

**NAfW Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Cttee Consultation
Culture, poverty and social exclusion**

Welsh Local Government Association – 14th December 2018



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CLILC • WLGA

Introduction

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
3. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee inquiry into how publicly funded bodies can use culture to tackle poverty and social exclusion in Wales.

Response to questions

How effective has the Welsh Government been in improving participation in and access to culture for people in poverty?

4. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to try and define what is meant by the term 'culture'. The definition used in Baroness Andrews' 2014 report on Culture and Poverty (see [Welsh Government | Culture and Poverty: Harnessing the power of the arts, culture and heritage to promote social justice in Wales](#)) was: "not just the arts, but also heritage and the historic environment, including the contribution of museums, libraries and the media".
5. Other definitions suggest it encompasses "*language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts*" but add that it is important to acknowledge that "*culture is no longer fixed, if it ever was. It is essentially fluid and constantly in motion*" (<https://www.livescience.com/21478-what-is-culture-definition-of-culture.html>).
6. Tastes and views differ, between individuals and over time. Whether something 'cultural' is enjoyable and stimulating is inherently subjective and contingent. Moreover, there is a distinction between cultural experiences that provide momentary pleasure (e.g. based on the commodification of popular culture) and those which make a longer-term contribution by impacting on an individual's sense of purpose and intrinsic goals. Societal pressures and much social media and advertising tend to promote and deify the former.

7. The question that is posed (above) presupposes that involvement in culture - in any form - would be welcomed by people living in poverty. Whilst cultural experiences can be life-enriching, in either a short or longer-term sense, many people living in poverty arguably have other priorities to address first. These are usually focused on having sufficient income for essentials - basic shelter, heating, clothing and eating. It should not be assumed that access to 'culture' would be of interest or, indeed, immediate benefit to them given their circumstances. In Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, physiological needs come first. Only at the top of the hierarchy does 'creative activity' feature – as part of 'self-actualisation'. Even if more income becomes available, initial aspirations are likely to be for a better standard of basic living, rather than access to cultural activity.
8. However, for children in families in poverty there is the possibility that their outlook and opportunities in life will be restricted if, because of low household incomes, they are denied exposure to a range of cultural activity – e.g. sport, music and arts.
9. Likewise, the situation might be quite different for adults suffering, for a variety of reasons, from social exclusion as opposed to poverty. Their isolation *might* be related to low income but it could, equally, be due to a range of other factors such as disability, age, geographic location, access to transport etc. The expectations and desires of those who feel socially excluded could, therefore be quite different from those living in poverty. They may *want* to participate in events and activities but have no means of getting to and from them.
10. These points need to be borne in mind in considering whether Welsh Government has managed to improve access to, and participation in, culture. They raise fundamental questions as to government's role in identifying cultural activities that it feels are beneficial and then encouraging participation – and how far this should be a matter for individuals to decide themselves. The key issue here is opportunity. Individuals should not be excluded due to poverty. They should be given opportunities/access to experience cultural activities and then allowed to decide if (and when) they are in a position to participate further.
11. As well as the FUSION project, there are a number of examples where Welsh Government has taken steps to encourage and facilitate participation in cultural activity. Working in some cases with local authorities and National Parks these include:

- A digital library service which can be accessed for free by anyone who is a member of their local library service and has a library card ([My Digital Library - Libraries Wales](#))
- The decision to allow free entry to museums¹
- Support for the 'Kids in Museums' initiative in Communities First areas whilst they were operational
- There were other Communities First initiatives that encouraged cultural activity
- Support for the National Parks for disabled access improvement schemes and for mentoring schemes to encourage diversity amongst National Park members. (A related Lottery funded project – now concluded - also encouraged involvement in the NPAs from black and minority ethnic communities).

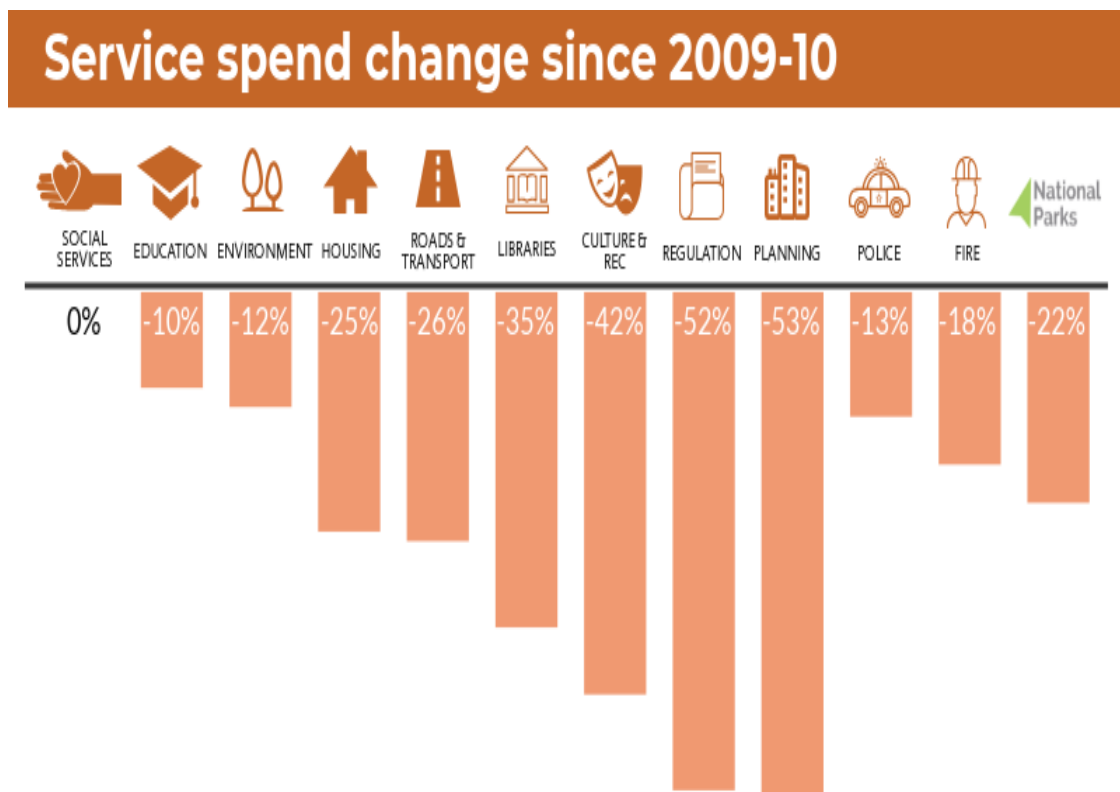
How effective have the efforts of Welsh Government sponsored bodies (namely the Arts Council for Wales, National Museum, National Library and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales) and local government been in using culture to tackle poverty?

12. Much of what local government does, arguably, is aimed at ensuring residents enjoy a good quality of life. Almost inevitably, that involves providing assistance to those in greatest need and seeking to tackle inequality (one of the seven goals in the Well-being of Future Generations Act). Inequality and poverty are closely inter-related.
13. The LSE study *Double Trouble*, published in November 2017² looked at the close relationship between poverty and inequality in the UK. It found that spatial inequalities in outcomes, including poverty, can be addressed through spatially redistributive social policies that are people-based or place-based (or a combination of the two). Cultural interventions can be both people-based (e.g. via education and exposure of individuals to cultural activity) and place-based (e.g. provision of buildings and facilities that accommodate cultural and heritage activity; through architecture and design). They can contribute to wider efforts to address inequality and, in turn, poverty (and not only financial poverty but also poverty of ambition).

¹ Except for car parking, and some special exhibitions and events.

² <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620373/rr-double-trouble-inequality-poverty-uk-091117-en.pdf;jsessionid=58CD82E2750788C5FE01A299A3ACDAB0?sequence=1>

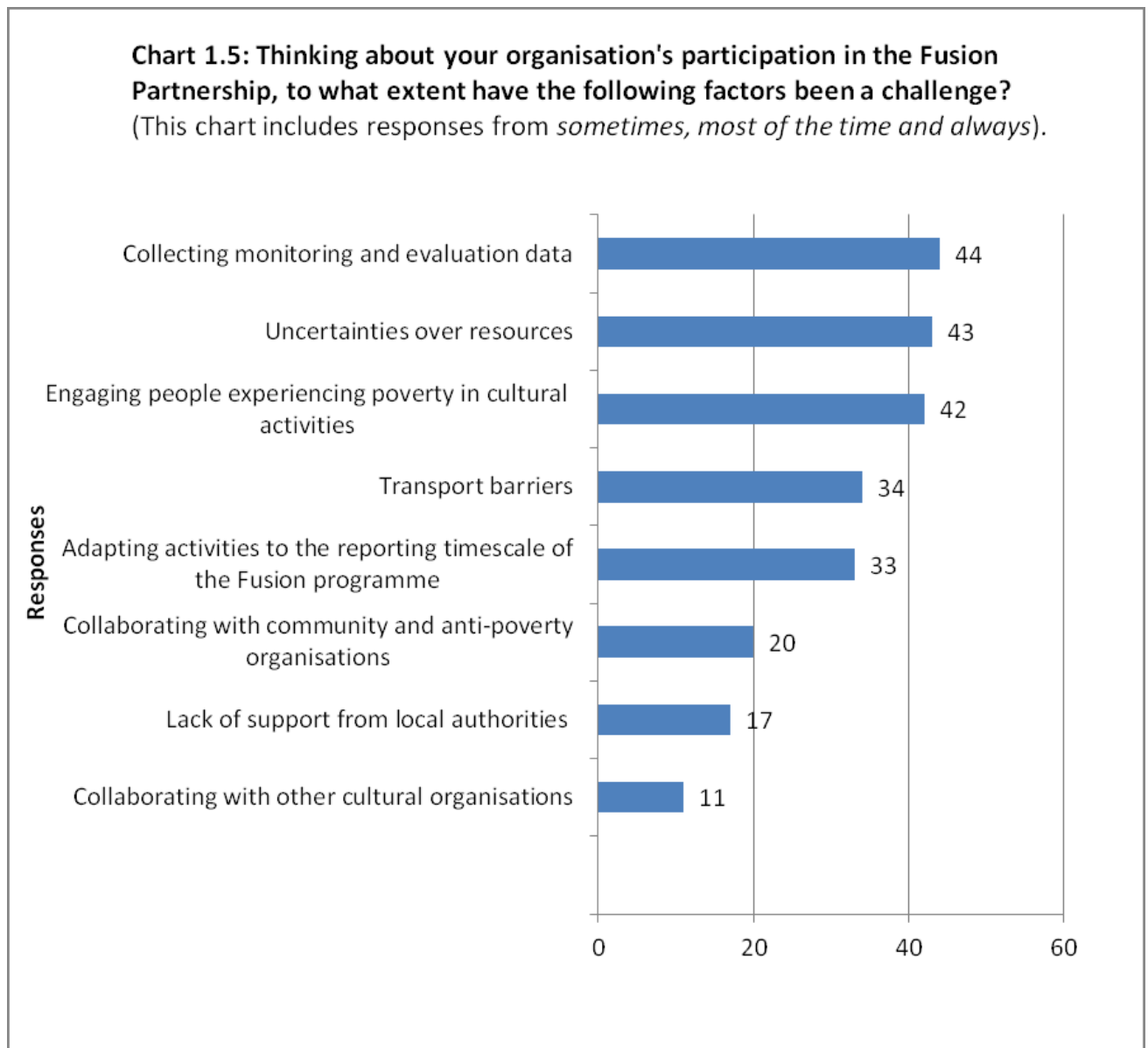
14. Local authorities have long recognised that support for cultural activity can have a positive impact on people and places, helping to address inequality and poverty. Support for adult education, the arts, music and sports have featured strongly amongst the range of services provided by local government over the years.
15. Unfortunately, however, successive years of financial austerity have made it increasingly difficult for local authorities to support cultural activities. The figure below shows that Libraries have experienced a cut of 35% since 2009/10 whilst culture and recreation has been cut by 42%. Compounding the issue, it has been difficult to attract Lottery funding to support activities run by public bodies. They are often seen as the responsibility of local authorities and therefore considered ineligible for Lottery support. Outsourcing of the provision of a range of services (e.g. leisure centres) has been undertaken by many authorities, with trusts and other community-based groups often better placed to access the funding needed to keep services afloat.



What impact has the Welsh Government's Fusion programme had on using culture to tackle poverty?

16. The Fusion programme has been delivered in a number of local authority areas, linked to the now-ended Communities First (CF) programme, focused spatially on the most deprived parts of Wales. The operation expanded from six areas covering 15 CF clusters in its first year (2015/16) to ten areas covering 25 clusters in its second year. In each area a Fusion Partnership of relevant local bodies was established.
17. Activities have included digital heritage programmes, schemes to encourage young people and their families to visit museums, volunteering and work experience and projects using heritage to encourage healthier lifestyles.
18. Assessment of outcomes across Fusion Partnerships in the first year of the pilot phase was hindered by the shortage of consistent, robust and comparable monitoring information. The second-year review of the Programme undertaken by GSR in August 2017³ found that: "*individuals experiencing poverty in their communities were accessing cultural activities more as a result of the Fusion Partnerships. In addition, a majority of respondents thought participating in a Fusion Partnership had resulted in their organisation gaining a better understanding of the role culture can play in tackling poverty*" (p. 2).
19. That suggests a degree of success with the programme in working towards its goals. However, the chart below taken from the GSR report shows that 42 participating organisations identified 'engaging people experiencing poverty in cultural activities' as the third most significant challenge they faced. This reflects comments in para. 7 above – accessing cultural activity may not be an immediate priority for those affected by poverty and disadvantage.

³ <https://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2017/170822-fusion-creating-opportunities-culture-programme-second-year-review-summary-en.pdf>



20. Feedback received from one of the areas involved in the programme was as follows:

- *The services and facilities offered by the cultural partners in the Fusion network have primarily been used as an engagement tool by the previous Communities First, now Legacy Team*
- *The Programme allowed us to bring awareness to the art and cultural sector about the barriers some people experience living in poverty: from access geographically to access due to confidence, rather than purely the financial barrier. We have worked together to inspire those living in poverty to develop key life skills while enjoying educational and stimulating activities*

- *The programme opened access for community members to cultural organisations and venues that they otherwise would not have engaged with. The Night Out scheme as an example has been developed locally with groups since Fusion's inception to the current day. This has encouraged people to use and develop skills such as: project planning, sales, creativity, financial management skills, marketing etc. We have been pleased to note the continuation of this work since the initial link was established, with shows organised in two communities this December as part of Christmas celebrations*
- *Opportunities have been sent through by cultural partners for both voluntary placements and potential paid employment. These have been forwarded to the employment support team (communities for Work and Communities for Work+) as potential opportunities for participants seeking employment. WE are monitoring progress to evaluate whether these result in any employment outcomes.*

How effective the Fusion pioneer programmes have been in stimulating local collaboration?

21. The GSR report found cultural organisations identified greater collaboration as one of the main benefits of the programme. It brought together cultural, arts and heritage organisations with the local authority, CF clusters, local community groups and other bodies working within each area. They designed, funded and delivered a range of joint activities and projects.
22. Feedback on this issue from one of the areas involved in the programme was as follows:
 - *The Fusion programme has funded a joint officer post [across two local authorities] to co-ordinate the network of arts, cultural and community organisations*
 - *Involvement in the Fusion network has provided us with opportunities to make new services available to communities that we would not have otherwise known about*
 - *As many of the cultural partners operate formal volunteering opportunities for members of the community, our staff have benefitted from training and advice*

for supporting volunteers in our programmes, for example the Digital Fridays network

- *From our point of view, the main success of the programme has been the contacts developed locally as a result of the network. These links have contributed to projects being developed and delivered in communities outside of the reporting remit of the network.*