

Museums Taskforce statement on museum funding

Museums are popular public institutions that deliver a range of important public benefits.

They preserve, protect and promote the public's collective memory, knowledge and history. They engage and work in partnership with the public to share stories and preserve and present collections, bringing important cultural, educational, social and scientific ideas to life. They play an important role in enhancing health and wellbeing; creating better places to live, work and visit; and inspiring new ideas, debate and reflection.

Museums have received significant public funding from national and local government and this investment is paying dividends. Museums are working in partnership with local authorities and government to contribute across a range of public policy areas across the UK from culture, science, education and tourism to immigration, hate crime reduction, international trade and diplomacy, anti-poverty initiatives and health and social services.

There are different business models in the sector however the majority of museums are supported by a mix of investment that includes public funding, lottery funding, private funding and donations, and earned income.

Museums have taken serious steps to raise additional income and reduce costs and have deployed a variety of means to become more sustainable, from the creative use of building spaces to crowd sourcing and working in partnership. All museums face the same issues of high fixed overheads inherent in what makes them unique - caring for collections and buildings and ensuring public access. In order for museums to do this they need long-term strategic investment and consistent levels of funding.

Many local authorities continue to invest and work in partnership with their museums, however the pressure on public finances has meant that some authorities have had to significantly reduce their support. In some cases this has led to closure of museums or a reduction in opening hours, programming and public access.

Often it is less prosperous areas that are feeling the brunt of the crisis in funding and there is concern that further reductions in public finances will leave local authorities in less wealthy areas in particular unable to fund non-statutory services such as museums.

Recommendations:

- There is an urgent need for government to develop a strategic approach to museums and their funding.
- Government should support and make the case for national and local public funding for museums.
- Museums facing the withdrawal of local authority funding are sometimes forced to close before alternatives can be found or considered. Where this is the case government and strategic bodies should intervene in order that viable and strategic alternative plans can be sought.

- Lottery funding should be used strategically and directed towards making the most of the museums and galleries that we already have, including gallery refurbishments, and should include investment and staff costs for key posts in areas such as learning, engagement and programming.
- Many local and regional museums are housed in historic buildings that are expensive to maintain and in need of investment. Government should work with other funders to create a capital fund for refurbishment and repair.
- Local authorities should allow the museums that they fund to operate freely in order that they can innovate and secure new sources of income while maintaining and developing their role as public institutions. This should include the ability to: access reserves; opt out of central procurement; and have control over websites and communications.
- Government and strategic agencies should target cross-departmental funds to support partnership working at a local and national level on specific programmes encouraging working with communities and diversifying and broadening audiences.
- Government and strategic agencies should articulate and support the case for cultural learning and learning outside the classroom with specific programmes that encourage museum and school partnerships.
- It is demonstrably difficult for museums outside of London to encourage philanthropy. Government and strategic agencies should develop a case for cultural giving that works at a regional level.
- Government and strategic agencies should work with museums to explore ways for them to monetise their assets – buildings and collections - more effectively.

About the Museums Taskforce

1. The Museums Taskforce has been established in response to the increasingly difficult financial situation that many museums in the UK face, in particular those museums not in receipt of national funding, including local authority and former local authority-run museums.
2. The Taskforce provides a unique and independent voice to advocate for museums across the UK. It uses research and evidence to make the case for museums to funders, politicians, stakeholders and the public.
3. The Taskforce will make a series of recommendations in spring 2017.