

Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

Ymchwiliad i'r achosion o COVID-19 ac effaith y feirws ar ddiwylliant, y diwydiannau creadigol, treftadaeth, cyfathrebu a chwaraeon / Inquiry into the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, creative industries, heritage, communications and sport

CWLC COV64

Ymateb gan CLOA / Response from CLOA

Welsh Parliament Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee Inquiry into the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, creative industries, heritage, communications and sport

July 2020, submitted by the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association

1. About CLOA

1.1 The Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) is the membership body for senior professionals leading Local Authority culture and leisure services. CLOA currently represents the interests of over 330 members from across England and Wales, working in association with the Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Wales (CCLOW). The purpose of CCLOW is to promote and represent Welsh local government's expertise in cultural and leisure disciplines; to influence policies and resources nationally and locally; and to provide advice, support and development to its members. CCLOW is represented at the CLOA Executive Committee by its Chair and Vice-Chair.

1.2 CLOA seeks to influence national policy, produces guidance and supports the sector. It also acts as the hub for many influential professional organisations within the cultural and leisure industries, providing a vehicle for cross-fertilisation of ideas towards common goals and playing an important part in creating the conditions for culture and leisure to flourish.

2. Evidence for consideration

2.1 CLOA would like to submit evidence to inform the Welsh Parliament's Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee. A response to the DCMS Select Committee inquiry has been done. Both responses are based on feedback gathered from its membership on the impact of Covid-19.

3. What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

3.1 There have been several key issues for Local Authority (LA) culture and leisure service delivery arising from COVID-19.

3.2 Closing down services

3.2.1 This required rapid management decisions in response to the changing government advice. LA's were not always able to communicate the rationale for these decisions in a timely manner to their customers, due to the speed of the changing landscape. Plans were swiftly developed to keep facilities safe and secure when closed. However, a lack of shared knowledge nationally around how to quickly 'mothball' facilities was evident. Many facilities operate cafes and had perishable

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stock; this needed to be disposed of. In some instances, this was donated to food banks.

3.2.2 For those LA's with external contracts in place for the provision of culture/leisure a number of force majeure issues arose regarding the definition, which were problematic from an insurance perspective.

3.3 Financial impact

3.3.1 Membership and casual use of leisure centres, car parks at open spaces, ticketed events at cultural venues, entrance fees at heritage sites and associated secondary spend provide Local Authorities with an income stream which significantly supports both local and national economy through employment and taxation. The closures resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a major loss of this income. Furthermore, rental on leased facilities has required the need to issue refunds.

3.3.2 Officer capacity is stretched,, with a need to respond quickly to enquiries around paying gym memberships by direct debit, freezing memberships and refunding money. Theatres and other venues are also tasked with the added dilemma of considerations around rebooking of shows.

3.3.3 There are concerns that Government funding won't cover the scale of income losses; this will put key culture and leisure services, which have been so essential to resilience during lockdown, under significant stress. It will also impact on the ability of culture and leisure to contribute to recovery within communities moving forwards.

3.3.4 Furthermore, funding is currently directed at organisations in 'immediate financial crisis'; however there is a need to devise further funding streams to support recovery planning.

3.3.5 The complexities surrounding furlough have meant that many LA's have decided against following this route and are instead seeking to implement homeworking or where this is not viable, redeploy staff. Government clarity has

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been absent. Some LA's are continuing to pay casual staff, in order to retain to ensure capacity to bring them back into service quickly.

3.3.6 Alongside these direct impacts, the tourism industry, which supports local jobs and boosts economic growth has been hugely disrupted with massive consequences for the visitor economy. Some localised campaigns have been instigated to encourage would be visitors to plan future staycations. However, the knock-on impact of a decline in outdoor enthusiasts, heritage visitors and the cancellation of festivals and other cultural highlights will undoubtedly have a severely detrimental immediate and foreseeable effect on local business and support services.

3.4 Pressure on services

3.4.1 The very rapid escalation of the situation seriously challenged the timescale of emergency decision making in some councils.

3.4.2 A reduction in staff within some teams due to redeployment. has further been compounded by queries from Trade Unions regarding what is essential work and reluctance by many to leave home due to the government advice.

3.4.3 Managing green space is a major challenge. Whilst Local Authorities are mindful of the benefits of keeping these open to allow people to exercise, the issue of social distancing and dissuading people from gathering is ongoing. Many LA's shut their car parks to discourage people. Furthermore, the need to close off access to tennis courts, play areas and outdoor gyms required rental of Heras fencing, with significant associated costs.

3.4.4 The need to shift to online delivery and programmes at speed and scale has relied on IT infrastructure which was not adequate in many respects and required teams to fast-track their digital knowledge without the usual support and training in place to assist.

3.4.5 In order to help protect grass roots activity LA's have created new/promoted existing grant schemes to local clubs and organisations.

3.4.6 The potential for re-scheduling dates for events/programmes is being explored but given the ongoing uncertainty regarding easing of restrictions this is problematic.

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Another challenge is the real risk that production/touring companies may not be in existence.

3.4.7 Finally, the supply chain for many culture and leisure services has been badly affected, so uncertainties exist as to whether the resources will be there when it is time to remobilise.

4. How effectively has the support provided by Welsh Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

4.1 Initially there was a lack of clarity around which culture and leisure services could operate safely, with certain precautions and restrictions in place. Information from central government was unclear and at times contradictory; information from Welsh Government, WLGA and other national organisations in Wales was limited. As such LA's needed to establish protocols for operating within perceived guidelines individually. This led to a fragmented and inconsistent approach to decision-making across the country.

4.2 Arts Council of Wales (ACW), working with Welsh Government reallocated money from existing budgets to create an urgent response fund for individuals and organisations which has been positively received by the sector; however, it is limited in focusing on stabilisation.

4.3 Fast decision times around when project grants will be reinstated would be welcome, especially for the lower value thresholds. Local Government would also welcome a conversation with ACW to discuss a collaborative approach to supporting the cultural sector, which Arts Council England have already produced with CLOA as a signatory.

4.4 Creative Wales's emergency funding support for the sector have not been sufficient to meet demand and are now closed to applications.

4.5 The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) matched both ACW and ACE's philosophy of pooling all available resources, which will mean some projects that had been notified of an award will not now actually go ahead as the funding has been withdrawn. This has caused immense disappointment amongst those organisations and areas affected and consideration regarding how this might be addressed would be welcomed.

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4.6 Sports Wales (SW), in dialogue with WLGA and Leisure providers, facilitated the distribution of re-directed funding via the Emergency Relief Fund as a re-active measure to support the sector during the early phases. The sector has welcomed the opportunity to shape the criteria for this funding to support existing partners; not-for-profit trusts; and other sector partners.

4.7 Welsh Government, WLGA, SW, ACW, National Governing Bodies of Sport and Culture, local authorities and agencies such as the Welsh Sports Association, Creu Cymru, Community Leisure UK and the Creative Industries Federation are working well to support and re-model the sector, with a consensus view that this will present significant challenges and opportunities. It would now be helpful to have co-ordinated communications to Chief Executives about the importance of culture and leisure (not just facilities) to the recovery as coming budget choices about discretionary services will require strong advocacy.

4.8 In general support packages have tended to be 'one size fits all', so some organisations and certainly many freelancers, upon which the culture and leisure sector relies, have fallen through the gaps. Those organisations that are not in receipt of regular funding from the arms-length bodies, and are therefore already vulnerable, have been greatly affected.

4.9 It is generally felt that Local Authorities reacted well to protecting and supporting voluntary sector and key partners during the initial phases of the lock-down, however it was evident that there was no clear national plan for such a scenario.

4.10 Emergency funding schemes have largely been unavailable to support LA culture and leisure provision and will not therefore be accessible by valued discretionary services that will certainly be under threat as they compete for resources with statutory obligations in the coming months. This also applies to support for the tourism sector.

4.11 CCLOW, are pleased to be working with the WLGA to ensure LA culture and leisure sector representation at discussions with Welsh Government. LA's operate a significant number of sports facilities, theatres and concert halls, museums, libraries, heritage sites, parks and open spaces, so we feel that CCLOW input is key in offering valuable insight into the challenges and act as a partner in implementing the recovery actions in our localities.

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5. What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

5.1 There has been an increased recognition of the value of culture and leisure as a support mechanism for helping to protect mental health and promote physical health. Evidence of this can be found within the ongoing data being collated in the University College London's study of the psychological and social effects of Covid-19. There is an opportunity for culture and leisure to continue contributing to the community cohesion that COVID-19 has instilled. There is a recognition within the sector that the leisure and culture workforce will need to become more resilient, adaptable and ICT savvy to prosper in the future.

5.2 The rapid adaptation of services and a move online will be of great benefit moving forward to those with adequate digital access. However, this crisis has also highlighted the digital divide and created a situation whereby those most vulnerable are excluded from accessing valued support services such as job seeker clubs and dementia cafes in libraries, health referrals in leisure centres, community participation projects in theatres. These closures represent a loss of important community assets that supported mental health, offered respite, and contributed to the reduction of isolation. Furthermore, these services are all important to prevention and help reduce demand in the health and social care sectors.

5.3 The closure of some culture and leisure facilities may mean that they do not re-open after the pandemic has abated, either for operational or financial reasons. Customers will have heightened awareness to cleanliness (actual and perceived) and older facilities may require investment in order to attract users back. This could have significant detrimental impact, which may affect communities unequally in terms of the diversity and accessibility of offer. Investment in infrastructure through economic regeneration initiatives will help to ensure that inequalities are not further exacerbated and act as focus for reconstructing the cultural identity of a place.

5.4 For those LA's with external culture and leisure contracts, with Trusts or commercial partners, concerns exist regarding their financial stability. Whilst every effort is being made to negotiate forward payments of contract fees and in some cases underwrite losses, the fact is that some contractors may not be able to bring services back to life. This may necessitate some LA's bringing services back in-house in order to avoid a detrimental impact on their local communities arising from the loss of provision and a more long-term impact on health and well-being.

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Government could consider extending the tax relief given to some models of external supply businesses to local authorities, given that the tax impact on the nation would be broadly neutral.

5.5 A longer-term challenge, whilst we are in recovery mode, is that all the good community based development work to help drive up participation in sport and physical activity could be lost. It will be essential to build on the government's own stated importance of being active and engage with the public through positive communications messaging as we emerge from lockdown.

5.6 Furthermore, the rise in popularity of online fitness content and interest in outdoor physical activity, cycling, walking and jogging may mean that membership of gyms declines even after social distancing measures are relaxed. This poses a threat for sustaining LA swimming provision, which is supported by general leisure membership income. A similar scenario may arise for theatres and cultural venues as content moves online, people will have become accustomed to accessing entertainment differently and this, compounded by fears of going out and reduced income, may mean that some venues struggle to survive. A loss of these culture and leisure assets would have a grave impact on localities, eroding both the vital social capital and economic value of a place.

5.7 It will be important to capture the financial impact of COVID-19 on the culture and leisure sector, which has been acknowledged in many places as a key economic driver.

6. What lessons can be learnt from how Welsh Government, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

6.1 There is a missed opportunity to draw on the considerable expertise within CCLOW and the wider CLOA membership and this should be exploited moving forward.

6.2 LA's have also expressed frustrations with differing messages and timelines for the lockdown and lifting of restrictions across the sector for devolved administrations and Westminster, especially in border communities where the application of two sets of guidelines/restrictions causes significant confusion and conflict.

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6.3 The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of collaboration and the need for alignment of support for the whole of the sector. Intelligence sharing has been of paramount importance and CLOA has been instrumental in swiftly collating evidence of the impact on the ground and sharing how LA's are adapting and innovating to continue service provision. This information has been cascaded across the country through our membership via regular e-bulletins and shared with a range of partners involved in supporting public culture and leisure provision.

7. How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

7.1 There is widespread recognition that the model for the use of and need for physical assets to deliver services is likely to change significantly in future, and that opportunities exist for re-modelling and re-purposing community facilities.

7.2 Sector evolution will largely be constrained by financial and capacity issues at local level. However, it will be important to understand people's attitudes to resuming engagement, as this will help to inform LA planning around community need and reshaping services. The dissemination of any research into physical activity patterns, trends and attitudes post lockdown would be extremely helpful, alongside similar intelligence regarding cultural consumption.

7.3 The nature of the pandemic and the emergency response has been disempowering for communities. Creativity, physical activity and engagement with culture and green spaces gives people the means to establish agency in their lives. LA's will need to work with communities to co-produce and redesign the cultural and leisure offer needed for each stage of the recovery process to ensure that investment is made into the right areas.

7.4 The case for further investment in re-booting culture and leisure will be incredibly important. The Culture, Welsh Language and Communication Committee have a critical role to play in advocating across Government regarding the importance of culture and leisure for the recovery of the economy and local communities, as a key factor in health and wellbeing and as a contributor to addressing the climate emergency.

Support actions might also include:

- Ensuring that culture, leisure and tourism are included in any recovery packages for City Regions and for local government

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- Working with ACW, NLHF and SW to ensure that the needs of LA-supported/managed cultural and leisure facilities are included in their recovery plans.
- Working with Creative Wales and MALD to ensure resilience of talent pathways, sector skills development and industrial growth/recovery strategies.
- Support for the development of new financial and investment tools to enable the creation of new business models within the sector – particularly replacing the trading income which comes from mass participation events and activities (such as festivals, leisure centres, theatres.)

7.5 CLOA also recommend that a new Culture, Tourism, Sport & Physical Activity Commission is established to maximise the impact of our shared capacity and to ensure that debate is well-informed and sector and sub-sector interests do not obstruct a constructive dialogue about system change.

7.6 The Commission would:

- Set out a new narrative about the invaluable role of culture and leisure
- Better articulate the contributions being made and the 'cost' of failing to protect and develop the richness and diversity of the offer
- Develop an evidence base of good practice within localities (particularly in relation to cross-sectoral practice)
- Identify new financial and investment models to underpin recovery and reset, taking account of local context, the 'levelling up' agenda and the changing role of the public sector
- Address issues of inequality

7.7 Specialist expertise in the fields of Culture, Parks, Sport, Physical Activity, Tourism, Museums, Arts and Libraries would be pulled together by the Commission to give a rounded and outcome-focussed approach. In this way we can collectively influence public policy, putting people and places at the heart of our

thinking, and fully realise the future opportunities to address inequality, improve lives and strengthen bonds.

End. (2985 words) CLOA July 2020

Email: info@cloa.org.uk

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Website: www.cloa.org.uk

Twitter: @cCLOAssociation