**CLOA – Workshop - Speech Notes for 8.3.13**

Breaking down the slides: the single cultural conversation and Growth.

The Single Cultural Conversation is best summed up as a partnership between Arts Council England and local government to establish a framework which will ensure the support for a local cultural offer that improves the lives of local people within their local communities.

The LGA and ACE, through the single cultural conversation framework have committed to working together so that there can be a joint understanding of shared priorities, key issues and investment.

The following 2 slides outlines the commitments which each organisation has made.

And this slides describes what they will do together.

ACE does bring an expert national overview and local reach, local government has the democratic legitimacy and depth of understanding of the communities.

Together we are the biggest public investors in culture within England/how much?

As we all know arts and culture can help to change the narrative of an area for the better, raising aspirations and a belief in what is possible, whilst also offering tangible opportunities to boost economic growth – through tourism, the creative industries or improving skills and educational attainment.

As budgets are reducing it is vitally important that we demonstrate how national collaboration will support and inform the local collaboration that already exists to unlock fully the benefits of closer working between libraries, museums, culture and the arts.

Local conversations between ACE and local authorities focusing upon the cultural offer will inform the single conversation at national level between ACE and the LGA and as national policy develops ,this will inform the delivery of culture at the local level.

I am going to give a couple of practical examples of how this joined up conversation can make a real difference and generate real improvement at both a national and local level.

My first example is going to focus upon the development of the library service Universal Health Offer.

I am the President of the Society of Chief Librarians and three weeks ago we launched four universal service offers for libraries.

* Books and reading
* Information
* Digital
* Health

The Health Offer is a really good case study of how SCL worked collaboratively with ACE, the LGA, DCMS, TRA and the Dept. Of Health to develop a national strategy which expresses the public library contribution to the health and well being of local communities.

It is about us saying we are part of the solution not the problem!

The Universal Health Offer builds upon the generic library assets which include a network of local hubs offering non-clinical community space, public health information and promotion, signposting and referrals and creative and social reading activities.

There are 6 million people in the UK currently suffering from anxiety and depression and 2/3 of these people are not receiving treatment and are looking for quality health information.

As part of the Offer the new books on prescription scheme for England will be delivered through all public libraries in partnership with key national stakeholders, and it will be complimented by mood boosting collections which support creative reading and also local links to reading/social activity.

Funded by an ACE LDI grant of 20k the development of the health offer and Books on Prescription has been a national partnership which will enable libraries to articulate their role in supporting the new public health responsibilities of local authorities as part of the commissioning landscape.

It positions libraries as strategic health and well being delivery partners.

The books on prescription scheme provides a quality assured national reading list .

Within Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Lancashire – as three examples, Public Health have already agreed that they will invest in the Health Offer.

Local political sign up has meant that funding for this national development will be found locally via Public Health budgets.

Within Staffordshire libraries will be commissioned to deliver wider aspects of the health and well being agenda - our buildings are being used as clinical space, our staff are being supported to refer and signpost and a grant from adult and community learning is supporting libraries, museums and archives to develop and deliver local history/reminiscence and family history workshops to and with local communities.

The Health Offer is a national strategy which can be delivered and tailored locally.

The development was done by a small group of people nationally who built the partnerships, sourced the funding and created the strategy on behalf of 174 library authorities.

It is a really good example of how a single conversation nationally can result in an overarching strategy and product which can be delivered locally.

If I were to described the critical success factors I would say it was about:-

* Aligning service priorities to larger Public Policy Agendas
* Identifying appropriate partnerships nationally
* Sourcing the funding to enable the development
* Achieving national and local political sign off
* Engaging the professionals in the development of the detail
* Ensuring that it is flexible so it can be delivered locally.

My second example is the development within my own authority, Staffordshire, of the ‘Prosperity Wheel’.

The ‘Prosperity Wheel’ was developed in response to the Council’s key priority of driving prosperity and increasing jobs within the County.

It describes how all of the functions within a local authority which need to be mobilised and engaged to ensure properity.

The Wheel originated within the Place Directorate- which my services sit within- but it encompasses services and functions which sit within the People Directorate and the District / Borough Councils.

It is about taking an holistic view to prosperity.

Our members were clear that a strong cultural offer had to be part of this wheel – it was not seen as a nice to have or an add on – but a vital component.

As both the professional and political leadership of the County Council worked up the prosperity wheel we also identified key partnerships, key areas of collaboration and where each service / functional area added value.

What this work has meant is a much greater value has been placed on Tourism and Culture – it has meant that we have realised more funding, the transformation of our asset base and a greater reach into marginalised or remote communities for our services.

It has also meant that there is a much greater appreciation within the local authority of how Culture can deliver / impact upon other service areas priorities.

So for example:

All of our libraries are now Wifi enabled.

They are all Start2 centres where job clubs, small businesses lone workers are located or choose to use our space for meeting, training or day to day activities.

In the Moorlands area of Staffordshire 81 people who attended the Job Club located at Leek Library and the volunteer supported IT and job seeking skills network found work in the previous quarter.

The Start2 development has been commissioned by Economic Development and supported by higher education partners, Job Centre Plus and Chambers of Commerce.

Our Heritage Services are now recognised as an important part of the Tourism Offer to the County and again have attracted HLF and ACE funding to develop the Staffordshire Hoard/Mercian Trail Exhibitions.

And following a local conversation between ourselves, ACE and HLF we have drawn down funding to scope our WW1 Centennial Offer.

Through all of this work it has been vitally important to secure that wider recognition of the contribution of Cultural Services to the wider political priorities both locally and nationally.

It has been about saying and evidencing ‘We are part of the solution not the problem’.

Another example similar to Staffordshire’s Prosperity Wheel is Derbyshire’s Cultural Prospectus which has come through a partnership of public, private, voluntary and community organisations who have come together to promote and improve culture within Derbyshire.

The prospectus is based on a belief that culture permeates all aspects of our lives and it articulates an ambition for cultural services going forwards.

What these examples do demonstrate is the difference that a strong cultural offer can make to community life and also resource allocation within local authorities.

If we, as local authorities, really do want to move people from high levels of dependency and need, to be living independently for much longer a good strong cultural offer is essential.

We may not actually save lives but what we do – really effectively – is improve the quality of lives.

If we think of the ‘graph of doom’ or indeed a local authority budget where we still have the greatest amount of our spend on those with high levels of need what we do need to do is to move people from this box to this one/or ideally ensure that they do not enter this box at all!

The provision of a joined up cultural offer enables this to happen.

And a joined up conversation nationally is important because we do need to influence the policy makers.

As they are rolling out key policies we need them to consider Culture’s contribution and then we need to think about how we articulate and implement that locally.

As part of the Single Cultural Conversation we need ACE to advocate for all aspects of the Cultural economy and to consider that in its widest context.

Libraries, Archives, Heritage services are hugely important – they are about much more than art – and there needs to be that recognition of the role that they can play in community memory, community narrative and community prosperity.

There is no doubt that a joined up conversation nationally when applied locally – can lead to better use of assets, a more imaginative allocation of resources and ultimately better community outcomes.

When I launched the Library Universal Offers I did say that local authorities have never faced such challenging times, and confronted with these challenges we do have to think innovatively, act collaboratively and manage creatively to ensure both the sustainability and future development of our services.

It is not enough to ask that libraries, arts, museums and archives should be ‘defended’ – we have to ensure that we evidence their value – that we:

* Connect professional and political leadership to lead transformation rather than cuts and closures.
* Ensure effective commissioning , use of our assets and that we reach marginalised communities and deliver better outcomes
* Ensure wider recognition of the contribution that Cultural services make to those wider public policy objectives – especially growth /prosperity.
* Ensure ACE works nationally and locally to support a joined up cultural vision.

Janene Cox.

25/2/13