

Local Government Association and  
All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing

# Local Government Support for Health and Wellbeing through the Arts and Culture

Policy Briefing – July 2017

## Key Messages:

- **The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived.**
- **The arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care: ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health.**
- **The arts can help save money in the health service and social care.**

## Background

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW) has undertaken a major Inquiry into the role of the arts and culture in health and wellbeing. The Inquiry yielded a substantial report – *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* – providing evidence that creative and cultural activities can have a positive impact on people's health and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

*Creative Health* recommends that an individual is designated to take strategic responsibility for the pursuit of institutional policy for arts, health and wellbeing within each local authority. This can be through an existing role or a new one.

The Local Government Association (LGA) has contributed to the Inquiry and identified existing good practice that can be shared more widely. The LGA supports the recommendations made by the report, and encourages its members to find ways of delivering against them locally.

This briefing sets out some of the ways in which the arts and culture can help local government better support the health and wellbeing of its communities. This acknowledges the combined responsibilities of local government for the arts, public health, wellbeing and older people's services as well as many factors influencing the social determinants of health.

1 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing. (2017). *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* is available at: [artshandwellbeing.org.uk/appg/inquiry](http://artshandwellbeing.org.uk/appg/inquiry)

## Public Health

*Creative Health* shows that arts engagement can improve mental health, help with the self-management of long-term health conditions, promote healthy ageing, tackle health inequalities and begin to address obesity.

Around 9.4 million people in England participate in the arts through more than 49,000 amateur arts groups, with others engaging in informal creative activity in their homes and communities. Many people attend cultural events at concert halls, galleries, heritage sites, libraries, museums and theatres. Population-level research conducted in the Nordic countries shows that arts engagement has a part to play in longer lives better lived.<sup>2</sup>

As the biggest public-sector investor in culture, spending over £1bn per year, councils can help to forge the partnerships necessary to realise the health and wellbeing benefits of the arts and culture. Kent County Council is leading the way in health-orientated cultural commissioning,<sup>3</sup> and Greater Manchester Combined Authority has integrated the arts into its population health plan.<sup>4</sup>

An estimated one in five GP visits is made for non-medical reasons. Social prescribing aims to address the broader causes of ill health by seeking solutions to psychosocial problems in the community beyond the clinical environment; it also helps in the management of long-term health conditions.<sup>5</sup>

Arts on prescription is a vital part of social prescribing, providing participatory creative activities that help to restore people's mental and physical health and generate cost savings. The LGA guidance on social prescribing champions a role for local government and looks at nine councils which have successfully assumed this role, including the use of music to improve the health and wellbeing of

2 Gordon-Nesbitt, R. (2015). *Exploring the Longitudinal Relationship Between Arts Engagement and Health*. Manchester: Arts for Health.

3 See Kent County Council's Arts and Cultural Commissioning Toolkit: [artscommissioningtoolkit.com](http://artscommissioningtoolkit.com)

4 Greater Manchester Combined Authority. (2016). *The Greater Manchester Population Health Plan 2017–2021*. Manchester: Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

5 Dixon, M. & Polley, M. (2016). Report of the Annual Social Prescribing Network Annual Conference. London: University of Westminster.

residents in Halton, St Helens and Knowsley.<sup>6</sup> Halton Clinical Commissioning Group has issued a *Cultural Manifesto for Wellbeing*, which acknowledges the interdependence of the arts and heritage, environment and sport in addressing the root causes of health.<sup>7</sup> An arts-on prescription service in St Helens has shown a social return on investment of £11.55 for every £1 invested.<sup>8</sup>

There is evidence that the arts have a part to play in healthy ageing. The LGA report on healthy ageing recognises social prescribing and the arts.<sup>9</sup> Dance helps to prevent falls in older adults, with classes around the country proving both popular and effective.<sup>10</sup> Group singing in later life increases mental health-related quality of life and reduces loneliness, anxiety and depression.<sup>11</sup>

Museums, galleries and libraries are increasingly being considered as locations for health and wellbeing activities. A Museum Directory of Social Prescribing and Wellbeing Activity in North West England shows a £3 return on every £1 invested.<sup>12</sup> Healthy Libraries is a partnership between Norfolk County Council's libraries information service and public health which has the aim of turning all of Norfolk's libraries into health and wellbeing hubs, offering a range of information and activities including the arts and crafts.<sup>13</sup>

## Wellbeing

*Creative Health* finds that arts engagement improves psychological, social and emotional wellbeing in people of all ages. The report also emphasises the importance to wellbeing of a sense of place, including architecture, design, planning, heritage and green space. The LGA has, jointly with the Chief Culture and Leisure Officers' Association (cCLOA), produced a report which shows how ten councils have used arts and culture to create a sense of place and enhance their communities.<sup>14</sup>

Wellbeing has been described as feeling good and functioning well.<sup>15</sup> Low levels of wellbeing are associated with poor health and reduced life expectancy. An ongoing review – conducted by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, part of the Government's What Works network – is collating evidence of the impact on wellbeing of different art forms. The first studies, exploring the impact of music and singing in healthy adults and those with health conditions such as dementia, collate some strong evidence in this area.<sup>16</sup> An analysis of data from more than 15,000 older people published by Age UK in February 2017 found that engagement in creative and cultural activities made the highest contribution to overall wellbeing.<sup>17</sup>

Social isolation and loneliness affect people of all ages. An estimated 1.2 million older people are chronically lonely, and Duncan Selbie, Chief Executive of Public Health England acknowledges the relationship between isolation, depression and physical ailments.<sup>18</sup> Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council set up four community anchor organisations, with a micro-commissioning budget of £50,000, to stimulate arts activities in response to local need. There was a significant reduction in loneliness over the pilot period, with some participants also reporting improvements in their health.<sup>19</sup> The success of the project has led to it becoming a universal service funded by the council.

## Residential Care

*Creative Health* details several examples of arts engagement in care homes and supports the proposal of artists' residencies in every care home made by Alice Thwaite from Equal Arts.<sup>20</sup> In England, local authorities provide 11 percent of care homes, many of which encourage creative activities to brighten the care environment and improve quality of life for residents and staff alike. The participatory arts help to maintain physical health and flexibility as well as cognitive functioning and a sense of identity.<sup>21</sup> Chief Inspector of Adult Social Care for the Care Quality Commission, Andrea Sutcliffe, has pointed to the role of the arts in enabling people to live full and meaningful lives. She identified the best care homes to be 'flexible and responsive to people's individual needs and preferences, finding creative ways to enable people to live a full life'.<sup>22</sup>

6 Local Government Association. (2016). *Just What the Doctor Ordered: Social prescribing – a guide for local authorities*. London: Local Government Association.

7 Ward, J. (2017). *A Cultural Manifesto for Wellbeing*. Halton: Halton Clinical Commissioning Group.

8 Whelan, G. (2016). *A Social Return on Investment: Evaluation of the St Helens Creative Alternatives Arts on Prescription Programme*. Liverpool: John Moores University.

9 Local Government Association. (2015). *Ageing: The silver lining – The opportunities and challenges of an ageing society for local government*. London: Local Government Association.

10 Kattenstroth, J-C., Kalisch, T., Holt, S., Tegenthoff, M. & Dinse, H. R. (2013). Six Months of Dance Intervention Enhances Postural Sensorimotor and Cognitive Performance in Elderly without Affecting Cardio-respiratory Functions. *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience*, 5 (5).

11 Daykin, N., Julier, G., Tomlinson, A., Meads, C., Mansfield, L., et al. (2016). *Music, Singing and Wellbeing in Healthy Adults*. London: What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

12 Health Education England. (2016). *More than Heritage: A museum directory of social prescribing and wellbeing activity in north west England*.

13 To watch a short film about Healthy Libraries, visit: [youtube.com/watch?v=497ha86-fZc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=497ha86-fZc)

14 Local Government Association and Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association. (2017). *People, Culture, Place: The role of culture in placemaking*. London: Local Government Association.

15 Aked, J., Marks, N., Cordon, C. & Thompson, S. (2008). *Five Ways to Wellbeing: A report presented to the Foresight Project on communicating the evidence base for improving people's well-being*. London: New Economics Foundation.

16 What Works Centre for Wellbeing: [whatworkswellbeing.org](http://whatworkswellbeing.org)

17 Green, M., Iparraguirre, J., Davidson, S., Rossall, P. & Zaidi, A. (2017). *A Summary of Age UK's Index of Wellbeing in Later Life*. London: Age UK.

18 Boseley, S. (12 March 2013). Duncan Selbie: 'Being isolated is equivalent to 15 cigarettes a day'. Health Interview. *The Guardian*.

19 Windle, K., George, T., Porter, R., McKay, S., Cullinley, M., et al. (2016). 'Staying Well in Calderdale' Programme Evaluation: Final report.

20 Thwaite, A. (14 June 2017) *The Arts in Later Life*: [lahf.wordpress.com/2017/06/14/the-arts-and-later-life](http://lahf.wordpress.com/2017/06/14/the-arts-and-later-life)

21 The Baring Foundation. (2011). *Creative Homes: How the arts can contribute to quality of life in residential care*. London: Baring Foundation.

22 Sutcliffe, A. (2 June 2016). *The Art of Being Outstanding*: [medium.com/tag/care-quality-commission](http://medium.com/tag/care-quality-commission)

### The Social Determinants of Health

*Creative Health* envisages arts engagement as a factor that can mitigate the effects of health inequalities at the same time as policies are implemented to eradicate their causes. Professor Sir Michael Marmot's review of health inequalities in England advocated giving every child the best start in life; enabling everyone to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives; creating fair employment and good work for all; ensuring a healthy standard of living for all; creating and developing healthy and sustainable places and communities; and strengthening the role and impact of ill health prevention.<sup>23</sup> The Marmot principles for tackling health inequalities have been adopted by many local authorities. *Creative Health* finds that arts engagement influences maternal nutrition, perinatal mental health and childhood development; shapes educational and employment opportunities and tackles chronic distress; enables self-expression and empowerment and overcomes social isolation; prevents illness and infirmity from developing in the first place and worsening in the longer term.

Despite the health and wellbeing benefits of the arts, cultural engagement tends to be unevenly distributed across the social gradient. Analysis of data generated by the Taking Part survey has shown that people who visit museums and galleries are disproportionately prosperous, well-educated professionals in the 55 to 74 age range, who also visited museums and galleries when they were young. When it comes to participation in creative activities, the picture is the same in terms of education and occupation, with the older generation joined by those aged between 16 and 19 years and both age groups having been encouraged by their parents to be creative. In both attendance and participation, ethnicity is a factor, with museum and gallery visitors unlikely to be black or Asian and arts participants most likely to be white. Both attendees and participants enjoy good health.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, disadvantaged and marginalised groups are disproportionately affected by ill health and, as a result, are well represented within arts activities experienced through health routes. Councils can help to unblock barriers to cultural participation by offering and promoting arts activities aimed at promoting health and wellbeing.

### Information and Contact Details

The APPG on Arts, Health and Wellbeing is chaired by Rt Hon. Ed Vaizey MP and Rt Hon. Lord Howarth of Newport CBE, and the secretariat is provided by the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing. *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* was researched and drafted by Dr Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt at King's College London.

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<sup>23</sup> Marmot, M., Allen, J., Goldblatt, P., Boyce, T., McNeish, D., et al. (2010). *Fair Society, Healthy Lives - The Marmot Review: Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010*.

<sup>24</sup> Inglis, G. & Williams, J. (2010). *Models of Sporting and Cultural Activity: Analysis of the Taking Part Survey*.