

EQUITY

Visitor Levy Consultation: A consultation on the design of a new Mayoral power to create visitor levies on overnight stays in England

February 2026

About

Equity is the largest creative industries trade union with 50,000 members united in the fight for fair terms and conditions across the performing arts and entertainment. Our members are actors, singers, dancers, designers, directors, models, stage managers, stunt performers, circus performers, puppeteers, comedians, voice artists, supporting artists and variety performers. They work on stage, on TV and film sets, on the catwalk, in film studios, in recording studios, in night clubs and in circus tents.

Contact

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Summary

1. Equity welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to this consultation on the design of new Mayoral power to create visitor levies on overnight stays in England. We are responding to Chapter 3: Question 2, on the use of revenues.
2. Equity agrees that Mayors should be able to invest the revenues from a levy in interventions to support economic growth, and urges the government to ring-fence a substantial proportion of these revenues for local arts and culture spending. This funding should be directed solely towards creative work undertaken on industry-standard terms and conditions.

Question response

2.	<i>Do you agree that Mayors should be able to invest the revenues from a levy in interventions to support economic growth, including the visitor economy?</i>
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3. The present situation for local arts and culture funding across England is dire. Local government culture spending per person in England has been cut by more than 50% since 2009-10.¹ In 2024, several local authorities – including Nottingham, Birmingham and Suffolk – proposed eliminating their culture budgets entirely. Suffolk stepped back from this plan after extensive campaigning from Equity, which won the concession of a replacement fund of £500,000.² Similarly, in 2026, after Bristol City Council had proposed reducing its Cultural Investment Programme to zero, Equity and local arts and community groups mobilised and succeeded in convincing the Council to maintain this fund.³
4. Some Mayors appear to view cuts in arts and culture funding as an attractive cost-saving measure, but this is a self-defeating approach, as public investment in arts

¹ Campaign for the Arts, [English councils have more than halved culture spending since 2010, new CFTA analysis finds](#), December 2024.

² Equity, [Stop Arts Cuts | Save The Arts](#).

³ Equity, [Equity stops Bristol arts cuts](#), 22 January 2026.

and culture is one of the best ways to boost local economies. The creative industries' economic importance is increasingly recognised, for instance through their inclusion in the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy.⁴ In England, every £1 generated by arts and culture catalyses an additional £1.23 in wider impact, creating jobs and supporting supply chains across tourism, education and retail.⁵ The Centre for Economics and Business Research has identified nine different ways in which public investment in arts and culture creates positive spillover effects,⁶ including:

- a. Public investment in arts and culture plays a catalytic role in unlocking private and inward investment, as it de-risks cultural infrastructure projects and attracts long-term private partners. For example, in Manchester, public funding unlocked major private investment, supporting the creation of Aviva Studios, projected to generate £1.1 billion for the city's economy and create 1,500 jobs.⁷
 - b. Arts and culture organisations contribute to local economic ecosystems by attracting visitors, stimulating footfall, and supporting surrounding businesses. Major events play a key role in city branding, making places more attractive to investors, workers and creative enterprises. For example, the Liverpool Biennial had an economic impact of £24.3 million in 2023,⁸ while Basingstoke-based Anvil Arts attracted 200,000 visitors in 2024, with two-thirds saying that they would not have visited the town centre otherwise.⁹
5. Beyond the clear impact on the local economy, public investment in arts and culture can also have positive effects on social cohesion. Crises at the global level – from wars to economic shocks, online information and extremism – are increasingly experienced locally, and can exacerbate existing inequalities and tensions between residents.¹⁰ A study from the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP) – drawing on examples from Mexico City, Barbados and Bogotá – has underlined how public investment in culture can foster inclusion, civic pride

⁴ Department for Business and Trade and Department for Culture Media and Sport, [The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy](#), 2025.

⁵ Centre for Economics and Business Research, [Contribution of the arts and culture industry to the UK economy](#), May 2020.

⁶ Centre for Economics and Business Research, [Spillover impacts of publicly funded arts and culture](#), April 2025.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Matthew Cleaver, [How devolution could revitalise the future of UK arts](#), Arts Professional, 27 February 2025.

¹⁰ Strong Cities Network, [City Leadership in Partnering with Local Communities for Social Cohesion: Ten Considerations for Mayors and Local Governments](#), 10 December 2025.

and long-term public value.¹¹ These outcomes can help local governments counter the risks of polarisation, social fragmentation and declining trust in public institutions.

6. We also note that the ring-fenced funding that Equity is proposing would help overcome the challenge faced by those Mayors who understand that cutting arts funding can provide a trivial short-term saving at an exorbitant long-term cost, which are the strict fiscal rules that constrain the scale and nature of public investment. As the IIPP has stated, “[t]hese rules limit the patient, strategic finance needed not only for bold mission-driven projects in arts and culture, but also for rebuilding the very public sector capabilities required to deliver them.”¹² Protecting arts and culture funding would enable ambitious and long-term investment.
7. Ring-fencing a substantial proportion of revenues from a visitor levy would – at no cost to the Exchequer – support the government’s growth agenda and industrial strategy by fostering regional creative clusters across England. In the recent review of Arts Council England (ACE), Equity underlined the vital role that local government plays in supporting local arts and entertainment, and emphasised that ACE must collaborate with other arts and culture funders and commissioning bodies, in order to develop place-based strategies for the arts and entertainment in every region. A strategic cooperation among the relevant bodies would help to build a local creative labour market, ending regional reliance on London workforces over time, while providing creative career opportunities for local people. This would allow regional institutions to create meaningful outreach programmes, that provide genuine labour market opportunities in arts and culture.¹³
8. Equity takes the position that public subsidies in any form – from local arts grants, to BBC commissions, to tax relief – should be reserved for work undertaken on industry-standard terms and conditions. As Jennie Lee’s 1965 White Paper stated, “one of the main objectives of the Government’s policy [towards the arts] is to encourage the living artist.”¹⁴ Local government investment in work for local artists on decent terms and conditions will facilitate lifelong professional creative careers, workforce skills development and intellectual property formation.

¹¹ Mariana Mazzucato, [The Public Value of Arts and Culture: Investing in Arts and Culture to Reimagine Economic Growth in the 21st Century](#), Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, September 2025.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Equity, [Equity response to the independent review of Arts Council England](#), June 2025.

¹⁴ Equity, [Equity celebrates 60 years of Jennie Lee’s vision for the arts](#), 25 February 2025.