

Position Statement

CLOA (Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association)

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Title of Position Statement

Local Government's role in supporting the Museums sector

Purpose of the Statement

To set out CLOA's position on museums in England, articulating the critical role local government plays in sustaining museum provision and influencing national policy, funding and devolution arrangements.

Background / Context

Local government is the principal funder, steward and strategic leader of museums in England. Councils directly manage the majority of accredited museums and collections and support independent and voluntary museums. Museums safeguard collections of local, national and international significance and contribute to education, wellbeing, tourism, placemaking and the visitor economy.

Despite this public value, museums operate in an increasingly challenging financial environment marked by short-term funding, rising costs and complex governance transitions.

CLOA's Position

CLOA's base position aligns with the National Alliance for Cultural Services and builds on CLOA's existing positions on arts, local government reform and devolution. Specifically, CLOA calls for a new approach to museums that recognises their unique public value while embedding them within place-based cultural strategies.

1. Local government as the system leader for museums in place

Local authorities are central to the leadership, governance and sustainability of museums. CLOA's position is that:

- Councils should be recognised as the **primary strategic leaders for museums in place**, whether as direct operators, funders, landlords or convenors.
- Museums should be embedded within wider local strategies for culture, education, health, tourism, economic development and community wellbeing.
- Devolution and reorganisation must strengthen, not weaken, local democratic accountability for museum provision and collections stewardship.

2. A simplified and coherent national–local relationship

The current museums funding and policy landscape is fragmented and resource intensive. CLOA advocates for:

- A **clear, coherent national framework** for museums that aligns with locally agreed strategies and priorities.
- Reduction in duplicated effort across national bodies, development agencies and funding programmes.
- A **single strategic interface** between central government and local authorities on museums policy, funding and reform, rather than multiple overlapping relationships.

3. Long-term, place-based investment in museums

Short-term, competitive and project-based funding undermines sustainability and workforce capacity. CLOA calls for:

- **Multi-year, place-based investment settlements** for museums that reflect land support the governance arrangements at a local level.
- Funding that supports the **whole system**, including collections care, skills, leadership, community engagement and digital capability.
- Investment approaches that recognise the different roles of civic, regional, specialist and community museums.

4. Alignment of capital and revenue funding

Museums face acute pressures arising from misalignment between capital investment and ongoing revenue costs. CLOA's position is that:

- All capital investment, including funding from local authorities, in museum buildings, refurbishments or collections infrastructure must include **adequate, long-term revenue provision**.
- National policy should recognise the full lifecycle costs of museum assets, including storage, conservation, environmental control and security.
- Sustainable operation, not just capital delivery, should be a core test of future investment decisions for all funders.

5. Museums as essential public services, not discretionary add-ons

CLOA asserts that museums are:

- Core civic assets that support statutory and preventative agendas across education, health, community cohesion and economic development.

- Not optional or peripheral services, but fundamental to placemaking and long-term social value.
- Services whose public benefit justifies stable public funding and strategic leadership within local government structures.

6. Fit for devolution and local government reorganisation

In the context of local government reorganisation and devolution, CLOA's position is that:

- Museum governance, funding and collections ownership implications must be considered **early and explicitly** in reorganisation processes.
- Collections held in trust for the public require clear legal and governance protections during structural change.
- Devolved and mayoral arrangements should empower local government to shape museum investment based on local priorities and strengths.

7. Recognition of local specialisms and national contribution

Museums make diverse contributions to national priorities, often rooted in local specialism. CLOA supports:

- Funding approaches that **recognise and reward local strengths**, including industrial heritage, archaeology, social history, creative practice, science and natural history.
- Flexibility for places to shape museum investment around their contribution to tourism, skills, education, creative industries and international reputation.
- Recognition that excellence exists across the whole country, not only in major national institutions.

Recommendations / Calls to Action

CLOA calls on central government, national agencies and strategic partners to:

- **Formally recognise local government's leadership role** in museums as part of place based cultural systems.
- **Establish a simpler, more coherent national–local framework** for museums policy, funding and partnership working.
- **Introduce multiyear, place-based investment settlements for local government** that support long term sustainability rather than short term project delivery.
- **Ensure all capital funding programmes for museums** include appropriate, long term revenue provision.
- **Align museums policy with devolution and reform**, protecting collections, governance and civic accountability through structural change.
- **Acknowledge museums as essential public services**, integral to education, prevention, placemaking and local identity.
- **Support local specialisms and contributions to national goals**, enabling places to shape investment around local strengths and needs.