



DEBATE PACK

Number 0015, 22 January 2019

Establishing a Town of Culture award

By Mark Sandford

Summary

A Westminster Hall debate, initiated by David Hanson MP, on Establishing a Town of Culture Award will take place on Wednesday 23 January 2019.

The debate will be on the motion: That this House has considered establishing a Town of Culture Award.

Contents

1. Proposals for a 'Town of Culture'	2
Centre for Towns	2
London Borough of Culture	3
2. City of Culture status	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 Eligibility for City of Culture	4
3. City of Culture: economic evaluations	6
3.1 Derry/Londonderry	6
3.2 Hull	6
3.3 Liverpool: European City of Culture	7
4. Press Articles	8
5. Further reading	9

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Proposals for a 'Town of Culture'

The initiative for a 'Town of Culture' has originated with a letter from 22 Labour MPs, led by Yvette Cooper MP, to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport proposing a process to run alongside the 'City of Culture' award process. This letter was [published in late December 2019](#). It says:

We are writing to urge you to establish a new Town of Culture award to run alongside the UK City of Culture, and to celebrate and boost arts, culture, investment and jobs in towns across the country.

...

While towns are not exempt from applying for the City of Culture title, only one town has made the shortlist previously, and small towns are simply not equipped to contend against major cities in a bidding process that is resource-intensive. That disqualifies huge parts of the country that are rich with cultural history and heritage.

Towns already lose out from national arts and culture investment. Arts Council funding is more than four times higher on average in city constituencies than it is in town constituencies. In addition towns are facing growing economic challenges compared to cities, so losing out on arts and culture investment and jobs is even more of a problem. The number of jobs in English town constituencies has grown by just 5% in 5 years compared to 11% in city constituencies.

Instead of having to compete with big cities once every four years, or lose out completely, we believe there should be a distinctive Town of Culture award convened by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport every year.

An article in the *Guardian* on 29 December 2018 mentioned a few possible candidate towns (Huddersfield, Bridgwater and Colchester), a mention that was subsequently picked up by the local press in those areas.¹

Centre for Towns

There have been few other references to the Town of Culture initiative since its publication.

A think-tank called the Centre for Towns was established in 2017. [Its launch briefing](#) was published on 12 December 2017, written by Lisa Nandy MP. Amongst other short publications, the Centre's website includes [a briefing from Professor Will Jennings](#) at the University of Southampton, which includes some statistics comparing public opinion

in cities and towns. Will Jennings and Gerry Stoker have also previously highlighted differing attitudes to Brexit and economic prospects in cities and towns.²

London Borough of Culture

The Greater London Authority runs a parallel competition called the 'London Borough of Culture'. This initiative may be a response to the fact that the City of Culture criteria rules out bids from any part of London.³ The first London Borough of Culture is Waltham Forest, in 2019, with Brent selected for 2020. Waltham Forest will receive £1.35 million from the Mayor of London to establish a programme of events.

A number of smaller 'cultural impact awards' have been made to other boroughs for the period from 2018 to 2020. These go to Barking and Dagenham; Camden; Kingston; Lambeth; Lewisham; and Merton. These boroughs will share approximately £1 million for specific agreed projects in 2019.

Further details are available on the [London Borough of Culture web pages](#).

² See Will Jennings and Gerry Stoker, "[Tilting Towards the Cosmopolitan Axis? Political Change in England and the 2017 General Election](#)", *Political Quarterly* 88:3, 359-369, 2017

³ DCMS, [UK City of Culture Consultation](#), 2014, p5

2. City of Culture status

2.1 Introduction

UK City of Culture is a designation given to a city in the UK for a period of one year. To date, two cities have held the title - the inaugural holder of the award was Derry/Londonderry in 2013, followed by Hull in 2017. Coventry will be the City of Culture in 2021.⁴

UK Cities of Culture do not receive any direct national funding from the UK Government for events and initiatives related to City of Culture programmes – Department for Culture, Media and Sport guidance on applications states:

- ... One of the driving principles is to bring people together within existing resources. Bids are therefore expected to be aligned with local resources and budgets, with evidence of a credible fundraising plan, including the development of new sources of funding.⁵

The assessment criteria, and the shortlisting and selection of the City of Culture, are managed by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

For the 2021 competition, bids were received from Coventry, Hereford, Paisley, Perth, Portsmouth, St David's and the Hundred of Dewisland, Stoke-on-Trent, Sunderland, Swansea, Warrington and Wells. Coventry, Paisley, Stoke, Sunderland and Swansea were shortlisted.⁶

Two of the bidders, Wells and St David's, are very small settlements (populations 10,536 and 1,841 in the 2011 Census) which also have cathedrals and therefore city status. Wells's bid was [debated in Westminster Hall on 25 April 2017](#).

2.2 Eligibility for City of Culture

There is no legal definition of what constitutes a 'town' or a 'city' in the UK. Although many local authorities are known as 'X City Council' or 'X Town Council', this does not mean that those areas are cities, or towns, and other areas are not.

The DCMS's 2014 consultation on the future operation of the City of Culture process included the following relevant points about eligibility:

2. Bids are welcomed from across the UK, but there must be a clear central urban focus to the area. This could be a city or large town, two or more neighbouring cities or towns, or a closely linked set of urban areas. The only areas precluded from bidding are London as a whole or any part of London (although this does not prevent parts of London being partners in a bid for an area outside London).
3. There is no pre-determined minimum size of population or geographical area for those that wish to bid, but the areas

⁴ See the [Coventry 2021 website](#) for further information.

⁵ DCMS, [UK City of Culture consultation document](#), December 2014, pg. 6

⁶ DCMS, ["Five towns and cities shortlisted for UK City of Culture 2021"](#), 14 July 2017

must demonstrate that they can host events and exhibitions at scale, both indoors and outdoors.

4. Bids are expected to be from a partnership for the area, which includes the relevant local authorities as well as other local organisations. There will need to be a lead organisation for communication purposes.⁷

The 2009 UK City of Culture Working Group Report, which led to the establishment of the award, did not set any fixed eligibility requirements to establish what constituted a 'city' – and thus did not definitively say that a 'town' that was not a 'city' would be ineligible. It stated that:

Working Group members agreed that a broad interpretation of the term 'city' should be employed to stimulate innovative approaches and enable, for example, a region or a cluster of towns and a city to bid. However, it was equally important, particularly for the 2013 round of bids, that the definition of 'city' be clear enough not to create unrealistic bids from sites without the robust local partnerships and infrastructure we would expect from any successful bid.⁸

The report emphasised the need for partnerships and capacity elsewhere, saying:

Cities will need to have strong funding and delivery partnerships with a range of bodies (local government, cultural sector, RDAs, other public sector partners, the private sector, trusts and foundations) and robust budget and delivery plans.⁹

It also summarised the purpose of the City of Culture award as being to:

- encourage the use of culture and creativity as a catalyst for change,
- promote the development of new partnerships
- encourage ambition, innovation and inspiration in cultural and creative activity
- align the cultural excellence of national arts organisations to support the year with cultural highlights that will attract media attention, encourage national tourism and change perceptions

⁷ DCMS, [UK City of Culture Consultation](#), 2014, p5

⁸ [UK City of Culture Working Group Report June 2009](#), p6

⁹ *Ibid.*, p20

3. City of Culture: economic evaluations

3.1 Derry/Londonderry

Figures on the economic impact of Derry/Londonderry's year as City of Culture are provided in the Culture Media and Sport Select Committee report [Countries of Culture: Funding and support for the arts outside London](#) (December 2016), [Derry-Londonderry: first UK City of Culture](#), published by Culture for Cities and Regions and [Fashioning a City of Culture: 'life and place changing' or '12 month party'?](#) (International Journal of Cultural Policy, September 2016). Some notable statistics include:

- £20 million of public funding was invested in programming and £140 million in capital infrastructure
- The DCMS report states that public investment had produced a £100 million return; Culture for Cities and Regions state that for "every £1 spent, there has been a £5 return".
- Over a million visits to the city were generated, 41% from outside the city, a 61% increase in overnight stays and an accompanying 76% increase in visitor expenditure.
- The programme was also attributed with supporting 40 business start-ups
- Long-term objectives for 2020 are £98 million in additional wages and profits, 2800 net additional workplace jobs and 25% growth in creative industries

3.2 Hull

An initial evaluation of the impact of the 2017 City of Culture programme on Hull found that:

- The total number of annual visitors in 2017 is projected to be **1.3m greater** than in 2013, when Hull bid for the UK City of Culture title and 4.7 million people visited the city¹. The projected value of tourism in 2017 is on track to contribute in excess of **£300m** to the economy.
- **3 in 4 residents are proud to live in Hull** and the city achieved significant national profile, securing over **20,200 pieces** of media exposure across print, online and broadcast media outlets.
- Nearly **800 new jobs** have been created in the visitor economy and cultural sector since 2013, a direct result of **investments totalling £219.5m in the cultural and visitor economy**, which are fully or partly attributable to Hull being awarded UK City of Culture status in November 2013.¹⁰

A [full report is also available](#) on the University of Hull's website.

These findings compare with the following targets in the City of Culture's [Strategic Business Plan 2015-2018](#):

¹⁰ University of Hull, ["University of Hull reveals UK City of Culture 2017 evaluation"](#), 15 March 2018

- Secure economic impact worth £60 million
- Raise £18 million in cash and in-kind contributions towards Hull 2017
- Attract 1 million extra visitors to Hull in 2017
- Drive a 7% increase in cultural participation among Hull residents
- Deliver 84 permanent jobs in the cultural and visitor economies
- Engage 4,000 volunteers, including cast, crew and ambassadors

The Strategic Business Plan anticipated a total spend of some £18 million on the City of Culture programmes.

3.3 Liverpool: European City of Culture

An [evaluation](#) of Liverpool's experience as a European Capital of Culture was commissioned by Liverpool Council for the period 2005 to 2010.¹¹

On the economy and tourism, the report's headline findings were:

- The Liverpool European Capital of Culture attracted 9.7 million additional visits to Liverpool, constituting 35% of all visits to the city in 2008.
- These visits generated an economic impact of £753.8 million (additional direct visitor spend) across Liverpool, Merseyside and the wider North West region.
- 2.6 million European and global visits were motivated by the Liverpool European Capital of Culture in 2008. 97% of these were first-time visits to the city.
- The European Capital of Culture generated an additional 1.14 million staying visitor nights in Liverpool hotels, 1.29 million in the rest of Merseyside and 1.7 million in the rest of the North West.

¹¹ [Creating an impact: Liverpool's experience as European Capital of Culture](#), University of Liverpool/Liverpool JMU, 2010

4. Press Articles

Please note: The Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[Stratford in mind in 'town of culture' plea](#)

Stratford Herald

4 Jan 2019

STRATFORD'S world famous status for being the birthplace of Shakespeare could help increase its chances of becoming Britain's first ever town of culture and local MP Jeremy Wright might have a big say in the outcome.

[The Guardian view on Yvette Cooper's 'town of culture' proposal: a fine idea](#)

Editorial, The Guardian

30 Dec 2018

Instituting a UK 'town of culture' award alongside the existing 'city of culture' title might look like a desperate post-Brexit search for meaning. But the idea could bring real benefits to Britain's communities

['Town of culture' award would boost regeneration, says Yvette Cooper](#)

Vanessa Thorp, The Guardian

29 Dec 2018

In an open letter to the culture secretary, the MP leads call to create a civic prize stimulating investment, visitors and jobs

[Does being a UK City of Culture create a lasting legacy](#)

Mark Bosworth, BBC News

23 April 2018

Hull's status as the UK City of Culture attracted more than five million people, £220m of investment and 800 new jobs. The findings of a recent report into its success appear to be positive. But as it passes the baton to Coventry, do UK Cities of Culture create legacies?

5. Further reading

Arts & Humanities Research Council

[Understanding the value of arts & culture: the AHRC cultural value project](#) (Mar 2016) - limited evidence of direct effect on urban regeneration.

British Council

[UK city of culture reflects the global identity of UK cities](#) (Dec 2017)

The international links of cities are becoming increasingly important, as are the opportunities for global connection presented by programmes such as the UK City of Culture.

[Cities, Prosperity and Influence](#) [Pdf] (Mar 2017)

The role of city diplomacy in shaping soft power in the 21st century by Jo Beall and David Adam.

Center for Research in Economics, Management and the Arts

[European Capitals of Culture and Life Satisfaction](#) (2013) – no evidence of direct impact on GDP from ‘capital of culture’ status.

Waltham Forest London Borough

[Waltham Forest London Borough of Culture 2019](#)

Waltham Forest is the first London Borough of Culture 2019. An exciting year-long programme of events and projects is planned with cultural partners. This features brand new commissions from world-class artists and co-creations with the local community. There will be lots of opportunities for schools and young people to participate.

Warwick University

Sustainable Cities Global Research Priority

[Exploring potential opportunities related to Coventry City of Culture 2021](#) (Jun 2018)

A workshop aimed at exploring potential opportunities related to Coventry City of Culture 2021 was held on 8th June 2018 at Warwick. This workshop was particularly focused on researchers working in the sciences and social sciences.

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publically available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcinfo@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).