

Minutes

English Public Libraries Stakeholder Working Group (EPLG)

Date	Tuesday 4 th August 2020
Time	14:00 – 16:00
Location	Virtual Meeting

Present:	Sue Williamson	Director, Libraries, Arts Council England (Chair)
	Jenna Birley	Governance and Business Support Officer, Libraries, Arts Council England (Minutes)
	Isobel Hunter	Chief Executive, Libraries Connected
	Sophie Lancaster	Senior Manager, Libraries, Arts Council England
	Lauren Lucas	Advisor – Culture, Tourism and Sport, Local Government Association (LGA)
	Nick Poole	Chief Executive, CILIP, The UK library and information association
	Susan Wills	Acting Assistant Director, Lifelong Learning & Culture, Surrey County Council (representing the Heads of Service Sounding Board)
Apologies:	Prof. Steven Broomhead	Chief Executive, Warrington Borough Council
	Liz White	Head of Public Libraries and Engagement, British Library (BL)
Also attending:	Katherine Blamire	Living Knowledge Network Project Officer, BL (for Liz White)
	Laura Dyer	Deputy Chief Executive, Places and Engagement, Arts Council England
	Iain Moore	Commercial Director, Libraries Connected

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 Sue Williamson welcomed everyone to the meeting and those present introduced themselves.
- 1.2 Apologies were noted from Professor Broomhead and Liz White. Katherine Blamire was standing in as Liz's representative.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were no interests to declare.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 Sue Williamson highlighted the actions required from the last meeting.
- 3.2 Nick Poole provided clarification on sections 9.7 and 10.5 for the minutes and agreed to link the Arts Council's Senior Manager, Libraries and Literature, with members of the Book Industry Communication (BIC).
- 3.3 Sophie Lancaster provided an update on signposting the members to particular organisations and stakeholders. Libraries Connected and the Arts Council were subsequently working on a piece of work loosely linked with the Arts Council's employment research project. It was agreed that an update on the Arts Council's project would be shared with EPLG.
- 3.4 Sophie informed members that the schedule of matters was in development and would be provided in advance of each EPLG meeting for discussion.
- 3.5 Members noted that the Heads of Service Sounding Board had been established and that a representative of that group was present to reflect their views in discussions.
- 3.6 Sue Williamson provided an update on the Single Digital Presence, informing members that the BL had run several 'show and tell' sessions on the project's development. Sue agreed to share the slides from these sessions with the group and Heads of Service Sounding Board, provided permission to do so was obtained from the BL.
- 3.7 Members discussed the one pagers regarding member organisations' positions on Community Managed Libraries (CMLs). Nick Poole confirmed that CILIP would shortly be able to issue their position as approved by their Board. Members agreed to wait until this could be considered alongside the position as stated by the LGA and Libraries Connected.

Action

**Kath
Blamire**

**Sue
Williamson**

3.8 It was agreed that all statements would be circulated together when possible.

4. UPDATE FROM ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

4.1 Laura Dyer, Deputy Chief Executive, Places and Engagement at Arts Council England, introduced herself to the members of the EPLG and provided an update on relevant Arts Council activity. It was noted that Laura had taken over the Libraries' portfolio from Arts Council England's Deputy Chief Executive, Simon Mellor.

4.2 Laura informed members that Arts Council England had launched the guidance for the Culture Recovery Fund (CRF), though it was noted that libraries were ineligible for this funding programme. Laura also asked members to note that the Arts Council were aware of the financial challenges to be faced by Local Authorities (LAs) in the coming months and over the coming financial year, and it was hoped that the CRF could help support the LA culture offer in other areas.

4.3 Laura informed members that Arts Council England had also announced the reopening of their National Lottery Project Grants (NLPG) funding programme. The portal to apply had been open since 22 July 2020. Libraries would be able to apply for NLPG to support work specifically related to the Universal Library Offers (ULOs), a new addition to the programme. Libraries would continue to be able to apply to undertake other cultural activities and projects unrelated to the ULOs.

4.4 Laura gave the EPLG an update on the Stronger Towns initiative of which the Arts Council are a key partner, alongside the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Alongside other arms-length bodies, Arts Council England are working to ensure that libraries are promoted and included as part of the conversations about regenerating towns and high streets in England.

4.5 Isobel Hunter informed members that, as part of the High Street Taskforce, there had been dedicated recording of footfall in the retail sector. It was noted that, initially, the public were avoiding city centres and making greater use of their local high streets. Library Services were also collecting footfall data to inform their positioning on local agendas.

4.6 Laura noted this place-based approach to funding and informed the EPLG that, as many of the proposed funding options relate to capital, Arts Council England is looking at ways to use its funding models to promote and revenue support place-based cultural activity.

4.7 Laura then provided an update on the Arts Council's work on proposals for the upcoming Spending Review (SR) in the autumn. It was noted that obtaining a favourable settlement for arts and culture would require a compelling bid to Treasury for funds.

4.8 EPLG discussed the fact that, although it is the case that library services can and do deliver on several local and central government priorities, there is little discussion of a dedicated budget to create a strong public library sector. Currently, it was noted, library services must look to apply for funding from other budgets they can relate their ancillary functions to.

5. TASKFORCE ACTION PLAN REVIEW

5.1 Sophie Lancaster introduced this item which provided an update on the Libraries Taskforce (LTF) Action Plan.

5.2 Members noted that the normal reporting channels (through the DCMS/Arts Council England Liaison Meetings) had paused through lockdown. Sue Williamson was now reporting directly in a more informal way to the libraries team at DCMS on a regular basis.

5.3 Nick Poole asked that the section on Apprenticeships be updated to reflect that CILIP can be a designated assessor for the level 6 apprenticeship, not that they are the only one.

5.4 Lauren Lucas provided an update on the reshaping of the LGA and Arts Council England's Peer Challenges and the other parts of their improvement offer, including best practice sharing webinars, advocacy workshops and recovery panels. EPLG members felt that early thoughts on how the improvement programme might look in the future could be shared with the Heads of Service Sounding Board to gain their input into the development. Lauren agreed to share this information and Susan Wills agreed to share it further with key peer challenge assessors as appropriate.

**Lauren
Lucas**

Sue Wills

5.5 Isobel Hunter suggested the outline column in the table presented be slightly amended to give a clear read across to any related project initiation documents.

5.6 A query was raised regarding the budget for 2020/21. Sophie clarified that this budget was allocated by DCMS for a transition year, to end in March 2021.

5.7 Regarding workforce development it was noted that, when the Libraries Taskforce was at DCMS, there were some secondments from local authority library staff to DCMS which was funded by the Taskforce budget. This programme was beneficial to those able to take part, enabling a greater understanding the work of central and local government and how they work together.

5.8 Sophie asked members to feedback on any inaccurate or missing updates by 12 August 2020 so a comprehensive version of the Action Plan could be shared with DCMS.

All

6. FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

- 6.1 Sue Williamson introduced this item which asked members to discuss the question of how to build a financially resilient public library sector.
- 6.2 Nick Poole led the discussion and asked members to note CILIP's view that there is an inherent problem in how public libraries are financed in England.
- 6.3 CILIP was in the process of formulating a bid to Arts Council England's Library Development Budget to conduct an independent review of comprehensive funding models, both in England and abroad. It was hoped this could be concluded by December 2020.
- 6.4 This review should provide a roadmap and realistic recommendations to achieve an excellent, and financially resilient public library sector in England. It should also look at the amounts and types of funding available for library services.
- 6.5 Members queried how CILIP proposed to measure the core funding threshold required to ensure a functional, high quality public library service. Nick noted this was difficult to measure and would vary from place to place, but informed members that CILIP felt the most applicable measure to be the per capita spend on library services. This data can be directly compared with other international library services.
- 6.6 The issue was raised that an integral part of ensuring proper funding for library services was the upskilling of library leaders to enable them to have greater influence in their local authority budget allocation conversations. It was agreed that this is a related issue that needed addressing.
- 6.7 Members commented that it was essential to involve Heads of Service in any conversations around financial resilience and funding models and that these conversations should be honest and transparent. This point was noted, and clarification was provided in that this piece of work would give Heads of Service (and other major stakeholders) a starting point for debate.
- 6.8 Members noted that the LGA agreed with the opinion that there needs to be an assessment of how to properly fund library services, although the LGA feels this applies across all local government services.
- 6.9 Members queried whether the scope of the report would cover maximising existing public money, philanthropic giving and/or other funding sources. It was felt that it should cover all possible funding sources.
- 6.10 Members were keen for any report to consider core funding solutions and that they should be more than short-term rescue packages.

- 6.11 It was also noted that, in order for any recommendations to be taken on by the sector, there would have to be significant stakeholder buy-in to the project. Plans should therefore be put in place to secure this support as soon as possible.
- 6.12 The EPLG thanked Nick for leading the discussions and AGREED the following actions:
 - a) that CILIP would use the EPLG as a sounding board when drafting the scope of the bid and would report initial findings when compiled
 - b) that the Heads of Service Shadow Board would also be included in the development of the project as and when appropriate
 - c) that any suggestions for sufficiently impartial members of the official project group be emailed directly to Nick Poole.

Nick Poole

All

7. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

- 7.1 Sophie Lancaster provided an update on the shared communications plan.
- 7.2 Sophie detailed that some planned communications activity had been delayed as activity concerning messaging around Covid-19 had taken priority. It was now expected that some of this deprioritised activity could be conducted.
- 7.3 The EPLG noted that the shared approach to communications had already borne positive results, with member organisations aligning messaging across platforms.

All

8. AOB

- 8.1 It was noted that the BL reported a significant increase in library staff participation in digital skills webinars and training since the lockdown, and this had highlighted need to examine the way to deliver such training in the future.
- 8.2 Members were pleased to learn that Nick Poole had received direct communication from the Faculty for Public Health to express their gratitude for the work library services had done to help the health sector during the pandemic.
- 8.3 Lauren Lucas informed members that the LGA were collating case studies on the sector's ability to assist with the response to the pandemic and asked members to share any they have knowledge of. Arts Council England agreed to co-ordinate work they were doing to collect case studies with the LGA.

Sophie Lancaster

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| 8.4 Nick Poole agreed to provide an update on EveryLibrary to be circulated amongst the membership by email. | Nick Poole |
| 8.5 Sophie Lancaster agreed to add detail on ACE's library work post-March 2021 to the schedule of matters. | Sophie Lancaster |

Date and location of next meeting: Tuesday 13th October 2020, 14:00 – 16:00, Virtual Meeting (TBC)