

Written evidence submitted by Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council

What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

The evidence within this is reflective of a feedback from a cross section of cultural organisations, creative businesses, freelancers and creative practitioners living in and working in Calderdale, through 1-2-1 annotated conversations, network meetings with members of the cultural partnership and responses from the wider Leeds city region sector survey. Specific examples have been taken from internal cultural services - libraries, theatres and museums that are run by the metropolitan borough, which have been severely impacted during this period following extreme austerity reductions and venues having to close

Within Calderdale there has been a dichotomy of devastation and innovation, which has highlighted the two tier nature of the sector where resilience and the ability to bounce back sit on a knife edge. Initially the fall out of protecting the general public led to a battery of incessant decision making, cancelling shows, workshops, closing venues, to furlough or not to furlough, with a lot of the decisions being made by individuals and organisations already at maximum capacity. Notably each decision being problematic due to the subsequent chain reactions that then follows and ricochets across the sector. A closed theatre venue, means a cancelled show, renegotiating contracts with promoters, rescheduling performances and refunding customers. The rebooking of a show is dependent on the promoter's schedules, which are dependent on the availability of their team due to the significantly large numbers of freelance workers and casuals in the sector. Undoubtedly it's not hard to see the scheduling quagmire that ensues as a result, before factoring in conversations with insurers, funders and human resource specialists. The creative/cultural sector pre covid-19 was already stretched, suddenly had to function like a commercial business with their HR, legal, customer service and accountancy teams on standby ready to crunch the numbers to assess damage limitation. For those that have the luxury of being a national portfolio organisation perhaps this concept was semi-plausible, however for the vast majority of arts organisations and freelancers for which Calderdale have a significant number it has obviously been a time of great anxiety in terms of knowing what direct monies are available to them.

Most or all respondents communicated that they had lost between 50 – 90% of their total revenue, with reserves being all but non-existent. In some circumstance due to previous shortfalls in funding coronavirus compounded their pre-existing problems and they had to cease trading. Without support the majority of the respondents will not be able to survive and with the average length for survival being 3 - 6 months. Serious concerns for employee morale and well-being were presented as impacts as well as the added pressures of delivering engagement/services whilst also dealing with staff that are shielding and self-isolating. For an industry that on the whole thrives on communication and contact coronavirus has introduced a new dynamic that is unsettling and challenging.

Against this background the sector has responded with greater use of digital platforms to continue and maintain their commitment to delivering excellence for their audiences. This has undoubtedly been a difficult time but there have been a number of new collaborations and unexpected successes during this time that have shown that with further investment could create models for best practice

if organisations continue to work collectively. The isolating nature of the pandemic has put a spotlight onto mental health and well-being with the sector being well experienced in enabling vulnerable people to articulate their emotions in creative and dignified ways sometimes at pace. Dependent on the discipline with music, dance and the visual arts seeming to adapt most swiftly and economically this has meant that they have been able to keep a modicum of normalcy in terms of audience engagement by transferring to online delivery for workshops and courses. With the introduction of furloughed staff in NPO organisations and the large amount of freelance workers this has seen the sector step up to become a volunteer force within their communities, creative businesses working to make PPE where previously they may have made costumes for theatre or stage equipment.

How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

It's fair to say that the consensus that the government's approach was more non-strategic to the point of inefficacy. The complexities of the sector and the structures of how the creative industries operates were not taken into account with the initial funds available having an emphasis on encouraging borrowing, business rate relief which only factors in those with premises and the debacle with the delay for those who are self-employed effectively splitting the industry in two.

The money made available to the sector in terms of the £160million from ACE and Heritage Lottery fund when compared with the money given through the business sector is a very small drop in the ocean when you consider the social and economic contribution made. Local authorities have been asked to shoulder the burden in terms of providing guidance and fund administration however their very own cultural services are under extreme pressure with loss of revenue placing them into financial abyss without any financial support from central government. Other government departments managed to get funding directly into the neighbourhoods. DCMS did not and could not do this because it operates through arms-length bodies, this proved problematic.

The lack of central leadership was prevalent in the number of surveys and consultations that were in circulation. At a time when the sector was looking for guidance and support it was being inundated with calls for data! The plethora of survey's added to the anxieties and pressures felt on the ground. Questions were constantly being asked by small arts organisations/freelancers *what was the purpose of taking the time to complete each specific survey? Who ultimately had the oversight? Was it happening at a regional level, national level, sector specific etc? Were they all feeding into the same evidence base and to what end?*

Within Calderdale out of over 4,000 businesses that were eligible for business retention scheme only **86** creative businesses applied for and were given government grants and only 12% of Covid-19 emergency relief applications administered by Community Foundation for Calderdale (CFFC) were given to cultural organisations doing work in the community. The funding made available through ACE which was sector specific was a much needed lifeline for the borough with organisations and individuals (one of which was Calderdale Museums Service to support their education/community outreach programme) receiving a total of £532,955 through the Emergency Response Fund. The efficiency of ACE approach during this period is to be commended and recognised. The emergency response given has opened up ACE's reach across the sector with new organisations/individuals

supported. It is hoped that both DCMS and ACE can make greater use of the new organisations/individuals supported in the future. There is still an enormous lack of support and understanding of Local Authority Cultural Services nationally and regionally who continue to be overlooked and in danger of devastation and obliteration.

What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

As already mentioned the lack of resilience within the sector has been a rude awakening as those with any reserves will see the complete depletion of those. The most impact will be felt with models where live events, live performance, gathering in an internal space such as theatres and cinemas. The industry has to prepare for a not just a change in behaviour where social distancing guideline become the new normal but the change in perception and attitudes where it almost becomes the default position. Will audiences be able to overcome the culture of fear and anxiety that permeated through lockdown and feel safe once restrictions have been lifted and society eases its way back to recovery? *How can an industry where already affordability, excellence and equality were already polarising debates in terms of access and inclusion? How do we prioritise who gets assistance the limited amount of resources that are available? Is it through supporting the larger national institutions and keeping them open for the annual -once a year trip that only certain families can afford, or is the more localised initiatives where everyone can participate yet cannot be standardised or categorised in the same manner that some of the more traditional gatekeepers of culture can?*

The other very real awakening is about upskilling the sector, the obvious very real lack of training and best practice principles around, agility, contingency planning and digital. The support required by the sector is to recognise that by statutory services such as libraries straddle these two worlds of community and culture. Where organisations were great at generating income as time continued during lockdown this is no longer the case. It will take the organisations who received little to no public subsidy if they survive 18 months to 2 years to get back to pre covid-19 levels.

What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

It was felt that there was a lack of leadership, direction, non-prioritisation of the sector in comparison to other sectors. Creative businesses left to fend for themselves. The initial reaction of all organisations to go into survival mode meant that the arms-length bodies felt, distant and inward facing rather than outward and ready to respond. There needs to be real understanding from DCMS that a one size fits all isn't necessarily appropriate for the creative sector. That solutions may look different for each art-form and what may work for the visual arts, isn't going to work for dance or museums or theatres. *Where the synergies, what are the unique problems that theatre faces that publishing does not and where do these strategic conversations take place?* The responses found that sector specific bodies such as Outdoor Arts UK proved more beneficial for direct advice and support than an overarching government bodies. There has to be sector specific support that recognises that cultural institutions straddle the tourism and business and skills agenda. Recognition can be given through ring-fencing monies within those departments for cultural organisation and

creative businesses so that they are not side-lined or not included around the table when the policies or initiatives for support are being drawn up in these areas.

The swift and ease of how ACE distributed its emergency response funds proved that bureaucratic processes for funding can largely be cut out whilst still retaining appropriate checks and balances for public funding. The use of Grantium as a portal continues to be problematic and difficult to navigate and needs revisiting. How do organisations and individuals who are not part of the established system and fell through the major funding gaps continue within the industry and not feel like that they have to completely abandon a career or art form that they have dedicated their life to perfecting?

Clearer guidelines from the outset on what recovery looks like, social distancing measures 1m and 2m rules apply and in what instances. How long realistically closure so that venues and individuals can financially prepare and make informed choices about whether or not being 'open' and back in business is actually a viable option.

How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

Providing serious investment levels through direct funding to local authorities to commission new work or creative artists that responds to their place/locality where the knowledge and expertise exists on the ground, rather than taking an impersonal approach through arms-length bodies, which tends to fund to known organisations with no space for growth and development in response to a changing society.

This has been the paradigm shift which has changed arts and culture to being a lofty ideal, something other to the notion of developing creativity which is relatable and an inherent instinct. The new renaissance of creativity as something that is as tangible as a sewing tutorial to make your own face mask or art activity packs for vulnerable children or zoom dance sessions for older people proves that breaking new ground in the everyday is part of parcel of what the sector does as its *raison d'être*.

Moving forward a better integration of government departments such as education and health is fundamental as these departments recognise that they cannot deliver their services without the contribution of the creative sector therefore at some point have to start with direct investment through their budgets. Especially with regards to the long term effects on the mental health and well-being of public that will be with us for some time to come. Recognising that people need to process these emotions individually and as a collective memory. The creative sector is best placed to capture with the tools and expertise for that to happen effectively and innovatively.

Furthermore through Black Lives Matter campaign and the disproportionate effect that Covid 19 has had on BAME communities the sector has to do a lot of self-analysis about whether or not the institutions are reflective of the society we live in and how it can help provoke new conversations or communicate those stories.