



Commission on Culture and Local Government: Short call for submissions

Over the past three months, the Commission on Culture and Local Government has been collecting case studies and evidence to inform its findings. We have established a strong narrative on the role culture can play in our national recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and your contributions have been important in building this picture.

We are now beginning the process of writing up our findings and making recommendations and we would like to call on the combined expertise of the advisory group and local authority culture leads once again.

Specifically, we would like to ensure we are bringing in a range of voices in helping us to shape the recommendations of the Commission.

Please respond to the following questions using the template below:

1. The Commission is exploring the role of culture in supporting four themes: sustainable economic recovery, health inequalities, social mobility and place/civic pride. What will be **most important** in allowing your organisation (or the organisations you represent) to deliver against each of these four themes in the next five years?
2. What are the **top recommendations** you would like to see the Commission making to support this work and why? Please provide no more than three suggestions per theme.

Responses should be kept as succinct as possible within the format of the template, but if we need further details, we will follow up with you separately.

You do not need to fill out all sections of the template below. Please note the word limit. If you are a membership body we would appreciate a single response if possible, rather than separate submissions from member organisations.

Our recommendations can address all levels of government, other public authorities and cultural organisations themselves.



Overarching response, not specific to any of the four themes (293 words)

Making Music (making the submission) represents constituted groups of people making music and presenting live music events in their leisure time. We are a membership association of over 3,800 such groups in the UK, of which around 3,400 in England - run by volunteers, making and presenting music in all genres, with members in every local authority area in England. Our members make up part of a vibrant and embedded sector of leisure time music groups, which includes community choirs, brass bands, orchestral societies, samba bands and festivals.

This sector intersects with the professional culture sector as well as with community level, grass roots, volunteer led activity such as sports clubs and share similar needs to many of these.

Summary and connecting threads in our responses below:

A) Infrastructure and local authorities

- Local infrastructure being in place, especially spaces for groups to rehearse, meet and perform, is vital. There is a lot of anxiety about current stock not re-opening, not being ventilated, becoming unaffordable (e.g. through rising cost of energy); mapping, promoting and supporting all available spaces (whether church, school, community hall etc.) would entail low cost and low effort and reap disproportionate benefits in facilitating the flourishing of community activity
- To raise the sights of groups and an area, the other type of venue needed is an aspirational first class performance space (e.g. Sage Gateshead)
- Other infrastructure needed is public transport; (music) libraries; low cost licenses and low bureaucracy for events

B) Local authorities as catalysts and brokers

- Connecting music groups to social prescribing and promoting the benefits of local music groups to link workers
- Encouraging/asking music education hubs and schools to interact and signpost to over-18s community music
- Encouraging/mandating affordable community rates with local spaces/venues

THEME 1 - A sustainable and inclusive economic recovery (295 words)

MOST IMPORTANT

- Venues for rehearsals/regular meetings and for performances or presenting music (e.g. by amateur promoters or volunteer-run local festivals).
 - Re-opening, maintaining and halting the erosion of the infrastructure of venues used to rehearse, perform and present live music. Venues need to be open and available to hire, financially accessible, physically accessible, within reasonable travelling distance, well ventilated. These venues are often community buildings, used for a variety of activity – church halls, schools, tenants halls, town halls – and sometimes arts buildings – concert halls, arts centres. While this vast infrastructure of community spaces is not (all) controlled by local government, making funds available to those who own and maintain these venues would help to ensure they are available and suitable for our members' activity.



- **Why?** Music groups spend – on venue hire, contributing to the nighttime economy, hiring freelance local as well as national music professionals, spending with music publishers, using public transport and many local businesses (florists, caterers, music shops, advertising, printers). This is mostly local spending supporting the local economy. Groups' activities entice residents out of their houses and into retail and leisure spaces.
- Some other relevant local infrastructure (mostly) under local authority control: sheet music and/or instruments available affordably from local libraries (see also under Themes 3 & 4); public transport including evenings; affordable licensing including for open air and temporary events notices to encourage performance activity.

TOP 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Notice, map, financially support (e.g. small grants for roof repairs, installation of ventilation) ALL venues in an area, no matter who owns or runs them
2. Ensure/require/mandate affordability of venue hire for community groups/small charities (e.g. dual charging structure commercial/community as a licensing condition on commercial sites)
3. Invest in or seek funding for aspirational cultural venues in an area (e.g. Sage Gateshead)

THEME 2 – Health inequalities (200 words)

MOST IMPORTANT

Our member groups are able to make a strong contribution under this theme. A number of them work with participants with particular health challenges, e.g. dementia, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD), etc.. Research supports the beneficial effects of singing, e.g., for some specific health conditions.

Where our groups contribute across the health spectrum is in terms of addressing loneliness and lack of social contact, amply demonstrated during Covid when participants felt the loss of social contact in music groups as keenly as that of the actual musical activity.

The best and most obvious way for the health system to connect to music groups, therefore, is via social prescribing, where persons with a range of social or health needs may be referred for community activity.

TOP 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Social prescribing looks different in every area; to maximise its effectiveness, it would be helpful for local authorities to be:

- clear about the model in their area
- encourage better connections between link workers and music groups, including facilitating greater education of link workers about the availability of local music groups
- encourage or intervene to make it as easy as possible for the volunteers who manage these groups to receive referrals



THEME 3 – Social mobility through cultural education and creative skills (284 words)

MOST IMPORTANT

We believe local authorities have a useful role to play in connecting Music (Education) Hubs and music education in schools to adult community music making and thus to encourage lifelong learning.

Hence there is also a need for libraries/music libraries (services which hire out sheet music). (Music) Libraries are crucial for obtaining these materials affordably, as well as acting as catalysts for music-making: often offering space for meetings, running early years music activities (e.g. baby singing) and/or providing instrument trying-out/lending/hiring opportunities. If there is no local or otherwise accessible (e.g. online) music library service, groups have to spend their money (mainly derived from participants' subscriptions and thus sensitive to cost of living crisis etc.) on buying or commercially hiring music, which will counteract their desire to be as financially accessible as possible to their communities.

TOP 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) If you have a music library service, cherish it, keep it, support it for the benefit of the community. If you do and it's currently not sustainable, contact Making Music which has been working on local solutions with authorities in England for 7 years. If you don't currently have such a service, consider joint provision with other local authorities nearby; contact Making Music for advice
- 2) Libraries with or without sheet music holdings of their own play an important hub role for music groups – some still facilitate Inter Library Loans for music, even if they don't have any of their own, others offer meeting space, research materials, instruments
- 3) Ask the Music Education Hub in your area to take note of and connect under-18s leaving the education sector with your local community music scene – local authority as catalyst and broker to encourage joined up thinking

THEME 4 – Place (286 words)

MOST IMPORTANT

Music groups contribute to place not just directly (Theme 1), but also by bringing activity and a new dynamic to public spaces, drawing new and more people to town centres, for instance: in Hannover, Germany, (a city the size of Bristol approx.) their annual Make Music Day celebrations bring an additional 84,000 visitors to the centre on 21 June, making council support for the event worthwhile.

There is also the question of pride and ownership. Music groups will often proudly have their place in their group name ('Leicester Community Concert Band'), raise thousands of pounds for local causes (foodbanks, hospices, the NHS, e.g.), and allow an area to celebrate its milestones and anniversaries featuring home grown talent, helping to change the narrative around a location.



What groups need...

- Venues for rehearsals/meetings and performances
- Aspirational venues, such as Sage Gateshead, which are commercially successful but accessible to the community. There are not such venues in each area (e.g. Cumbria, Exeter)
- Minimal red tape and licensing costs for events
- Music libraries or access to affordable sheet music

TOP 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Notice and financially support ALL venues in an area, whether or not in local authority control; offer small pots of money for adaptations (e.g. ventilation); seek to support or provide at least one aspirational top-flight venue per county
- 2) Keep licensing fees low and applications for events straightforward – groups are run by volunteers who may give up if faced with complexity or asked questions not easily applicable to them. Encourage festivals/outdoor events (e.g. in bandstands, high streets, town squares) with easy admin for permissions
- 3) Support or create local music libraries to act as hubs and catalysts for musical activities in the area

Your details

Name: Barbara Eifler

Organisation: Making Music

Contact details: barbara@makingmusic.org.uk 020-79396030

Would you be happy for your comments to be attributed to you in the final report of the Commission? We will seek approval for any attributed quotes with you before publication. **Yes**

For more information about the Commission on Culture and Local Government, please [visit our website](#) or contact lauren.lucas@local.gov.uk