

Meeting: Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

Date: 7 December 2022



Public libraries strategy: DCMS briefing

Purpose of report

For information

Summary

On Friday 2 September Lord Parkinson [announced](#) the appointment of Baroness Sanderson to help the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport develop a new public libraries strategy.

The LGA has been invited to be a core member of the advisory panel meetings for this piece of work and to attend each of the 'deep dive' sessions planned as part of the evidence gathering phase of this work.

This paper sets out some initial information about the purpose of the programme and how it will be delivered, ahead of a proposed presentation by Baroness Sanderson at a future Board meeting.

Is this report confidential? No

Recommendation/s

That the Culture, Tourism and Sport Board note the contents of this paper, raise any points they would like the LGA team to feed into the 'deep dive' sessions noted below and consider what questions they would like to put to Baroness Sanderson at a future CTS Board meeting.

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Chairman: Councillor James Jamieson OBE **Chief Executive:** Mark Lloyd CBE **President:** Baroness Grey-Thompson

Public libraries strategy: DCMS briefing



Background

1. On Friday 2 September 2022, Minister for Arts and Heritage Lord Parkinson [announced](#) the appointment of Baroness Sanderson to help the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport develop a new public libraries strategy.
2. This forms part of the work initiated by the DCMS Libraries Team to consider a future Government strategy for public libraries, as outlined by Lord Parkinson at the Libraries Connected seminar in June.
3. This programme of work builds on the previous strategy [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England](#) (2016-2021), produced as part of the work of the [Libraries Taskforce](#). The LGA was co-chair of the Taskforce, which developed a series of toolkits and guidance with the aim of building upon and adding value to existing good practice and partnerships. It also promoted libraries to national and local government and to potential funders and helped to set out a strong and coherent narrative around the contribution public libraries make to society and to local communities.
4. The work initiated by the Taskforce is being taken forward by the DCMS Libraries team and by the [English Public Libraries Working Group](#) (EPLWG): a stakeholder working group of which the LGA is a member. This group will also act as a sounding board for the new Government strategy.

DCMS update

5. *The below note is an update from the DCMS Libraries Team on Baroness Sanderson's work.*
6. The Press Notice talks about a number of sessions with an advisory panel of contributors. This will be achieved through a series of thematic deep dive sessions focused on the 7 Strategic Outcomes plus separate sessions on governance/how libraries could work, and on blue skies thinking.
7. This approach enables us to meet the minister's wish to engage with and hear from a wide range of voices, from those responsible for delivering public library services to sector stakeholders, and others with a keen interest in the public libraries agenda, including drawing in other government departments.
8. The work in this phase is to look at what the government can do to support public libraries, and these sessions will help us:
 - consider any particular opportunities arising from new ways of working and living as we emerge from the pandemic and ensuring that libraries contribute to the Government's central mission to level up the country;

- explore further potential policy and partnership opportunities through the lens of each Strategic Outcome¹, tapping into the experience and expertise of panel members; and
 - explore possible government barriers to libraries doing innovative things (“red tape challenge”).
9. Participants in the ‘deep dives’ will vary depending on the topic, but the following organisations will be invited to contribute to all sessions:
 - Arts Council England - as the development agency.
 - Libraries Connected - as the sector support organisation for libraries and representative body for Heads of Service.
 - The LGA - representing local government which bears the statutory duty to provide comprehensive and efficient library services.
 10. Other participants will include important organisations across the wider sector, such as CILIP, ASCEL and the British Library as well as other government departments.
 11. Many library services have already been engaged with the initial phase of this work and have hosted visits from Baroness Sanderson. This will continue with invitations to deep dive sessions. Ensuring that the voice of the sector is engaged and heard is very important as part of this process. The sessions commence from mid-January and run until May and invitations will be issued shortly.
 12. As Chair, Baroness Sanderson’s role is to provide a formal readout and report, synthesising the deep dive discussions and making non-binding recommendations to the Minister. DCMS Libraries Team is providing background support to Baroness Sanderson to ensure she is well informed about the sector. She has already visited a number of library services and spoken to sector organisations to inform her thinking and is grateful to all those who have taken the time to talk to her to date. She is also talking to a wide range of others who have approached her - ranging from publishers to campaigners.
 13. This is a listening process, gathering knowledge and generating ideas. It is also not about recreating the Libraries Taskforce. Our strategy will be a government focused strategy; the sector now has its own forum - the English Public Libraries Working Group (EPLWG) - to shape and lead sector-led activity (and we will of course aim to involve them as an important sounding board when we embark on drawing the government strategy together).
 14. In the meantime, we have set up a libraries.strategy@dcms.gov.uk inbox should you have any queries, or if you want to contact Baroness Sanderson with any thoughts or ideas you’d like her to take into account.

¹ [Libraries Deliver: Ambition - strategic outcomes](#)

15. Please note that DCMS will not start drafting any strategy document until we have the benefit of Baroness Sanderson's work to inform our thinking.

Implications for Wales

16. The new public libraries strategy will cover England only, libraries being a devolved matter in Wales.

Financial Implications

17. None

Equalities implications

18. Lord Parkinson has expressed a wish to engage with and hear from a wide range of voices in the development of the strategy.
19. Participation in the 'deep dive' sessions will offer the LGA an opportunity to raise topics arising from the work of the Commission on Culture and Local Government, including increasing access to services and representation in workforce and leadership.

Next steps

20. Baroness Sanderson has been invited to attend a future Culture, Tourism and Sport Board meeting to discuss the findings of her review.
21. Board members are invited to discuss any key issues they would like to be included in the LGA's contributions to the review process.