

## Arts Council England and devolution

This note sets out how Arts Council England will engage with local authorities and combined authorities in receipt of devolution deals with the government. It is designed to inform engagement between the Arts Council and the relevant and responsible local authorities, and also for government departments insofar as they consider arts and culture in devolution. This note has been informed by experience of the first devolution deals and will be revised as appropriate in the future.

### Key considerations

- The Arts Council's most important strategic and delivery partner is local government, and we seek to engage constructively and positively with local authorities. This means that we are committed to:
  - Taking account of the needs and aspirations of all parts of the country, especially as they relate to goal 2 of the Arts Council's ten year strategic framework, *Great Art and Culture for Everyone* – 'Everyone has the opportunity to experience and be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries';
  - Recognising the role of local government as the democratically elected leader for places and communities, with deep understanding of those places and communities; and
  - Aligning our national strategies with the strategies and aspirations of local partners, in order to sustain and grow a cultural sector which provides greater opportunities for places and people to engage with culture.
- In enhancing the capacity of local government devolution represents a major opportunity for the cultural sector in England.
- The Arts Council will work with local government to realise the benefits of devolution for culture.
- The Arts Council will remain the national development agency, able to bring an expert and an England-wide perspective, able to engage at the UK and the EU levels (and to enable others to do so), and able to invest at scale to realise strategic opportunities.

- Many positive changes that can happen locally to support the cultural sector and to grow the value of culture do not require devolution of powers or resources, and we encourage all of local government to work with us to this end irrespective of the progress of devolution deals.
- The Arts Council will continue to operate as a non-departmental public body, according to its Royal Charter – and this entails the maintenance of the arms’ length principle in national investment and support for the cultural sector.

### **What will this mean in practice?**

- The Arts Council will continue to engage positively and proactively with local government, in line with the principles set out in our Statement of Shared Principles agreed with the Local Government Association.
- We want local authorities to engage with us as early as is possible as they consider their devolution deals.
- Where local authorities and combined authorities are in receipt of devolution deals with the government then we will engage positively and proactively with them in order to realise the potential value of the new powers, freedoms and flexibilities. This might include:
  - Strategic engagement with new combined authority geographies in order to identify shared investment priorities and strategies to realise them;
  - A commitment to approach each devolution deal as a ‘fresh start’ to clearly identify potential and new opportunities, for example whether devolution of NHS funding creates a public health commissioning opportunity, or whether new financial freedoms provide an opportunity to grow and retain value created locally through culture;
  - Identifying new investment approaches which utilise new financial and fiscal instruments – with the potential for Arts Council investment to unlock their potential for the cultural sector;
  - Development of new investment vehicles for the cultural sector, with support for innovative business and governance models;

- Defining Arts Council engagement with combined authority-wide delivery and strategic partnerships and organisations; and
  - Formal consideration of whether the advent of a devolution deal and/or a combined authority necessitates changes in existing Arts Council engagement.
- In realising these opportunities the Arts Council will adhere to the following principles:
    - We will respect the ways of working which define the partnership we have with local government as set out in our Statement of Principles with the LGA;
    - We will not depart from the arm's length principle, and we will retain full discretion in how we invest our resources;
    - We are prepared to support local partners through grant funding as appropriate but we will not devolve our funding to local government as part of devolution deals;
    - There will be no one size fits all approach and we will respond to local areas on a case-by-case basis;
    - Our resources are limited and the extent of our local engagement will depend upon strategic opportunity, the potential social, cultural and economic return on our investment, the willingness of local partners to stand by culture, and the nature of the local cultural sector ecology;
    - We will work with other national partners with an interest in the local area as appropriate, for instance other Lottery Distribution Bodies; and
    - Our engagement with local areas in receipt of devolution deals, indeed with local government per se, is not static, and will be revised as appropriate over time.

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