

Good morning, thank you for taking the time to attend the CLOA AGM today. I appreciate the many pressures on our members, professional and personal, and hope that the programme we have for you is enjoyable and rewarding.

For the third year in a row, we are running an online AGM and annual conference event. When the executive started planning the event in the autumn of 2021, there was still considerable uncertainty about Covid. Having considered various options, we felt it was worth exploring how we might make best use of the emerging digital options for online events, acknowledging the benefits of a much-reduced carbon footprint, improved accessibility, also savings in both cost and time for members and other attendees. So, we decided on an innovative approach, using a well-known industry brand, Airmeeet, to add value to our event, and make it the best possible online experience. We hope it works well and is an interesting experience for you all! (Thank Heidi, Anelli, Sian and Akua). Of course, however good the tech, there are other benefits with face-to-face engagement, and going forward, we are committed to providing a mix of meeting and event types.

This time last year we were all emerging from covid restrictions but facing the uncertainty of a possible third wave of the highly transmissible SARS CoV-2 Delta variant, whilst trying to make sense of the post covid world. Many of you will have been involved in supporting the vital local authority covid response, with communities. I would like to pay tribute to everyone, in all fields, who have played such a vital role as key workers in the crisis. During this time, you will have also been working tirelessly to figure out 'the new normal' and get your services, activities, and businesses back on track. I am sure that you all, like me, have found the support of colleagues and peers vital to keeping your head above water. I trust you have found your membership of CLOA to be part of that supportive framework, both personally and professionally.

Following on from covid, the executive felt it would be useful to focus this event on accessibility, in particular in relation to people with disabilities and long term conditions. We will hear more from our speakers today, but as I am sure you are aware, there is considerable evidence showing the disproportionate impact of the Covid virus and crisis on this section of our society.

Across the country, local government has shown that with resourcefulness and determination, new partnerships, new ideas and new models can continue to reach out and improve the lives of people in our communities, as well as help tackle inequality and disadvantage. I look forward to hearing more about the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Over the last year we have continued to provide up to date information, case studies and good practice, and I'd like to thank Heidi Bellamy for her energy and commitment in keeping CLOA on top of its game. Heidi provides professional expertise and advice to CLOA executive members, overseeing the efficient administration of all our business, and I am immensely grateful to her for the considerable support and guidance she has provided me in the last year.

During this time, CLOA executive members have been building key strategic relationships for the Association. We've continued to work with strategic partners such as LGA, WLGA and our regular discussions and attendance at the Culture Tourism & Sport Board have helped to keep both officers and elected members connected. Collectively we have sought to improve evidence and identify ways in which we can inform and influence central government.

Of particular note is the work with Office of Health Improvement and Disparities, which has seen OHID provide a toolkit of materials to help CLOA members promote an offer linked to the forthcoming Commonwealth Games, as well as evidence-based, NHS assured messaging around improving mental health.

CLOA has played a key role in the growing influence of the [Local Government Physical Activity Partnership](#), chaired by vice chair Ian Brooke. LGPAP brings agencies together to work collaboratively to improve and articulate the social and economic value of public physical activity service provision and is making real progress in joining up strategic thinking, investment and action across leisure, health, and climate change. The Partnership has also offered a secondment/support opportunity for emerging leaders across our membership, further supporting engagement and involvement across the CLOA membership.

Following a period of consultation across the sector, a collaborative report *Securing the Future of Public Sport & Leisure*, was published, primarily led by CLOA, APSE and the LGA. I must acknowledge CLOA Hon. Secretary Mark Allman's major role in this research-based report which was designed to underline the value of these public services whilst also setting out a proactive vision for how they could be an essential part of COVID recovery. The report and its 7 recommendations can be found in the [Resources section of the CLOA website](#). Since the public launch last autumn, work has continued, led by the LGA in conjunction LGPAP whose web presence CLOA hosts.

CLOA is also part of a coalition of leading bodies in the physical activity sector working nationally to influence the conversation on the issue of rising energy costs so that it is clearly understood. Earlier this month CLOA was a joint signatory on a letter to the Government calling for urgent support for leisure facilities as they face a rise in energy costs of up to 150% on last year. Thanks to those members who took the time to complete the sector wide survey sent out by CLUK, which helped inform views.

On the cultural front, CLOA has continued to be an active participant in ACE's Local Stakeholder Group, which also includes representatives from Core Cities, Key Cities, CLUK, Rural Councils and London Councils. This group is a useful forum for discussing common issues including Levelling Up, National Portfolio process, ACE's strategic priorities and key projects such as the roll-out of Cultural Compacts.

CLOA was invited to be represented on the LGA's new [Culture & Local Government Commission](#), chaired by Baroness Lola Hornsey. Val Birchall, immediate Past Chair, is a commissioner and Matt Partridge from the Executive is on the Advisory Group. The

Commission is covering topics including cultural education, arts and health, the renewal of the high street and broader uses of culture for economic recovery and is taking a "place-led" approach. CLOA has circulated the call for case studies to its members. The Commission will be creating some short films to demonstrate its themes and producing recommendations in the early Autumn.

CLOA has responded to the DCMS Inquiry on Cultural Place-making and Levelling Up, with examples from many authorities showing the variety and quality of work, many of which have also been picked up in the work of the LGA Commission.

Val represented CLOA at the recent launch at the House of Lords of the [Culture in Crisis](#) report from Culture Commons and the Centre for Cultural Value, which includes a raft of recommendations aimed at strengthening the sector in post-pandemic recovery. Further dialogue with the team behind the report is anticipated, to try to create a single voice in advocating for change.

In terms of CLOA in Wales, Vice Chair Caroline O'Neill and Ian Jones have been continuing to bring together senior local authority officers for a Chief Culture Officers Wales Group and Chief Leisure Officers Wales Group. Relationship with WLGA is a key development, continuing to support in conversations with sponsored bodies and sector organisations, more recently CLUK and strengthening the conversation regarding the energy and cost of living crisis in Wales at local authority level.

Over the past year we have continued to offer members a programme of roundtables

- Parks & Wellbeing (Chaired by Stefania Horne)
- Working with LEP's to boost community and economic recovery (Chaired by Matt Partridge, case study Jayne Knight)
- Insights into Insourcing which I chaired with case studies from Karen Whitfield and Jane Wilson
- Events & Festivals – making good use of Public Space (Chaired by Jayne Knight with case study from Symon Easton)

We are looking to develop content for other sessions on topics identified through the survey of CLOA members, so please do let us know if you have requests or suggestions and look out for 'Leadership within our sector' in September.

In January we ratified our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) plan, which aims to drive improvement in following areas:

- Diversity and inclusivity of the Executive Committee
- Diversity of the staff teams in leisure & cultural services, especially (but not exclusively) in management roles
- Development of good EDI practice across the sector
- Promotion of our commitment and visible demonstration of it in practice

The plan also included the appointment of an EDI Champion, Val Birchall. Since then we have been working to progress commitments and have:

- Compiled an overview of the available intelligence regarding Diversity in the workforce.
- Identified ways to encourage underrepresented groups to join the Executive.
- Held two informal chat sessions to encourage aspiring leaders from underrepresented groups.
- Promoted allyship with a number of the Executive confirming their personal pronouns for use on the website

I will continue to champion the issue of accessibility in my second year in the role and welcome everyone's input to this topic. A proposal has also been agreed to invest in developing more dynamic social media content to engage with younger and aspiring leaders in a personable way. Watch this space, as we will be working on this over the next few months and are planning a campaign in the Autumn.

We have continued to share information on funding opportunities through our e-bulletin and website and input into numerous policy debates, reviews and think pieces. These exchanges are vital to retaining our status as the lead body for local government culture and leisure professionals, they provide a chance to highlight the quality, depth and range of our work, and ways for us to debate, analyse, and lead thinking in the sector.

I must thank the two Chief Executives on the committee, Nigel Lynn and Matt Partridge, who have used their influence nationally to highlight the work of CLOA and raise sector issues with decision-makers in Whitehall.

It continues to be a challenging time for us all, but equally to be a time when our work delivers on its enormous potential to be a force for good in our communities. For us to be most effective advocates, our professional association gives us access to influential audiences that we would find impossible to reach individually. It's important to remember that CLOA is our association, it exists to support us, our local authorities and sectors.

To get the full value of your membership, I'd encourage you to engage as much as possible (the [Members' LinkedIn Forum](#) is a good place to start). It's vital that we continue to refresh and hear new and diverse voices, to keep our debate well-informed, relevant and inclusive, so do think about whether you could join the Executive in the coming years.

I have had a busy first year as Chair of CLOA and am immensely grateful to everyone on the executive and wider who has supported the work of the organisation during this time.

Debbie Kaye, Chair of CLOA
June 2022