

Introduction

[The Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association](#) (CLOA) is the professional association for strategic leaders managing public sector Culture, Arts, Heritage, Tourism, Libraries, Parks, Sport, Leisure & Active Wellbeing services. We work closely with central government and key national organisations such as Arts Council England, Sport England and The National Archives to influence the development of national policies and to lobby for positive change within our sectors.

Membership of CLOA is open to all strategic leaders working in the public sector environment, and who hold cross-sector managerial responsibility for a range of culture and leisure services.

We rely on a strong and engaged membership base to sustain our work and deliver value to them and their organisations.

The association is governed by a [voluntary Executive Committee](#) drawn from the membership and is supported by a Policy Development and Business Manager and a Finance Manager, who collectively work 2.5 days per week. As such capacity is a key challenge.

Purpose of the review

This review has emerged from a task and finish group led by the Honorary Treasurer, which was convened to consider membership price and future structure.

It was decided by this group that it would be beneficial to involve an external practitioner in consulting with the whole membership (and former members, where practicable) to provide an impartial assessment, fresh perspectives and expert insights into a range of areas such as the cost of membership; brand name; membership benefits; potential for growth; format and focus of meetings and events; communications methods; comparison with other professional associations.

Areas we would like to specifically see explored are:

- Assess the current value proposition for members
- Identifying strengths, gaps and areas for improvement in our membership offer
- Provide insights into members' perceptions, needs and expectations
- Reviewing the membership model and pricing structure for sustainability and fairness
- Recommending strategies to enhance member engagement, recruitment and retention

All proposals need to be mindful of CLOA's existing capacity and resources.

Background information

[CLOA membership](#) runs between 1st April – 31st March each year.

There are currently 3 categories:-

- Individual membership £160
- Corporate membership £480 – this covers up to 6 representatives from an organisation and so represents really good value.
- Retired membership £30 – this is only available for people who have been a member of CLOA prior to retirement

The categories were simplified in 2016 (paper available) to create a single inclusive category of Individual Member and removing previous categories of Associate & Commercial.

The last increase in subscription fees took effect from April 23 and was +£10 for Individuals and +£30 for a Corporate subscription. There is no increase in fees planned for the coming 2026 subscription year. Any proposed increase needs to be agreed at the AGM in June and does not take effect until the following April.

In 2024/25 there were 64 Individual members, 57 Corporate members and 3 Retired members.

We also have the category of Honorary member (11 of these) which is free of cost and awarded to up to 2 people annually who are making or who have made a significant contribution to the development of the cultural and leisure disciplines nationally and/or internationally.

A further Complimentary membership is available for strategic partners (33 of these)

Membership income has grown significantly since the last review as we have placed an emphasis on converting to Corporate membership, this allows for emerging leaders to come through and also distributes the benefits more broadly, with each LA nominating who should be in membership, particularly as job titles in local authorities are increasingly fluid.

However, in the last 12 months there has been a slight downturn in membership numbers as a result of the financial challenges experienced by some local authorities, which has meant they have removed subscription fees from their budgets.

Year	Membership Income £
2015	18416
2016	21326
2017	19938
2018	22330
2019	31140
2020	31155

2021	32741
2022	33729
2023	33547
2024	36740
2025	35913

In June 2023 an amendment to the constitution was made to allow to Local Authority Trading Companies (LATCOs) to join CLOA on the same basis as Trusts, so as either Individual or Corporate members.

To counter act attrition, we have over the past years made contact with local authorities without a subscribing member to offer them a 3 month free trial offer. This has proved to be an effective way of introducing new members to the association without them needing to make an immediate financial commitment.

We have also recently been seeking to engage with officers in the Mayoral and Combined Authorities to see whether they would like to enjoy a 3 months free trial of CLOA.

Looking to the future, we would like to understand what tolerance there is for an increase to the cost of membership across the existing categories. And whether there are other categories that would be welcome. Although, the caveat is that having simplified the structure in 2016, we would be cautious regarding the introduction of a complex category hierarchy or cost based variables such as organisational turnover.

Membership serves those officers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, we only have 3 Corporates and 2 Individuals currently subscribing in Wales.

This is likely due to the fact that a parallel forum exists Chief Leisure Officers Wales (CLOW) which is serviced by two of Executive Committee members and is free to attend/receive information from.

We would like this review to reflect on the potential for CLOA growth in Wales, and for senior officers in Wales to be well connected. This might involve ceasing running CLOW in its current format and channelling everyone towards CLOA membership. The impact could perhaps be offset by re-instigating a regional CLOA group in Wales and allocating funding for to bring members together.

Pre-Covid and the advent of Teams there were other active regional groups who held in-person meetings in London and also the South East. The South East grouping faltered due to lack of volunteer capacity and the London group consciously moved to a more flexible format following an [in-house review](#) in Autumn 22.

There is now a growing appetite for face to face networking opportunities by some members, which was indicated by 11% of respondents to a survey following our virtual annual conference in June 25. We would like to test whether the occasional in

person meeting might be welcomed by a wider group of members, or whether consideration such as efficient use of time, avoiding travel costs and carbon reduction figure more highly in members thinking.

Name and brand identity

We are conscious that changes over time to job titles has meant that there are very few actual chief officers in local government now.

However, the brand identity of the Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association or CLOA is well established with both national partners and also amongst members, Alongside the risk of diminishing national recognition by changing the name of the association, there would also be an administrative burden incurred in contacting every member organisation and completing new supplier forms. This would have a financial implication.

As part of the membership review we would however like to consult members on an appropriate tag line, that could be used to project a less 'chief' type of exclusivity. This is particularly important as we are seeking to encourage aspiring leaders to join and benefit from the peer networking and CPD available through our events programme.

Membership benefits

We have currently determined that subscribing to CLOA brings the following benefits:

- Ability to influence the development of national policies and to lobby for positive change
- Free to attend annual conference every June
- Programme of topical roundtable events
- Regular ebulletin with sector news, funding opportunities, reports, research and resources
- Access to the latest issues, innovative projects and pilot studies
- Network into key consultations
- Connection to senior-level policy makers in key Government departments, arms-length bodies and other professional associations
- Access to best practice, peer support and shared expertise through our dedicated members LinkedIn forum
- Use of the fortnightly e-bulletin to advertise your organisations senior culture & leisure jobs
- Exchange of knowledge, best practice and innovative ideas
- Development of individual career opportunities
- Discounts on partner training, workshops and seminars

We would like to understand which of these benefits members value and what other benefits they would like us to consider offering.

The fortnightly ebulletin takes a considerable amount of our comms capacity. Anecdotally, and from adhoc feedback received, we sense that this is one of the key benefits for sector leaders as it provides a roundup of the latest sector news; highlights the work of the Executive Committee; gives updates on EDI and Climate Action; provides information about funding opportunities; shares links to new reports, research and resources, current consultations and recent viewpoints; includes calls for evidence, best practice and innovative ideas; alongside a range of job and CPD opportunities; plus a selection of relevant events.

We have a web presence at www.cloa.org.uk and X profile @cCLOAssociation plus a dedicated closed LinkedIn Forum for CLOA members where they can ask questions, share best practice and CLOA can gather feedback on topical matters and consultations.

It would be helpful to understand whether these platforms are serving the membership needs, and also to know whether there are other alternative platforms that they would prefer CLOA to use (for example switch from X to Bluesky)

We run a series of topical roundtables averaging 6 a year, and also include attendance at the annual conference within the membership subscription. An annual post-conference survey each year indicates what future topics members would like us to focus on, but this is completed by about 25% of conference attendees and so represents the views of a minority.

As such we would like to know what our members think CLOA should focus on over the coming 18 months and what would help them the most with their work place challenges.

Comparison with other professional bodies

We undertook a simple desk top comparison with other professional bodies to understand how the cost of subscription v the benefits available offers value for money.

[Libraries Connected](#) An annual fee, for the whole library service which covers everyone working there. Cost not published on their website.

[CILIP](#) - Individual memberships only between £172.80-£248.40 depending on whether a standard, certified, chartered or fellow

[Museum Association](#) Individual £98 per year, Organisational based on t/o over £10,711,500 would be £2,464, Commercial £275, Freelance/Consultant £185

[Archives & Records Association](#) – based on Individual salary between £36 and £324 (other categories not relevant)

[Community Leisure UK](#) – for organisations only and based on T/O

[Sport & Recreation Alliance](#) – for organisations only and based on T/O

[SOLACE](#) – Individuals only between £50-£350 depending on seniority

[ADPH](#) – no info on their website but an FOI from 20/21 suggests it was £3,950

[ADASS](#) – based on Population Range £2,528 - £2,947 Each full member can nominate up to 4 extended members and 1 principal social worker.

As part of this review we would value further insights into how we compare and in what ways we could further enhance the perceived value of membership.

Reporting expectations

It is anticipated that a summary of the findings with recommendations will be available in draft for comment, prior to finalising the report.

This should be structured to reflect the various lines of enquiry such as:

- Which current benefits members value most (and least valued) and what other benefits we should consider offering
- Member feedback analysis to include:-
 - Which current benefits members value most (and least valued) and what other benefits we should consider offering to remain competitive and relevant.
 - How our various communications methods are serving the membership (website, X, LinkedIn and e-bulletin) and whether there are other alternative platforms or comms methods that they would prefer to engage with
 - Appetite for occasional in person meetings, either nationally or at regional level
 - What topics our members think CLOA should focus its efforts on for roundtables/annual conference and will provide greatest benefit.
- Any new partnership that we should nurture
- The potential for CLOA growth in Wales
- Insights into how we compare with other professional associations and in what ways we could further enhance the perceived value of membership
- Tolerance for an increase to the cost of membership across the existing categories
- Suggestions on how to ensure that CLOA is recognised as the network for strategic leaders in the sector as well as encouraging aspiring leaders (potentially via an appropriate tag line)
- Recommendations with prioritisation (short, medium, long)

Fee and timescale

A fee of up to **£3200** has been allocated for research into how CLOA can better meet the needs of our members.

The proposed timescale below is indicative:

- Brief for review circulated: w/b 8th December 25
- Deadline for quotation responses: **5th January 26**
- Award made: by 12th January 26
- Survey period: mid-January – mid February 26
- Draft report available – early March 26

- Final report – by 13th April 26

Support available

In order to ensure the review completes with timescale and budget the following support will be available from the CLOA Policy Development & Business Manager

- Provision of background information and any previous surveys and reports
- Promotion of the survey amongst the membership, with reminders as necessary.
- Point of contact for any queries (N.B works 2 days per week)
- Proof reading draft report

Vincent Paliczka, the Honorary Treasurer will be the lead contact in terms of commissioning this work and signing off the report.

How to respond

To apply for this opportunity please send the following to info@cloa.org.uk by **5th January 26**

- Delivery proposal outlining your approach to the work
- CV highlighting your experience knowledge and skills
- Equality, diversity and inclusion statement
- Confirmation of Professional Indemnity Insurance
- Costings for the work with an outline activity plan