

Shadow Secretary of State for DCMS

Purpose of Report

For information.

Is this report confidential? Yes

Summary

[Thangam Debbonaire MP](#), Shadow Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, is attending this Board meeting.

This paper sets out the key points to be raised in discussions, and should be read alongside the accompanying slideset, which will be presented by lead members.

LGA Plan Theme: Strengthening our Voice

Recommendation(s)

That the Culture, Tourism & Sport Board:

- 1. Allocate and ask the core questions set out in paragraphs 7-10**
- 2. Come prepared with local case studies as set out in paragraph 12**
- 3. Develop and agree with their political group, supplementary questions based on the key lobbying lines set out in paragraph 13**

Contact details

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Shadow Secretary of State for DCMS

Background

1. Thangam Debbonaire MP, Shadow Secretary of State for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport, is attending this Board meeting.
2. The session will follow the same approach as for Lucy Frazer, Secretary of State for DCMS, and open with a slideset presented by lead members, followed by a response from the Shadow Secretary of State. The remainder of the session will be taken up by questions and answers from Board members.
3. Lead members have identified the key aim for the meeting is **to illustrate local government working alongside central government in partnership.**
4. There will be four prepared core questions with one allocated to each group.
5. Board members will have the opportunity to develop their own questions, and as many as possible will be taken in the time available. Members are asked to follow the approach of using a local case study to ask a question based on the agreed lobbying priorities for the board (See paragraph 13). There will not be time to explore specific local issues at this meeting.
6. Board members should share these questions with their lead member in advance of the meeting, and the political group meeting will agree an order of priority for them to be asked. The Chair will invite members to ask their question in accordance with the Board's proportionality.

Core questions

7. **Conservatives** - The Swimming Pool Support Fund has made a real difference to local areas, saving core facilities. However, [UKactive's recent survey](#) showed that 40 per cent of council areas remain at risk of reducing services or closing facilities by March of this year. 87.5 per cent have had to raise prices to cover costs, but reducing access to those on lower incomes. **What can we do to help build the business case for further investment, and integration with health services, to make this sector sustainable again?**
8. **Labour** – Continuing the point about building business cases, there is a real need to improve the data and evidence available on the sector at both the local and national level. The Board had a very positive presentation about the developing DCMS [Arts and Heritage Capital Framework](#), and the [Moving Communities Platform](#) developed by Sport England has also been invaluable. However, there is still a significant gap on data available for many cultural services, and particularly in academic research interpreting the impact of the

data. **Is there more we could do together to merge local insight and national policy into a robust evidence base of impact?**

9. **Independent** – Creative Industries are one of our fastest growing sectors and Government initiatives like the new strategy and the Creative Industries Council are positive, but **could we make more use of council services to develop a skills pipeline for this sector, particularly for young people?** Our Culture Commission found that council cultural service often acted as an incubator for people developing their practice and moving between public and private sector.
10. **Liberal Democrat** – The visitor economy is starting to recover, particularly with American visitors, which is very positive. However, the pressures on council finances are starting to hinder councils' ability to curate places as destinations. The visitor sector itself is very keen to see a reduction in VAT to remain competitive, but that still leaves an issue about getting investment into the destination as a place, rather than into an individual business. **Can we undertake some formal testing of the possibility of local levies**, with the money ringfenced for the visitor economy, as are in widespread international use; and in place in the UK for other service areas such as the late night levy for hospitality.

Proposal

11. Board members are invited to develop supplementary questions based on the agreed lobbying priorities below. These should be submitted to the group lead member ahead of their political group meeting. Due to time constraints, it is likely that there will be time for only one or two questions per political group.
12. Where possible Board members should illustrate these questions with local case studies, particularly drawing on:
 - 12.1. The use of the Swimming Pool Support Fund to help leisure centres (please include approximate number of users benefiting)
 - 12.2. The use of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund to help culture, leisure or tourism facilities reduce their energy consumption and become more sustainable
 - 12.3. Local work through culture or leisure provision to support young people participate, or to boost career pathways and skills for young people
13. [Lobbying priorities](#):
 - 13.1. Securing better value for money through place-based investment by DCMS-related arms-length bodies and non-ministerial departments, allowing pooled funding across agencies.

- 13.2. Invest in the retrofit of cultural and leisure assets, including heritage sites, swimming pools and leisure centres through the extension of the [Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund](#)
- 13.3. A Royal Commission on the future of public culture and leisure facilities
- 13.4. Support the vital creative industries, leisure sector and visitor economy with a more local approach to skills and employment support, as set out in the [LGA's Work Local proposals](#)
- 13.5. Long-term, sustainable funding settlement for local government would give councils the certainty to invest in culture and wider civic infrastructure in place.
- 13.6. Simplify the funding landscape for local authorities and work with cultural and sport related arms-length-bodies to further develop place-based approaches to funding
- 13.7. Investing in future technology in public buildings, for example ensuring libraries continue to open up access to new and emerging technologies
- 13.8. Recognise councils' key contribution in managing destinations for both domestic and international visitors by confirming ongoing local government representation on the Tourism Industry Council
- 13.9. Reduce inefficiency by ensuring the value of culture and physical activity to the economy and wider wellbeing is recognised in wider Government policy outcomes, in particular education, health, economic growth and planning.

Labour missions and priorities

14. Thangam met with Cllr Shaun Davies as Chair of the LGA on 10 January 2024. She identified the following issues as her priorities:
 - 14.1. Boosting women and girls' participation in sport
 - 14.2. Social prescribing
 - 14.3. Cultural strategies, and particularly availability of cultural space
 - 14.4. The role of Combined Authorities (subsidiarity)
15. Her priority deliverable for a first year in government is a map of cultural and creative industries eg games studies, film companies. This was put in the context of ensuring that young people are able to find creative career paths and cultural opportunities that are accessible to them.

16. In light of these priorities, Board members may wish to highlight our new [Call for evidence on supporting women and girls to be active](#); and our work on [social prescribing in culture and leisure services](#) and [promoting health and wellbeing through public services](#). We also have guides on [cultural strategies](#) and the [creative industries](#).

17. Labour has also announced [5 missions](#):

- 17.1. Get Britain building again
- 17.2. Switch on Great British energy
- 17.3. Get the NHS back on its feet
- 17.4. Take back our streets
- 17.5. Break down barriers to opportunity

Implications for Wales

18. Most culture, sport and tourism policy is devolved to the Welsh Assembly, including funding allocations.

Financial Implications

19. None.

Equalities implications

20. There are no specific equalities implications from this conversation.

Next steps

21. Board members will submit their questions in advance of the meeting to their group lead member.

22. The Chair will send a follow up note and thank you to the Shadow Secretary of State following the meeting. After the Board meeting, members may identify key points they want raised or shared in this follow up note and send to member services by 20 March for consideration by the Chair.