



**Local Heritage
Engagement
Network**

Toolkit

No. 9

**Local authority
cuts: Types of
cut, case
studies, and
how to
influence**

Last updated: 20 July 2020



Contents

This document will:

- **Give an overview of the financial problems facing local authorities in the current austerity period**
- **Briefly look at the levels of response of different local authorities**
- **Provide a list of impacts that cuts are having on historic environment services, including museums and planning advice**
- **Provide illustrated examples of cuts from across the country**
- **Give advice on a range of ways to influence or get involved**



Local authority cuts: Background

Local authorities are responsible for the delivery of a range of 'services' which help to support the conservation, preservation, and enjoyment of local heritage. However, recent financial strain on local authority budgets has meant that virtually all Councils are struggling to meet tough demands to cut costs. This is having impacts upon the range, model of delivery, and capacity of many historic environment, and related, services.

Among the services and roles which are commonly threatened are;

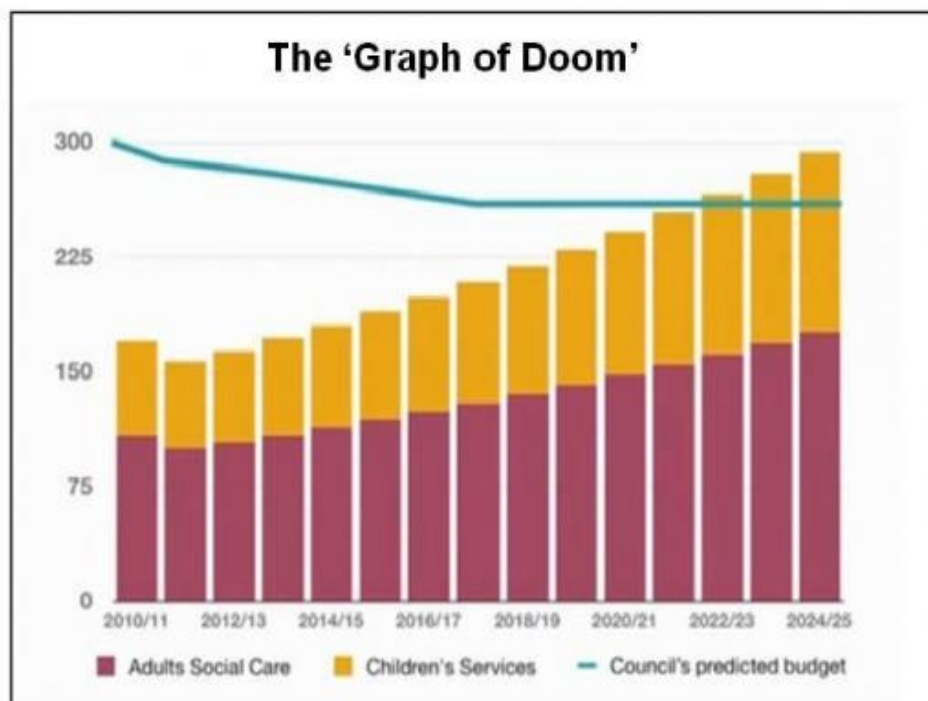
- Historic Environment Record databases
- Specialist planning advice (conservation and archaeology)
- Museums
- Museum curators
- Finds Liaison Officers and other development roles
- Heritage outreach posts
- Project posts (e.g. townscape heritage initiatives, local listing, strategy implementation officers)

Reasons: Rising costs and falling funding

Since at least 2010 there has been a steady decline in national government funding for local government due to austerity policies put in place following the last recession and designed to help the country overcome its budget deficit.

The 'Barnet graph of doom':

The main reason cited for the problem is the rising cost of adult social care and the declining level of central government funding over the past 7 years due to national recession and subsequent government austerity measures. Although other pressures also exist, the scale of this particular issue was illustrated by a 2011 Barnet Council slide which has become popularly known as the 'Barnet graph of doom':



'The Barnet graph of doom' (2011 Barnet Council)

The situation is similar in many other parts of the country. A wealth of other data exists to illustrate the problem nationally.

The Local Government Association (LGA), for example, estimates that Councils will face almost £10 billion in extra cost pressures by 2020 – £3.6 billion of increases to current service requirements, and £6.3 billion from implementing and carrying out new government policies¹.

Many Councils have seen budget cuts in the region of 50% of total operating budgets since 2010.

This is a serious issue across local government and it is by no means only the historic environment which is affected. However, non-statutory services (which include archaeology, museums, and planning) have been disproportionately hit as Councils look to prioritise services that they have legal obligations to meet.

Of remaining non-statutory services, it is vital that strong support is marshalled to highlight value to local people, which is often overlooked or underappreciated when budgetary decisions are made by financial administrators and Council bosses with no detailed understanding of the historic environment.

¹ <http://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/future-funding-outlook-co-18b.pdf>



How are local government responding?

Though virtually all councils are dealing with cuts of a similar magnitude, there are a range of responses, with some Councils seemingly having to make tougher decisions than others, with some opting for more innovative strategies to make efficiency savings, and effectively managing necessary cuts.

1. **Adaptive innovation:** councils *creatively redefine their role* and are able actively to affect their operating environment, often working in close partnership with other authorities
2. **Running to stand still:** councils are led and managed well and **can see a positive future**, provided that they can keep up the current pace and that there are no major shocks
3. **Nostril above the waterline:** councils are only able to act with a **short-term view**, their existence is hand to mouth and even a small external change might seriously challenge their viability
4. **Wither on the vine:** councils have moved from action to reaction. Their finances and capacity are not sufficient to the task and they are retreating into statutory services run at the minimum
5. **Just local administration:** councils have lost the capacity to deliver services, either because they have 'handed back the keys' or because responsibility for significant services has been taken from them
6. **Imposed disruption:** councils are subject to some form of externally imposed change, such as local government reorganisation²

What should authorities be doing?

Whilst it is important to recognise that the financial situation facing local government is very real, there are a range of ways in which the impacts of cuts can be planned for and strategically targeted in order to limit impact on important services. Our experience shows that there are ways to

² Grant Thornton LLP – 2020 Vision - <http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/insights/2020-vision-the-future-of-local-government/>

promote particular services such that elected representatives are primed to take note when budget negotiations take shape.

We therefore advise that councils should;

1. Ask whether service cuts are sustainable in the long term

Annual cuts may be capable of being swallowed by services, but at what cost? And what damage to capacity is accrued over time?

2. Assess what the impact of specific cuts would be

Many proposals to cut archaeological advice to planning services or museums are undertaken without any impact analysis. This is arguably part of a 'wither on the vine' approach which could be potentially averted.

In many cases it will be inevitable that some negative impact will have to be swallowed by services, however, there should be open recognition of what these impacts are and honest assessment of whether proposals reduce capacity or quality to a level which makes the service unviable. Public consultation may help, in these cases, to decide what aspects of a service are most important.

Some local authorities will have commitments to heritage written into local plans, heritage strategies, or wider cultural or community strategies. These documents often provide commitments which may be undermined by cuts and which may not have been considered by authorities.

A positive approach would be to undertake a detailed impact analysis to ensure that the effects of cuts to service are recognised.

3. Recognise the value that heritage services create

There is an extraordinary wealth of data which supports the value of heritage services. It is important to ensure that local authorities are aware that the services do create benefits for the public in terms of:

- Ensuring sustainable impact on the historic environment
- Protecting non-renewable cultural assets
- Contributing to the creation and maintenance of attractive, unique, places, which research shows promotes health and wellbeing, and are of economic benefit to regeneration and tourism.
- Ensuring and enabling effective research and public engagement into archaeological assets discovered as a result of development
- Providing public access to the past (via museums, and archives)

4. Think beyond 'statutory' and 'non-statutory'

Related to the above point, often, when struggling to meet budget targets there is a danger that *any* non-statutory service will be assumed to have no public benefit. Thinking beyond the 'statutory' label is important for issues which are rooted in public value, such as museums – for which strong arguments can be developed relating to civic pride, local identity, etc. but which have no statutory protection. These types of services should not be seen as 'easy targets'.

Non-statutory services, structured intelligently, can also seek to add value to front-line services such as health and education. Many successful heritage and museums services are organised around a strategy which seeks to create these benefits. Conversely, as other services are consistently cut, they lose the ability to be innovative and create cross-cutting benefits.

5. Think collaboratively

Much potential for partnership working exists within local authorities, however, innovative thinking may be stifled in the context of pressure to meet cuts, particularly where deadlines for agreeing budgets are pressing or resources to investigate collaborative options are limited. However, encouraging councils to consider the potential to work across borders (i.e. with other services) can be effective, and there are various examples of where Councils have sought to invest in heritage, even in the context of wider cuts, in order to facilitate particular benefits, such as economies of scale, streamlined administration and overhead costs, increase abilities to level external funding, and widen access to diverse specialist skills.

6. Be transparent and open about cuts

Some cuts to services are not formally announced to the public, many are buried within difficult to understand budget documents, and most do not have detailed information which can be understood by members of the public.

It is important that, where public services are to be affected – for example if a service is closing – that authorities are encouraged to make appropriate efforts to publicise proposals, and where possible, consult with service users and potentially seek alternative options.

The closure of services in Lancashire (see below) was not consulted upon and there was no public announcement about the impact other than a single line in a budget announcement. In contrast, Cheshire West and Chester have consulted on a number of proposals for service restructure in the past few years. The latter case has enabled new solutions to be found to meet budget requirements at the least possible impact and provided an opportunity for stakeholders to register their support for various elements of the services, revealing wide public support for existing services. These

processes have, in general, led to more amenable solutions for the HER, planning advisory service, and wider heritage services.

The reality:

The reality is that many cuts are undertaken by local government without proper consideration of these areas. There are often fair reasons for this, given the scale of the challenges that many authorities face. However, it is important to;

- **Resist knee-jerk decision making/assumptions that certain services cannot be saved:** There are usually similar examples of services which have been creatively adapted to survive similar pressures. The historic environment sector can help to highlight these examples.
- **Resist the assumption that heritage services are not major public benefits:** Heritage services and museums often are not appreciated as services which directly benefit people, or are valued by them. It can be difficult, though important, to emphasise secondary benefits to sustainability and place, which are widely valued by people.
- **Resist moves which will damage revenue making sections of services:** Some services are subjected to cuts which reduce their ability to deliver profit-making sections of their work. This can create a cycle of decline which leads to further impoverished services.
- **Resist poorly planned restructure/outsourcing processes:** Outsourcing of services or the sale and transference of assets can be undertaken successfully, however, processes which are poorly planned make this much less likely. Public pressure should discourage councils from seeking to dispose of services/assets 'as quickly as possible' without proper preparation, options appraisal, and consultation.
- **Pressure authorities to honour commitments to grant distributors:** If a site has received lottery funding, it may either be required to pay money back if that site closes, or will contribute to a waste of those resources. Lottery funders may look dimly on future applications from authorities which see this type of decision taken.
- **Pressure authorities to recognise the long-term impacts of short term decisions:** For example, museums closures are often billed as being 'temporary'. In reality, it is often much more difficult and expensive to re-open a mothballed museum than it is to keep it open.



Types of cuts to historic environment services, effects, & examples

1. Annual salami-slice cuts:

It is becoming common in some places for a year on year service cut of around 10% to be the norm in any budget review. Often this is part of an 'across the board' measure which has not been strategically targeted at any particular element of a service. Many salami-slice cuts will not generate any observable publicity and thus may be difficult to observe by members of the public.

The effects of salami-slice cuts are likely to be an erosion of capacity, potentially leading to lower quality work, or longer time taken to meet requirements. Recent changes to Government planning legislation has come under fire for placing extra pressure on planning, conservation, and archaeology services at a time when the lack of resourcing is arguably becoming a key factor in the underperformance of the system – as many services struggle to meet deadlines on applications³.

Example: Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester has operated a well-regarded shared service providing planning advice and HER functions to all planning authorities in the area for over 30 years.

Until 2012 the service had been operated by Manchester University under the name Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit (GMAU). However, cuts to the service budget led to the service being axed temporarily before being restored as the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) operated by the University of Salford.

GMAAS, however, while operating a high quality service similar to GMAU have been faced with year on year cuts which have resulted in a reduction in staff, most recently the senior service lead, leading to a consistent and renewed strain on the service to deliver quality results.

Other examples: Gateshead, Cheshire West and Chester

³ [P.11 – Neighbourhood Planning Bill – Public Bill Committee hearings](#)

2. Loss of particular roles:

In order to satisfy a budget cut, many services have opted to sacrifice an individual staff member as a 'neat' way to cut budget without causing wider disruption due to restructures. Whilst this can sometimes be an effective strategy, with the possibility to cover the role by splitting amongst colleagues, at the cost of some capacity, as with a salami-slice cut, in some cases it ends up causing a confusion of roles and a critical loss of skills.

Losing a particular role may decrease available skills, may mean that a particular service function may cease, or may bring into doubt the effectiveness or expertise of a service.

Recent research from the Society of Museum Archaeologists has shown that a large proportion museums which handle archaeological archives do not have the necessary expertise to maintain them.

In local authority planning advisory services the loss of individual posts may be related to certain projects or service functions. Over recent years particular types of role have been most vulnerable; public engagement roles, roles relating to non-statutory protection programmes such as local listing or townscape heritage initiatives.

As with salami-slice cuts, these tend to make the service narrower, and decrease opportunities to develop effective working across services (e.g. with the built or natural environment).

Some cuts have seen planning officers taking responsibility for conservation or archaeological screening, or merged curators with diverse specialisms which require substantially different skills.

Example: Birmingham City Council

In Birmingham, the archaeological officer post was made redundant in 2014. A non-specialist planning officer now undertook the archaeological duties. Rather than the expertise of an archaeological professional, the Council relied on a non-specialist interpretation of map data to screen planning applications of archaeological interest.

3. Loss of senior personnel:

The loss of senior personnel is a particular problem in archaeological advice services. Senior personnel are often at risk of redundancy due to higher salaries and permanent, contracts.

However, senior officers are able to employ their valuable detailed local knowledge of past archaeological discoveries, geology, and historic settlement patterns, etc., in order to increase capacity of overall services.

This is important as many services do not have adequate succession plans in place to ensure that junior staff, or new posts, are able to capture that accumulated knowledge.

Senior members of staff often have the most influence beyond their service within the Council (for example with the Head of Planning) and have built up contacts with external stakeholders, including developers, landowners, councillors, national agencies, and the public.

Whilst there are no easy answers to prevent the loss of senior personnel, particularly with many lost senior posts being caused by voluntary redundancies, it is possible to hold authorities to account for having a viable succession plan.

Actions such as ensuring a comfortable cross-over of time when replacing senior staff with new staff, or retaining senior posts on a part time basis while junior staff learn the role, is possible – though will not be possible in all cases.

Examples: Tyneside, Greater Manchester

4. Axed whole service:

The most extreme scenario is the axing of a whole service, meaning that certain functions are no longer provided. Ultimately, most historic environment services that local authorities operate are not legal requirements, even though there are some obligations to, for example, maintain access to an up to date Historic Environment Record.

For museums, the decision to close a single site, even on a temporary basis, can be extremely costly. Often proposals do not take into account the need to maintain existing archives.

For archaeological planning advisory services, many of which are operated at the County level, a decision to shut a shared service which fulfils the planning obligations of all local and district planning authorities leads to a problem being passed on to these authorities, who will need to make decisions on how to meet their obligations under planning policy. Where this has happened in the past, there has not been evidence of extensive consultation with District partners in advance of announcements and short timescales for districts to put in place plans, often leading to poorer quality services.

Example: Lancashire museums and historic environment service

In Lancashire, the decision to axe all historic environment services, including the archaeological planning advice, and historic environment record and close five museums was taken, without consultation, in November 2015, with a closure date of March 2016.

Some of the museums that were owned by District Councils but operated by the County museums service were passed back to District level. Planning obligations were similarly passed onward for the Districts to deal with.

The decision did not include any impact analysis, did not recognise any obligations under planning policy. No evidence that there had been prior consultation with District authorities was shown and no consultation was undertaken with the public.

Other cases: West Sussex

5. Withdrawal of a partner from shared service:

A type of cut which is becoming more common is for authorities to withdraw from shared services (usually known as service level agreements). Sometimes these services are operated by a county council on behalf of districts, or less frequently operated by one council on behalf of a group, or by a contractor on behalf of councils.

This decision is often seen as an 'easy' cut, as it allows Councils to cut budgets without having to lose staff on the payroll of their institution. Although some authorities who withdraw from share services may have plans for how to deliver on their obligations, due to the benefits of

economies of scale working with shared services, it is likely that new solo arrangements will be lacking in some crucial capacity.

Example: Stratford-upon-Avon

In 2016 Stratford-upon-Avon pulled out of the shared Warwickshire historic environment service. The new provision, undertaken internally at District level, required non-specialists to appraise documents, and screen applications based on whether it falls within known sensitive areas. The new service was opaque, not accessible for members of the public, and processed far fewer cases than the previous shared service.

Other cases: Inverclyde, Middlesbrough

6. Loss of non-statutory roles/programmes:

Some budget cuts have targeted ongoing projects or areas of operation tangential to the core issue of development control (in the case of planning advice services) and operation of central sites (in the case of museums).

Community outreach roles have commonly been among the first to be lost in this type of cut – an action which decreases the public benefit and visibility of a service. Unfortunately this type of decision makes it easier to cut in future, as it becomes harder for a service to justify its value.

Other services vulnerable to cuts are those related to non-statutory protection regimes like townscape heritage initiatives, local lists, and heritage strategies. Various types of programme may exist which fall into this category, from urban regeneration roles, to local museum development roles.

7. Outsourcing:

Outsourcing of services is not necessarily a negative issue, provided that services are adequately resourced, structured appropriately in order to deliver all necessary elements of service, and provided with the necessary financial security in terms of length of contract. However, outsourcing often masks a multitude of problems such as huge budget cuts, loss of important functions, and lack of public access.

There have been several examples of using outsourcing as a mask for cutting or axing current services (e.g. Lancashire and Inverclyde), where the contract has been set extremely low, making viable tenders unlikely (as was the case in Inverclyde) or leading to a financially unsustainable service (Lancashire).

As stated previously, another problem with outsourced services is that there is a temptation or a perceived need to set the contract on very short renewal, giving the authority the opportunity to withdraw from the service at short notice or to continually reduce the contract cost.

This has the effect of discouraging external service providers from investing in the service, so as to limit their liabilities and leads to greater volatility for both professionals employed in roles and potentially limits engagement routes for public.

Example: Horsham District Council

After the withdrawal of the West Sussex shared service, Horsham District opted to outsource their contract to a private national consultancy called White Young Green (WYG). Whilst WYG are a respected national consultancy, the structure of the contract meant that there would be no local presence by the consultant. They were also not to be responsible for a full screen of applications, rather they would only provide advice on cases brought to them by the authority. However, without a specialist to decide what required comment, it is unclear how the District Authority was selecting cases. In addition public visibility of the process dropped considerably.



Possible advocacy actions

1. Contribute to consultations on budgets, local plans

Keep an eye on your Council website and in your local press where news about budgets will be announced and reported. Budgets must be made public and so there should be accessible information available.

If there is a consultation this is certainly worth responding to in order to highlight the concern of local groups and residents for particular services.

For many cuts this consultation will not specifically be about heritage services, but rather about the broad shape of the budget.

Ideally, there will be detailed information presented on different options, and strong reasoning given for why cuts have been applied where they have, and an impact analysis detailing how the service will be affected. However, if this information is not available then it is reasonable to request more information, or state concerns about what might happen.

However, it is often extremely difficult to influence cuts once they have been announced, as often the point for discussion has passed – often without any public consultation.

If you or your group are able to read the documents and wish to discuss them, there are a number of possible routes that we can advise you on. Email cbacasework@archaeologyuk.org for advice.

2. Write to your local representatives

Writing to your local representatives in advance of budget reviews to highlight support for historic environment or museums services is an excellent way to raise the profile for these services.

You may wish to request information regarding exposure of services to cuts, or ask whether there will be public consultation on any proposed changes.

The information in this toolkit may provide useful material to use to express why you are concerned. In addition, the following toolkit also contains

useful information and statistics: [Toolkit 3: Local Historic Environment Services: Threats, importance, and how to protect them.](#)

Useful information: Local authority budgets are undertaken usually at some point in the 6 months of the financial year. Internal discussions often result in public statements or consultations in autumn and winter. There are often opportunities to fine-tune proposals ahead of the new financial year.

3. Write to, call, or visit your local historic environment service

Speaking to the officers who deliver particular services, including museums, to ask whether they perceive that there is a likelihood that they may receive a cut or to support their work and ask whether they can give assurances that it will continue can be a good way to support them.

Although Council officers are unlikely to be in a position to freely discuss budgetary issues with members of the public or provide reassurances, it is useful to have positive messages of support.

4. Speak to your local archaeology society, or local civic society

Your local CBA Regional Group, Archaeology Society, or Civic Society may be able to offer you advice on how to become part of a wider campaign or give you extra details of particular aspects of the case you are interested in.

Becoming a member of any of these groups is an excellent way to keep up to date with news of what is happening in your area and how to get involved.