

## Position Statement

CLOA (Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association)

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## Title of Position Statement

Data

## Purpose of the Statement

CLOA recognises the critical role of robust, accessible, and standardised cultural data in shaping evidence-based policy, informing investment decisions, and supporting local authorities to deliver high-quality cultural services. National data projects provide an opportunity to strengthen the sector's voice, influence government thinking, and ensure that local perspectives are embedded in national frameworks. This document sets out the association's position regarding key data issues in this sector in order to influence and shape thinking.

## Background / Context

Across government departments and agencies with responsibility for cultural policy and development, a wide range of data projects are underway, each bringing valuable perspectives and insights. However, these initiatives are sometimes less connected than they could be, and the number of requests for engagement can place considerable demands on the capacity of local authorities and sector leaders. In response to this, CLOA, working in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA), has played a constructive role in bringing together key stakeholders - including Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs), academic institutions, and government departments. This collaborative approach aims to foster greater coherence, encourage shared learning, and support a more streamlined and effective use of data across the sector.

CLOA is actively engaged in key national data initiatives that will shape future funding and policy landscapes. We prioritise projects that align with our strategic objectives and have the greatest potential to impact local government and cultural services.

- **National Cultural Data Observatory (NCDO)**

CLOA is contributing to the development of a blueprint for the UK's

National Cultural Data Observatory, supported by ESRC funding and led by the Centre for Cultural Value in partnership with The Audience Agency, MyCake, and Culture Commons. CLOA provides local government insight through representation on the advisory group, ensuring that the observatory's design and outputs meet the needs of councils and communities.

- **National Cultural Framework**

CLOA supports the creation of a coherent framework for cultural data and indicators, building on existing work such as JCNA guidelines and avoiding duplication. We advocate for principles of proportionality, relevance, and usability to underpin this framework, ensuring it serves both national and local priorities.

- **National Heritage Capital Project**

CLOA engages with this initiative to influence approaches to capital investment in heritage assets, ensuring that local authority perspectives inform funding models and decision-making.

## CLOA's Position

CLOA's base position is the same as the National Alliance for Cultural Services calling for a new approach to:

- Simplify the funding landscape and move towards a more coherent, long-term, strategic partnership investment settlement for place integrating with locally agreed strategies
- Remove duplication of effort across the system and create a single point of strategic discussion between DCMS and local authorities
- Revisit the balance between revenue and capital funding; investment in new capital schemes should always include appropriate provision for revenue.
- Create a national strategy for culture developed with the key stakeholders including local government and which analyses and addresses the brakes and accelerators on country-wide cultural development
- Explore an "area specialism" element to funding, relating to local contribution to national strategic priorities (eg tourism, creative industries cluster, skills)

- Ensure libraries are acknowledged at national level to be a responsibility of local government and an integral part of cultural policy within local authority structures, not treated as a stand alone or silo'd function

In relation to Data specifically, CLOA's position is:

- **Collaboration:** Work with ALBs, DCMS, LGA, and sector partners to align efforts and reduce duplication.
- **Evidence-Based Policy:** Promote data standards and indicators that support transparent, equitable funding decisions.
- **Capacity Building:** Advocate for resources and skills development within local authorities to enable effective use of national data tools.
- **Public Benefit:** Ensure that data initiatives deliver tangible benefits for communities, supporting cultural vitality and inclusive growth.

## **Recommendations / Calls to Action**

CLOA calls on national bodies and funders to:

- Engage local government early in the design of data projects.
- Provide clear guidance and support for implementation at local level.
- Commit to open, interoperable data standards that enable meaningful analysis and benchmarking.
- Support data literacy development in local government culture and leisure services.