

Please reply to:

7 The Fairway
Rochester
Kent
ME1 2PY

3rd November 2014

Dear Sajid Javid,

We, the Social History Curators Group, are writing to draw your attention to the detrimental effects on communities across the UK of budget cuts to social history museums.

In your speech of 6 June at St George's, Bristol, you called on cultural heritage organizations to "make what you do accessible to everyone". The Social History Curators Group (SHCG), and the dedicated museum professionals we represent, share your vision. Since SHCG's foundation in 1980s, social history museums have led the way in encouraging the sector to include a broader and more diverse audience in the work museums do. In your speech you highlighted the work of one of our member organisations, Bristol's M Shed, in making "great strides in attracting audiences that reflect this diverse city". Just over the border in Wales, Cardiff Story, like M Shed, is a museum truly at the heart of its community. Community groups from across the city, including those from BAME- and lower socio-economic backgrounds were helped to produce the museum's displays, creating a museum truly of and for its ordinary citizens. This year alone, the museum has worked with and supported over 60 community groups. In Manchester, the People's History Museum's Play your Part project simultaneously tackles cultural and political disenfranchisement by inviting ordinary taxpayers to participate in the democratic process.

Yet the excellent work of these museums, and others across the country, is being jeopardized by the severe funding cuts seen over the last four years, made by both central and local government. In 2014, Cardiff Story saw its funding cut by 52% in a single year. By 2015, the People's History will have seen its funding cut by £200,000. We share your belief in the importance of philanthropy and finding alternative revenue streams to supplement central and local government grants. Cardiff Story has been successful both in generating revenue through special events and has secured £175,000 grants for projects this year. However, such substantial cuts to a museum's annual budget make it extremely difficult for revenue generation to keep pace with budgets needed to cover core functions. The cuts are detrimental to the

excellent work which social history practitioners have been doing to engage and involve their communities; collecting and interpreting objects that reflect diverse histories. Many museums are now operating with a skeleton staff who simply do not have the time or resources to prioritize this important work. This results in museums putting on fewer exhibitions and events to engage and involve their communities. It makes it harder for museums to 'make what they do accessible for everyone.'

We call on you to reconsider your department's position on cuts to the People's History Museum, which is in effect a national museum of social history. The proposed cuts would restrict this fantastic museum's ability to provide high quality work for the benefit of all. However, it's not just our Nationally funded museums that are suffering. We urge you to encourage councils across the country to preserve museum budgets so that social history museums can continue their excellent work in combating cultural disenfranchisement and promoting community cohesion.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Michelle L. Lees'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

Michelle Lees, Chair
On behalf of SHCG Trustees