
REPORT TO:	HOUSING & COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 12
DATE OF MEETING:	14th JUNE, 2007	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	STUART BATCHELOR (Ext. 5820)	DOC: s:\cent_serv\committee reports\housing & community services\14 june 2007\best value review of cultural services.doc
SUBJECT:	BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CULTURAL SERVICES	REF: SB/PMW
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 Members note the result of the Audit Commission's Best Value Review of Cultural Services and approve the delivery of the Improvement Plan.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 The report provides Members with the findings of the Audit Commission's Best Value Review of Cultural Services and seeks their approval for the delivery of an Improvement Plan to move the service to 'Excellent'.

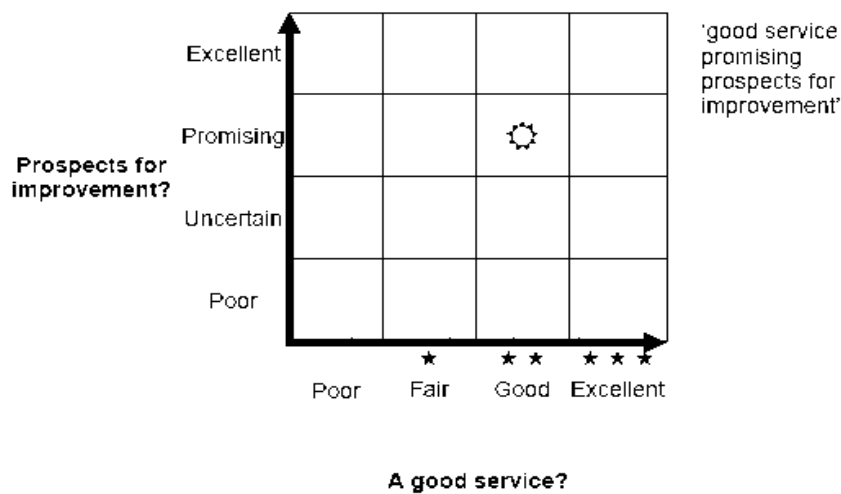
3.0 Detail

- 3.1 In March 2007 the Audit Commission conducted an inspection of the District Council's Cultural Services. The inspection was mainly concerned with the work of the Leisure & Community Development Service, but also included the tourism work of the Policy & Economic Regeneration Service and the heritage and open space element of the Planning Services work.
- 3.2 The Review consisted of a written submission based around 'Key Lines of Enquiry' (KLOE), a tour of the district and an on site inspection.
- 3.3 The inspection involved meetings with Councillors, managers, staff, partners and customers over a five day period.
- 3.4 The Inspectors then produced a 'Service Inspection Report', a copy of which is attached at Annexe A, from which an 'Improvement Plan' is agreed between the Audit Commission and the Council, a copy of this is attached at Annexe B.

Service Inspection Report

3.5 The Audit Commission have reported that the District Council provides 'GOOD' cultural services that have 'PROMISING' prospects for improvement. This score is illustrated by the following table:-

Table 1 Scoring chart¹



3.6 The Commission identified the service as a good, two star service because:-

- It consults well and is responsive to local needs;
- There is a good corporate understanding of the challenges facing the district and how cultural services can help achieve corporate aims and objectives;
- The Council has positioned cultural services to deliver on other agendas such as health and crime and understand the contribution made by culture;
- It works well with partners to build capacity and influence cultural provision;
- It makes effective use of external funding, cultural partnerships and provides grants for cultural activity to maximise the use of available resources;
- Children and Young people are a focus of the plans and strategies and have been involved in the design and provision of services; and
- There is a range of good quality cultural opportunities across the district.

3.7 However:-

- The approach to diversity is under-developed, and whilst some progress is being made the Council is not monitoring the impact of its approach. Physical access to cultural activity for people with disabilities is mixed;
- Service standards are still developing, and currently local people are not aware of the level of service they should expect;
- Targeting is limited and pricing and programming of services has not yet been used to maximise access to service for all; and
- The Council is not clear if it is routinely achieving value for money in cultural services

3.8 The Commission said the Service has promising prospects for improvement because:-

- Cultural leadership is effective and the Council has strong partnerships to enable and deliver further improved outcomes;
- The Council is good at attracting external funding and directing resources at cultural priorities;
- It has a good recent track record of improving the range and quality of cultural opportunities;
- The number of people participating in cultural activities is increasing;
- It has strengthened capacity with new resources and posts; and
- Cultural plans are well integrated with corporate and partner strategies

3.9 However:-

- Performance management does not focus effectively on the impact on local people;
- There is no consistent approach to using cost and quality information to manage and improve value for money;
- Information is not used effectively to drive service improvement
- Capacity to meet the challenges of future population growth is not certain

3.10 There were two recommendations from the report, these are:-

‘The Council should clearly show the extent to which cultural services contribute to improving quality of life’

and

‘Improve Value for Money and its management’

3.11 The actions coming out of these recommendations have been cross referenced with the requirements of the ‘Towards an Excellent Service’ Review and included in the Services ‘Improvement Plan’

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 The Best Value Review of Cultural Services confirms the previous ‘Towards an Excellent Service’ validation that it is a good service, and more importantly illustrates the progress the Council itself has made in performance management, use of resources and service delivery.

6.0 Community Implications

6.1 The Review confirms that the Council is providing a good and equitable service across the whole District. Many of the recent developments in outreach services, provided in partnership and based on community engagement, were recognised by the Audit Commission and contributed to the good score.

7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 The Review identifies that the service is good and has promising prospects for improvement. The challenge now is to ensure that improvement is delivered and the service improves to 'Excellent'.