Arts Council England’s response to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government’s a new deal for social housing green paper consultation
November 2018

About Arts Council England
Arts Council England is the national development agency for the arts, museums and libraries in England. Our mission is 'great art and culture for everyone' and we work to achieve this by championing, developing and investing in arts and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives.

Response
Chapter Four - Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities

52. How could we support or deliver a best neighbourhood competition?
The Arts Council recognises the importance of serving local needs and working with residents to deliver what they want to see in their communities. As the Green Paper acknowledges, residents can play a huge role in shaping their localities, and in making them ‘fantastic places’ in which to live. We believe that there is a strong potential role for arts and culture in recognising the work residents do within a Best Neighbourhood competition.

This could include the ways that residents engage with their surroundings, and each other, creatively – eg residents co-producing murals, interpretation panels or performances to celebrate key facets of a community’s heritage or identity; groups and projects to combat the loneliness of older residents; to offer mentoring and training for young people, including as a diversion from antisocial behaviour; and to promote social community and social mixing. It is also interesting to consider the way in which more ‘formal’ cultural infrastructure – local libraries, museums or theatres, for example – can help to create vibrant communities.

Accordingly, we would welcome the opportunity to be part of conversations around a Best Neighbourhood competition, as they develop.

53. In addition to sharing positive stories of social housing residents and their neighbourhoods, what more could be done to tackle stigma?
Cultural activity can be a powerful tool for looking beyond stereotypes, to share stories which portray the reality of the lives of our communities. The arts can offer positive activities, and a means for people to engage with each other in the life of their community. They can also be used establish or reinforce a positive collective
vision of a community, as well as engaging the people of that community in the creation of an identity that they share and are proud of.

This engagement of the rich, diverse, nuanced, creative, celebratory voice of the community, including to commission and co-produce new art, is a powerful way to tackle stigma – both in terms of how the community is seen externally, and how it views itself.

Public investment in arts and culture can be effectively targeted to spread cultural opportunity, and this can be done in partnership with housing providers. The following examples highlight this and demonstrate practice that is having a positive impact and could be adopted elsewhere.

Arts Council England funds the Creative People and Places programme (CPP), investing in areas of the country where people’s engagement in and with the arts is below the national average in order to increase participation in arts and cultural activity, and to make the provision of cultural opportunity sustainable.

CPP has supported a number of initiatives where housing providers have taken a lead. Blackpool’s ‘LeftCoast’ partnership is led by Blackpool Coastal Housing Ltd, alongside cultural organisations in the area such as the Grand Theatre. In response to the Financial Times’ article ‘Left Behind: can anyone save the towns the economy forgot?’ which focussed on Blackpool, LeftCoast commissioned five artistic proposals to ‘provide a nuanced and thoughtful counter-position’ to the difficult subjects raised in the article. It also sought to highlight the many positive facets of life in the town. In this way, a housing provider provided leadership for the cultural sector, and enabled cultural organisations to challenge external perceptions of the place and its community.

One of the responses, ‘The Golden Repair’, recognises the resilience of the people of Blackpool. Using Kintsugi (a Japanese technique of embracing the flawed and imperfect), the artist is embellishing cracks in the urban landscape with Kintsugi (Golden Repair). The commissions are an invitation to both Blackpool’s residents and visitors to view the town and its social challenges in a new light.

There is also potential in government working with the Arts Council to effectively target investment to support innovation and new ways of working, and to use this to find ways to enhance culture’s contribution to stronger local communities. The Arts and Communities programme, co-funded by Arts Council England and the Department for Communities and Local Government, ran from 2014 – 2016. It provided funding to the localities of Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol and Burnley and
aimed to support and showcase good practice in arts culture that brings communities together. In Druids Heath, part of the Selly Oak district in Birmingham, residents took part in a cross-generational projected intended to challenge perceptions of their estate. Residents filmed the area, showing its beauty and presenting it as a place where people were glad to live. The film was shared online, improving community relationships and offering an alternative narrative to the one often heard about social housing estates.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which is itself a housing provider as well as a national think-tank and campaigning charity, has also undertaken a range of interesting arts and creativity-led projects intended to address and diminish the stigma of social housing, and of poverty throughout society: https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/we-need-influence-culture-achieve-lasting-social-change

As demonstrated by these case studies, arts and culture could make a strong contribution to destigmatising communities, giving local people a voice and agency in tackling stigma and provoking conversation with wider society. There is great potential for housing providers, working with the cultural sector, to provide the leadership to realise this.

We want to embed a customer service culture and attract, retain and develop the right people with the right behaviours for the challenging and rewarding range of roles offered by the sector.

54. What is needed to further encourage the professionalisation of housing management to ensure all staff delivers a good quality of service?
   N/A

55. What key performance indicator should be used to measure whether landlords are providing good neighbourhood management?
   N/A

56. What evidence is there of the impact of the important role that many landlords are playing beyond their key responsibilities?

57. Should landlords report on the social value they deliver?
   There is a strong track record of social housing providers taking a leadership role, developing innovative practice and working beyond their key responsibilities to deliver social value in partnership with the cultural sector. This can see landlords
and cultural organisations working together to bring a cultural offer to residents, demonstrating that many social housing providers recognise the potential of arts and culture to bring communities together. Arts and cultural activities build common ground and promote social mixing, tackle key issues such as social isolation and skills and training, and develop community cohesion.

LeftCoast are an important example of a landlord playing this role, and there has been a focus on community engagement. Residents and community groups work together to help generate programme ideas, shape activities and take part in conversations about the place where they work and live. In partnership with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire and Mereside Residents, LeftCoast have helped to facilitate the commissioning of a public artwork for a new police station on the edge of the Mereside estate. The residents have been directly involved in the collaborative process, selecting the artist and shaping the brief with the police. Residents acknowledged how their ideas and values were taken on board and felt proud to have been involved in the development of the artwork, which was unveiled in May 2018.

There are additional examples across England; For example, Lewisham Homes is working together in a partnership with the Albany Arts Centre, Deptford to reduce social isolation and encourage community cohesion. The partnership offers arts and cultural activities to the community; a free street dance programme for young people; access to green space and gardening activity for all; training and development for 16-25 year olds; and residents have cheap or free access to shows and events at the Albany.

One joint project called Meet Me at Lewisham Homes, also involving Entelechy Arts, focuses particularly on social isolation amongst older residents. It provides a regular meeting place for formerly isolated and lonely older people to socialise and work alongside professional artists. The project has enjoyed huge success and has grown rapidly since its inception. By the start of 2017, three years after the project began, it was engaging over 100 isolated older people on a weekly basis, had expanded to several new sheltered accommodation sites, and added new activities including dance, a film club, and trips to cultural venues across London.

Social Housing providers have also worked in collaboration to realise culture’s potential to deliver social value. In 2014, the Arts Council funded the Social Housing Arts Network through its Strategic Touring programme. The project aimed to encourage social housing providers to work with artists and to offer residents an opportunity to play a central role. It worked with four social housing providers in
four locations (Bolton at Home, Poplar Harca, South Yorkshire Housing Association and St Leger Homes, Doncaster), using a three-phased model.

The partnership with Bolton at Home focused on the Breightmet district of the town. The area had recently welcomed a number of refugees and the project aimed to support them into accessing other Bolton at Home support structures. The artists worked to discover natural common ground between the refugees and the existing residents; food became the unifying topic, offering people a way to share stories and to build their understanding of other cultures. In conjunction with the residents, the Growing/Cooking/Sharing ‘deconstructed book’ was developed, using stories, recipes and tips that had been shared by residents over meals. It was initially displayed in Breightmet library and then moved to the Urban Care and Neighbourhood centre. Here, it continues to be used by a variety of community groups in Breightmet. Significantly, project participants continued to engage in other initiatives with Bolton at Home, meeting the project’s aim.

New Charter Homes (now part of Jigsaw Group) partners with Oldham Coliseum, and has previously partnered with another theatre, the Royal Exchange in Manchester. These partnerships deliver initiatives for New Charter residents, aiming to raise aspirations, tackle isolation, and offer employment, skills and personal development opportunities. A particular highlight of Oldham Coliseum’s offer gives young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in a range of skills, with a ‘virtual 100% success rate’ in participants finding work or re-entering training following the programme. They have also worked with Aksa Homes’ women’s group on several occasions, and supported residents with learning difficulties to produce and perform their own theatre pieces.

Many social housing landlords share news of residents’ cultural achievements and upcoming events through their websites, so much of their social contribution is being recorded informally. A more formal documentation method of reporting the social impact of such ‘additional’ work could be useful to gain a national overview of the valuable contribution being made by landlords and to share best practice.

Local government could also be encouraged to factor the role of social housing (council and housing association) in cultural strategies; the role of culture in housing in local plans, sustainable communities strategies and similar; and the role of culture in housing strategies.

58. How are landlords working with local partners to tackle anti-social behaviour?
Arts and cultural experiences or programmes can provide opportunities to tackle anti-social behaviour, engaging with people at risk of offending and building community relationships. There is an extensive evidence base for this, as gathered by the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance in their evidence library, and also included in a forthcoming evidence paper compiled by Arts Council England. [https://www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk/evidence-library](https://www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk/evidence-library)

For example, in Staffordshire New Vic Theatre’s Borderlines uses theatre to engage with disadvantaged young people (including those at risk of offending), tackling anti-social behaviour and helping people to find positive ways to understand themselves and their communities. Borderlines has won several awards, including the British Community Safety award for achievements in helping to reduce crime.


Where similar opportunities exist, landlords could make links with cultural organisations in order to refer young people or older residents who might benefit from such programmes.

59. What key performance indicator could be used to measure this work?
N/A

60. What other ways can planning guidance support good design in the social sector?
The National Planning Policy Framework acknowledges that planning policies and decisions should include the provision of cultural facilities and services. Arts and culture make a crucial contribution to developing healthy and safe communities as they bring social, economic and physical benefits – through building community cohesion, making places attractive to businesses and driving local economic growth, as well as by providing vibrant community spaces or activities for residents to come together and enjoy.

This can be realised through the planning system, and we strongly support the inclusion of culture within the National Planning Policy Framework and encourage the upcoming social housing guidance to place culture at its heart. Local planning authorities should have a vision of the contribution that culture can deliver to a
place, and to strategically consider how cultural opportunities can be appropriately and sustainably provided into the long term. Many local authorities have built in consideration of culture’s contribution.

One approach, such as that taken by Leeds City Council in its 2017 Culture Strategy, is to align cultural priorities with broader policy priorities, with the aim of creating healthier and happier communities. To further realise these ambitions, housing developers are now required to have a cultural statement in place, detailing how they will reflect the culture of the existing place in the new development, before permission to build is granted. The strategy intends to make sure that the culture of each community is maintained by starting with culture, and then building new infrastructure around this. Much as Leeds City Council have done, planning guidance should reflect the importance of culture in place making and community building; and ensure that cultural provision is fully considered when planning developments.

In addition, there are opportunities through the Community Investment Levy and Section 106 agreements to support the building of cultural infrastructure in new developments where appropriate. Councils in receipt of the New Homes Bonus could also spend this on cultural infrastructure, as these funds are not ringfenced. Planning guidance could encourage councils to consider the potential wider use of this income in supporting cultural infrastructure and development in the area. The 2015 Mayor of London’s An A-Z of Planning and Culture’ guide offers several examples of integrating culture into planning and communities in different ways, including using a Section 106 agreement to open a new museum in Harrow.

61. How can we encourage social housing residents to be involved in the planning and design of new developments?

Cultural organisations and practitioners have a unique convergence of assets and abilities that can support local residents to have their say in changes that affect their communities. Arts organisations often have buildings that can be used to convene community meetings and engagement sessions. Many cultural organisations are skilled/experienced in bringing together a wide cross-section of the community together to participate and share ideas; and also have expertise in creative co-production, where the community can come together with specialists to develop and enact their responses to new developments. Cultural organisations can also have the benefit of being neutral ‘third spaces’ in between residents/the community, and developers and councils.

Libraries have a potentially important role to play in encouraging social housing residents to be involved in having a say about their communities. Libraries are
valued and viewed as safe, neutral spaces, universally used by the public regardless of their socioeconomic background; the only form of arts and cultural participation that is not significantly impacted by socioeconomic deprivation.

This was born out in a 2017 report for Arts Council England, focussing on the contribution of public libraries to place-shaping. One of the libraries discussed in the report is Ramsey library in Cambridgeshire, which was built to host of mix of local services including healthcare, employment advice and housing support. However, the library has taken its ‘community hub’ role much further. Social housing landlords use the library to meet residents face to face, alongside other advisory and healthcare organisations, and Citizens Advice. While the library is funded and operated by Cambridgeshire County Council, it is governed by a management board of residents, ensuring that the library responds directly to the needs of the community. Having the shared physical base for the variety of services, organisations and groups means that Ramsey Library has truly achieved the ‘community hub’ goal.

Stoke on Trent’s ‘Community Maker’ project brought together long-term residents with new arrivals to build an engaged community, with great success. The project produced an active community group of residents who have since been offered a permanent community space by the council. As a way of involving the community in the design and delivery of this asset, a public arts and cultural programme took place to bring people into the building and get them involved in the discussion about its future. The full case study can be found on the Local Government Association’s Cultural Hub.

Social housing landlords may wish to partner with local libraries or other cultural providers to emulate these concepts, including community residents within decision making and ensuring that provision reflects the needs of the community. Library spaces or other cultural buildings could therefore be used as a central place for residents to meet to share their ideas and input into the planning and design of new developments. Arts and culture programmes can be used to encourage residents to get involved in the conversation.