



Seminar Notes: Charitable Trusts Delivering Public Culture

Date: 21 January 2020

Attending: Jon Whiteley (Doncaster Culture and Leisure Trust), Peter Appleton (Vivacity), Sue Wells (Lincs Inspire), Andrew Snelling (Sheffield International Venues), James Brindle (Magna Vitae Trust for Leisure and Culture), Aisha Brotherton (Hyndburn Leisure), Joanne Mortimer (Hyndburn Leisure), Andy King (Link4Life), Darren Grice (Link4Life), Leah Biddle (Culture Warrington), Gareth Morley (Vision-Redbridge Culture and Leisure), Helen Parrott (Arts Council England), Steve McFadyen (Alzheimer's Society), Guy Brindle (DCMS Mutuals Team), Kirsty Cumming (Community Leisure UK), Jennifer Huygen (Community Leisure UK)

Apologies: Lauren Lucas (Local Government Association), Richard Nevell (Wikimedia UK), Roberta Fusco (Charity Finance Group), Isobel Hunter (Libraries Connected), Emma Hutchinson (Culture Warrington), Diana Edmons (GLL), Sarah Johnson (Your Leisure), Keith Sykes (Mytime Active), Austin Gordon (Richmondshire Leisure Trust), Michael Hart (Doncaster Culture and Leisure Trust)

Follow-up resources:

Examples of successful usage of planning section 1.06 for cultural facilities. While the guidance as shared by Arts Council England [here](#) mentions archives and libraries in particular, the examples can be used by other cultural facilities in their discussion around local government planning.

Digital support for cultural organisations is now supported by Arts Council England through their Tech Champions: "The Tech Champions are digital specialists, on-hand to provide support and training for the arts and culture sector as part of the Digital Culture Network". More information can be found [here](#).

The Chamber of Commerce was mentioned by attendants as offering helpful workshops and resources in helping businesses plan to make the most of digital technology. An example is the [Digital Growth Programme](#) from the East Midlands Chamber.

The National Funding Scheme which can be used by charities for a variety of fundraising campaigns. The platform and examples of how Vision Redbridge Leisure and Culture trust uses the scheme can be found [here](#).

1. Place-based leadership

Attendants discussed that with the concept of place-based leadership, and the aim of multiple national agencies to encourage this type of leadership, should come the understanding and respect that each place is different. Attendants mentioned the LGA Leadership Essentials course as a good exercise for councillors and local government representatives which gives them new perspectives on managing arts and culture locally. The question was then raised whether there is a way for charitable trusts to access this training as currently it is targeting LGA member / ACE's NPO's organisations.

While charitable trusts absolutely want to be involved in place-based leadership and some actively support their local government in the development and execution of a local cultural delivery plan, attendants voiced the challenge for trusts to be involved in senior leadership positions / part of local Boards due to a conflict of interest. Trusts want to be involved but they also want to be able to deliver the cultural programming.

Attendants discussed multiple local challenges when it comes to place-based leadership:

- Mismatch in expertise vs. responsibility of the place's cultural assets i.e. the cultural asset might be covered by the "wrong" portfolio holder (for example: management of a town hall may fall under a leisure lead's responsibilities);
- Focus within local decision-making is on economic benefits due to prolonged austerity;
- There is not one leader as everyone has an impact;
- Keeping people who are all doing great things locally around the same table is difficult;
- Trusts struggle with the capacity to run the local facilities leading to working with volunteers as a necessity;
- The word 'culture' can be off-putting to some, making it harder to organise or promote cultural activities;
- Involving the voice of young people should not be a tick-box exercise

Following the discussion of these challenges, the discussions moved to what is currently missing and could address some, if not all, of these challenges:

- Recognising the advocacy and resilience building work for the libraries sector by Libraries Connected, attendants highlighted that there should be an equivalent to Libraries Connected for other cultural work as well;
- Trusts struggle with articulating their social return on investment;
- There is a role for an organisation like Community Leisure UK to keep people at the table i.e. trusts, LGA, Westminster, Arts Council England

2. Culture and Health

After the statement by the LGA, it became clear that not all attendants were familiar with the announcement of Link Workers by the NHS despite all attending showing a keen interest for cultural organisations to work closely with the health sector. It was discussed that Link Workers will be there for both pre- and after care of patients. Trusts attending mentioned the opportunity to link with health partners for staff training, reaching more people of the community, and as a way to diversify their income.

This then sparked a discussion around how to 'unlock' funding from the health sector for cultural organisations. Based on the experience from attending trust representatives this was seen as a challenge because:

- There is a stark difference between public health officials and their willingness to engage with arts/culture;
- Health directors and health boards want to see more evidence despite the evidence already being there (especially when considering the increase in commissioned reports in the past few years)

Despite these challenges, attending trust representatives further discussed their unique position as a trust being an opportunity since:

- Their status as 'spin-off' from the Council / close collaboration with local Councils gets them an invitation to Council meetings, which other local cultural organisations often do not get;
- All Trusts have programmes like the ArtsTrain from Mytime Active (as shown as part of the introduction to this session). Hence if Trusts work more closely with local colleges and universities to document the programmes this would help in promoting the work.

This brought the discussion back to the cultural sector as a whole and how the sector can promote its value towards health and wellbeing better. It was noted by attendants that Sport England is doing this very well for the sports and physical activity sector, and that they do this, for example, by actively addressing the health impact of the potential closure of (more) sports facilities. This seems to be a missing piece within the cultural sector.

The mentioning of closing of facilities and its impact further noted to the missing best practice for how cultural organisations can make their case within local government planning (i.e. section 1.06). In response to this discussion by attending trust representatives, it was noted by Arts Council England that some examples are available. These have been included in the follow-up resources.

3. Digital Technology

Attending trust representatives mentioned to use social media as a digital tool the most as it is a good way to engage with young people. Yet managing social media can be a challenge, especially given new GDPR regulations. GDPR regulations also restrict cultural organisations in digitising their collections to make it more accessible and available to a wider audience (e.g. questions around ownership of the object and permission to copy/digitise).

Attendants mentioned that the opposite of being active digitally is also something that cultural organisations should consider; the general public awareness of the impact of social media. This is an avenue that arts and culture culture, such as theatre, can explore.

Generally, there was an impression of cultural organisations lacking digital skills. This was discussed to be complicated further by two factors:

- Digital technology is a big field and encompasses many different aspects such as infrastructure (e.g. software), marketing, delivery of work (e.g. through augmented reality or other technological developments). It is therefore difficult to know what is possible and what it takes to make optimal use of the technological advancements;
- Engaging with digital technology opportunities requires additional investment in staff as currently staff does not have the right expertise

As a solution to these challenges, attendants discussed Arts Council England's Tech Champions who are digital specialists that can provide training and support to cultural organisations, as well as workshops and resources available by (local) Chambers of Commerce for businesses. Links to these have been included in the follow-up resources.

4. Financial Sustainability

It was understood by attendants that looking for ways to diversify trusts' income was imperative given the reductions in management fees from councils and the general lower budgets available for arts and culture locally.

All attendants were familiar or working with Gift Aid. This was a particularly popular avenue for income generation as part of online purchases. Fundraising was used by some of the attendants, though there seemed some difficulty in fundraising:

- Reliance on impulse donations;
- Culture trusts split donations between themselves and other local charities;
- Museums and the heritage sector still rely on cash donations as contactless is mistrusted by the public

To structure fundraising campaigns, Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure shared their experience with the National Funding Scheme. This has been included in the follow-up resources.

Attendants discussed that theatres have traditionally used a restoration levy which still proves effective for additional income generation. It was mentioned this would work well for community/town halls.

Some attending trust representatives mentioned to have explored (commercial) sponsorships from other organisations as part of their income generation but that this remains a challenge.

To manage a challenging funding landscape, three options were discussed:

- There is a role for Community Leisure UK to demonstrate the value of trusts' work;
- Clarity on rightable HMRC exemptions that culture trusts can use;
- Learn from Libraries Connected regarding commercial skills and CSR