role these organisations can play in educating and influencing communities to understand their contribution to addressing climate change in their local area.
- 4.4 Creative organisations can also be effective in engaging communities in traditional regeneration and planning processes, coproducing projects to support ownership of new developments. For example, the work of [WAVEparticle](#) with Glasgow City Council on urban regeneration has been instrumental in designing interventions that would make the rapid changes to the area relevant to local people, while also remaining authentic to the history and experience of the areas under development.
- 4.5 Creatives are not the only people working in the cultural sector who have a contribution to make to local decision making. Cultural organisations like libraries and museums can be important in engaging communities in place-based decision making. The way in which public engagement with culture and leisure activity increased during lockdown demonstrates how essential these activities are to people's wellbeing and quality of life and their reach into communities. For example, during the first national lockdown:
 - 4.5.1 [Some libraries saw a 600 per cent increase in digital membership as well as fourfold increase in the number of ebooks borrowed.](#) Estimates suggest that libraries made 5 million additional digital loans and loaned 3.5 million more ebooks than usual. Loans of online e-books, e-magazines and audiobooks went up an average of 63 percent in March compared with the previous year. 120,000 people joined libraries in the three weeks after lockdown began, a significant increase on previous years.
 - 4.5.2 Kingston Library Service reached on average 10,000 people for each of its online Rhyme Time sessions. Norfolk Libraries' filmed activities were viewed over 172,000 times. That includes over 93,000 views of Bounce and Rhyme session videos.
 - 4.5.3 Barnsley Museums Facebook page alone had a reach of over 5 million people. Around 500 people a day took part in online daily challenges created under the banner of 'Beat the Boredom'. Over 20,000 took part in tours online around exhibitions.
 - 4.5.4 Hackney Council had around 1,700 viewers on their Windrush council page and around 3,000 in total for their virtual Windrush Festival.
- 4.6 The engagement potential for these and similar services is significant, both in terms of sharing information about local decision-making and engaging people in the process. Public libraries, for example, are an important driving force for change in our civic centres as trusted community spaces with an inherent culture of reuse through their model of lending and borrowing. [Recent research](#) has highlighted the range of inspirational projects taking place in libraries to support communities to engage in the future of their place, including [Libraries of Things](#), [Seed Libraries](#), and the [Wakefield Word Fest](#).
- 4.7 The most effective way for continuous engagement is through the development of cultural compacts, as is the case in Coventry, or through comparable structures like [Sheffield's Culture Consortium](#) which gives creatives influence in funding decisions and drives a collaborative approach to delivery with enhanced chances of sustainable success. This does require ongoing investment from councils, and is hampered in many smaller areas by the loss of arts development roles during the period of austerity.
- 4.8 20 Cultural Compact areas were launched in 2019, funded by the Arts Council England and the Department for Culture Digital Media and Sport (DCMS), which established

formal, goal-driven partnerships between councils, local cultural sectors and wider stakeholders to co-design future cultural offers and deliver prosperity through cultural investment. [The review of the compact pilot initiative](#) found that this approach has been successful in delivering a positive vision culture in local areas, driven economic growth and had a significant multiplier effect. As we look to build back better, seed-corn funding from Arts Council England should be used to help kickstart cultural compacts in areas that could not otherwise afford to do so.

5 How can the Government support places without established artistic infrastructure to take full advantage of the opportunities that the levelling up agenda provides?

- 5.1 Local government will play a vital role in rebuilding and levelling up the economy in every region and place, but they need the funding and powers to do this. We are pleased that government has recognised councils' key role in delivering on the levelling up agenda by placing councils at the heart of the delivery of the Levelling Up Fund and Community Renewal Fund, and that culture has been prioritised within these funds. Many councils have made this the focus of their levelling up or shared prosperity fund bids, as well as town fund or securing private investment for regeneration schemes. However, additional information and support may be required to ensure culture is successfully incorporated in council bids where capacity in culture teams is low.
- 5.2 Pressure on core council budgets over the last twelve years alongside rising demand for statutory services such as social care has placed significant strain on largely discretionary cultural services. Local authority spending on cultural and related services decreased in real terms by £1.84 billion from 2009/10 to 2017/18. For every £1 spent on culture and heritage in 2009/10, 61p was spent in 2017/18. For libraries the figure was 58p.
- 5.3 This situation has only been exacerbated by COVID-19, which has had a negative impact on the ability of cultural services and organisations to generate income to supplement their core funding. In some areas cultural teams were redeployed to the frontline COVID-response during large sections of the pandemic. As a result, council culture departments have significantly depleted capacity to pursue new funding opportunities, particularly in areas outside urban centres and in lower tier local authorities.
- 5.4 Competition between authorities or regions for limited pots of funding is unhelpful as it disproportionately disadvantages those councils whose culture teams are already thinly resourced, as the National Audit Office's recent report [Supporting Local Economic Growth](#) highlighted. Therefore, smaller local authorities in smaller towns and local areas often have an inbuilt disadvantage in competitive bidding processes. Moreover, national funding programmes often have challenging timeframes for submission, which also places authorities with smaller teams at a disadvantage. Competitive bidding processes, such as those employed by the Levelling Up and Community Renewal Funds, consume valuable time and resources at a time when councils want to be fully focused on delivering local priorities, such as protecting communities and businesses from the impact of the pandemic and securing future resilience. We look forward to working with Government on the plan announced in the Levelling Up White Paper to streamline growth funding.
- 5.5 While we would like to move away from delivering funding via competitive bidding processes, where they continue to be used the Government should consider providing programme development grants to accompany large funding programmes. This would support poorly resourced councils to research and develop their funding submissions, and support areas that have historically struggled to access major grant programmes to develop a better quality of bids and build capacity.

5.6 It is essential that adequate revenue funding accompanies capital investment to avoid the development of unsustainable facilities, particularly in areas where cultural capacity is low. We were encouraged by the Community Renewal Fund's provision of revenue funding and would like to see clearer plans for how revenue funding streams from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other funds will be wrapped around any new capital investments made through levelling up to ensure the longevity of new cultural infrastructure. The investment plan approach in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund prospectus looks promising and has the potential to allow councils to work with communities to develop and prioritise local spending plans on cultural infrastructure and skills. This could draw on [cultural compacts](#), where they exist, and could encourage more areas to develop these or comparable collaborative approaches.

5.7 The LGA has recently run a series of regional 'Meet the funder' workshops with Arts Council England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and Historic England, which helped councils understand how to access skills and expertise from these organisations, as well as their funding. In a number of cases, access to those skills and insight is as important as the funding. Now that the Levelling Up White Paper is published, we hope that the full range of DCMS Arms-Length Bodies, and other departments, will commit to this kind of engagement with councils, helping them to understand the objectives of levelling up and related funds, and to most effectively integrate culture in their bids – and where some elements may be better funded through core council funds, private investment, or, if necessary, responsible public borrowing.

5.8 It is critical that all Government funding investments are designed through a place-based lens. From a DCMS perspective, the local visitor economy may well be best stimulated through a combined investment in cultural and sporting assets – such as locating libraries and leisure centres on the high street to replace closed department stores – and simultaneously using infrastructure funding to improve transport links. That means Sport England and VisitEngland must be around the same table as Arts Council England when it comes to making investment decisions. There has already been constructive progress on this approach for the Town Fund and it now needs to be taken to the next level for levelling up.

6 How should Government build on existing schemes, such as the UK City of Culture, to level up funding for arts and culture?

6.1 The most effective way to achieve levelling up objectives is to improve core funding for councils and channelling funding for culture through local authorities to communities. Councils know their communities best and understand local needs and the complexity of inequality at a hyper-local level. Moreover, as local conveners, councils can utilise their strong relationships with local partners and organisations to reach all parts of the community, including with groups and communities who typically engage less with public structures and services.

6.2 Although funding has declined significantly in the last decade, councils remain the biggest public funders of culture, spending over £1 billion a year in England alone. They run a nationwide network of local cultural organisations, including 3,000 libraries, 350 museums, 116 theatres and numerous castles, amusement parks, monuments, historic buildings and heritage sites. These services and organisations form the backbone of our national cultural infrastructure. They are successful at reaching into communities and are well placed to support wider agendas to tackle inequalities as they provide readymade network of community engagement opportunities at a local level.

6.3 For example, our national library network offers everything from books, to early years and family support, networking events, coding clubs and Business and IP Centres. Libraries are community hubs that provide universal access to a range of services in every region of the country. As the success of Business and IP centres has demonstrated, we could

better capitalise on our library infrastructure to support our country's recovery, close the digital skills divide in many of our most deprived areas, and grow entrepreneurs and innovators in every council area. [In our submission](#) to the 2021 Spending Review we called for a £30 million capital funding investment in libraries to develop a network of makerspaces and public access computers to unlock the economic and social benefits libraries could offer.

- 6.4 Although want to move away from the over-reliance on stand-alone competitive funding rounds, as the UK City of Culture scheme has provided longer-lead in times and a phased bidding process, this has offered a more strategic, bottom-up model for regions that has proven effective. UK City of Culture has been successful as participants have been given the space and opportunity to develop a holistic vision for culture across a city, even where the initial bid has been unsuccessful. This approach allows areas to focus their resources on developing their cultural offer and building the national and international reputation of their place and has driven excellent results. Compared to bidding rounds for small pots of funding which are resource intensive and often offer poor value for money, larger pots of funding which are offered through UK City of Culture have demonstrated their ability to deliver transformational change and lasting positive impacts for communities.
- 6.5 The leadership of Hull City Council was vital in ensuring the success of the initial bid for City of Culture, but also the breadth of the cultural programme and its long-term impact on the local area. Nearly all residents attended at least one cultural activity in 2017 according to a [2018 impact report from the University of Hull](#), which found that Hull City of Culture resulted in £11-17 million total gross value added to local economy and a £300 million increase in the value of tourism in 2017, as well as the wider benefits to the health, wellbeing, education and engagement of local people.
- 6.6 The success of UK City of Culture is reflected in the way similar schemes have been replicated within regions, most notable in the London Borough of Culture, the Greater Manchester Town of Culture and the Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture, which have been beneficial for participating areas. To extend the benefit of the programme, consideration should be given to how the principles of UK City of Culture can be applied to areas outside urban centres. The announcement that the 2025 City of Culture would be open to areas beyond cities was a positive step, but to achieve maximum impact from these events it would be useful to consider whether some of the success factors for big national celebrations can be applied in a smaller way to galvanise cultural activity in those areas that are unlikely to be eligible for this type of competition.
- 6.7 Collaboration between councils, local cultural organisations and national funding bodies is critical to achieving this, which is why the LGA has called for the extension of Arts Council England's programme of cultural compacts. [which have been shown to represent a step-change](#) in partnership working across sectors, bringing together local authorities, businesses, education providers, cultural and community leaders, driven by a shared ambition for culture and place, to co-design and deliver a vision for culture within a place. Arts Council England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England are committed to developing a shared approach to their work on place and are engaging closely with the LGA in this, including working with us to deliver three regional webinars on [place-based collaboration for culture and heritage](#) with local authorities in 2020.