

**Agenda Item:**

**Report to:** AUDIT COMMITTEE

**Date:** 26 SEPTEMBER 2006

**Report from:** Executive Director, Leisure and Cultural Development

**Title of report:** **AUDIT COMMISSION - CULTURAL SERVICES INSPECTION**

**Purpose of report:** To report on the Cultural Services inspection process and key findings and to set out the draft improvement plan for comment.  
To draw attention to a specific issue of management capacity arising from the inspection report.

**Recommendations:** **To consider and comment on the draft improvement plan**

---

## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The Audit Commission undertook an inspection of Cultural Services during September 2005 consisting of the submission of a comprehensive Self Assessment document from the Council supported by access to key strategy documents. The inspectors were on site for a week and undertook interviews with senior politicians and officers, focus groups of staff, partners and residents and mystery shopper visits to facilities.
- 1.2 The inspectors also explored two sub themes in more detail:  
  
cultural services and their impact on healthier communities, and  
  
contribution to the town's regeneration.
- 1.3 Their original draft report produced a Council response that the report did not fully reflect the positive work of the Directorate. A number of changes were agreed and addressed by the Inspectors in the final report.
- 1.4 The Audit Commission published their report on the 22nd December (a summary is attached), identifying the service as a 'fair service that has promising prospects for improvement'. The full report can be viewed at: [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports)

## **2.0 Key Recommendations and the Improvement Plan**

- 2.1 The report's key recommendations can be summarised as:
- 2.2 directorate management capacity: developing clear customer standards (i.e. customer charters); completing community profiles; further development of local P.I.s, benchmarking and revising the long term vision for cultural services to embrace new regeneration plans.
- 2.3 Wider corporate issues include management effectiveness, style and development linked back to issues identified in the CPA assessment; improving training and support for Overview and Scrutiny; working with East Sussex County Council as the transport authority to improve access to facilities; improved 'badging' of cultural services outcomes across Council corporate documents.
- 2.4 In response to the Inspectors recommendations a draft cultural services improvement plan (see appendix 1) has been submitted to the Audit Commission's appointed Relationship Manager, Darren Wells, who will be formally commenting on its contents prior to consideration of the final improvement plan by the Council's Audit Committee on the 26<sup>th</sup> September.
- 2.5 A number of the recommendations have already been addressed through new contract specifications and contracts for Leisure and Grounds Maintenance, and investment in leisure facilities through the newly appointed leisure contractor.

- 2.6 The restructure of the Directorate's senior management team is already being progressed through the introduction of new General Manager post and a modification of roles for a small number of staff to redirect their resource into supporting directorate policy work around refreshing the Cultural Strategy and client project work. The costs of the restructure as proposed will be funded from existing revenue budgets.
- 2.7 Members will also be aware of the work in strengthening of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny process.

### 3.0 Policy Implications

- 3.1 The draft improvement plan aims to be a proportionate response to the recommendations and be delivered within existing resources. It is likely that the Audit Commission will undertake a review of the Council's progress on the plan in a year's time.

Equalities & Community Cohesiveness	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Risk Management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Economic / Financial implications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Rights Act	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organisational Consequences	<input type="checkbox"/>

---

Report written by:

Mike Marsh, Executive Director, Leisure and Cultural Development

Telephone: 01424 451134

E-mail: [mmarsh@hastings.gov.uk](mailto:mmarsh@hastings.gov.uk)

## **Cultural services**

2005-12-01Hastings Borough Council

## **Service Inspection**

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services. As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

### **Copies of this report**

If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call 0845 056 0566.

### **Service Inspection**

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our strategic plan and strategic regulation. They also reflect the principles from 'The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003)'. Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;

- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater coordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self-assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk). This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under section 13 of the 1999 Act.

---

## **Summary**

1 Overall, the Council is providing fair cultural services with promising prospects for improvement.

2 Cultural services contribute towards meeting the Council's ambitions for the local area, particularly in terms of social regeneration. This is important given the multiple deprivation issues the Council faces, particularly in terms of health, education and crime. The Council is a leading partner in promoting the regeneration of Hastings, and there is evidence of cultural links to the regional and national agenda through the service's aspirations in areas such as health and young people, particularly in the borough's deprived wards. Extensive consultation has been carried out to develop cultural services, particularly with young people. However, the fast-developing regeneration agenda means that some plans are out-of-date, and there is a lack of prioritisation and matching of resources to key priorities.

3 There is not a clear up-to-date vision for the service that makes explicit links to the current regeneration agenda. To address this shortcoming, a number of development plans have been produced, but these are not linked by an overview of what the Council is trying to achieve within cultural services.

Although many of the cultural aims are still valid, they are now being addressed through more recent regeneration aims. So, although the service is contributing to the regeneration-driven agenda, there is currently no overall revised cultural framework that the Council is able to work within.

4 Cultural services can demonstrate the impact it has had in terms of local priorities, such as increasing opportunities in community participation, positive work with young people, making the town healthier and leading the social regeneration of the town. The Council works hard to support many events throughout the borough, particularly in deprived areas.

Sporting activities, provided in conjunction with partners, can demonstrate good attendance numbers and positive feedback, with initiatives to promote sport to a wide range of groups such as women or those excluded from school. It also provides many innovative arts development activities. User satisfaction rates are above average and visitor numbers are increasing for some key facilities such as the White Rock Theatre. This has been important in widening participation for all sections of the community.

5 However, the Council is not yet clear where there are gaps in leisure provision, as their needs analysis has not yet been converted into what is needed where. Many of the facilities provided through cultural services have a tired, dated appearance and do not provide a good visitor experience or good standards of customer service. Access to and at some venues is poor. The Council has investment plans to address many of these issues. Although the Council is not responsible for transport in the area, this is of major concern to the community and an obstacle to the wider participation in cultural activities. Customer service standards are not fully in place, and the Council's 'Passport to Leisure' scheme is also currently underdeveloped.

6 There is strong leadership for the service, making an explicit link between cultural services and the major regeneration work starting in the town. Whether the opportunities that this brings are being fully exploited remains open to question, since not all senior officers involved in delivering and developing cultural services have had an opportunity to make a contribution in this area. Nevertheless, the significant amount of money being attracted to the area will have a major impact and the Council is clear that this is to support the quality of life issues as well as the physical fabric. And staff are clearly committed to improving and delivering the service. Another important success for the Council is how well it works with its partners to develop new initiatives and deliver improvements to the community.

7 The financial management of the Council is strong and is supported by the successes that the Council has had in

attracting large amounts of external funding. The performance management system is robust. However, the involvement of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in performance management is underdeveloped and benchmarking needs to be improved if the Council is to demonstrate that it is achieving value for money.

8 The Council has well-developed future plans for important specific service improvements. A criticism is that there is a lack of consistency when identifying these many initiatives between different documents. However, funds have been allocated to pursue these plans and a feasibility study fund has been set up to use when developing these projects. This is to ensure that the resources are fully understood before a commitment is made, as well as their links to what the Council is trying to achieve.

9 Management capacity is not fully developed. The management development programme has not been completed by all the relevant managers within cultural services, and it is unclear what benefits the programme is bringing from discussions with staff. The concerns raised in the comprehensive performance assessment report around the inconsistent managerial style have not been addressed fully although an action plan and funding for this has been allocated. Staff morale is improving, but it is at a low base.

---

## **Scoring the service**

### [Recommendations](#)

10 We have assessed the Council as providing a fair one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

#### *Audit Commission*

11 The service is fair because of the following.

- Cultural services are supporting the regeneration ambitions for the local area, which is important given the multiple deprivation issues the area faces.



- Its aims are based on extensive consultation, for example, with young people.
- It is meeting a wide range of needs expressed by the community.
- Parks and open spaces are attractive and well maintained with high satisfaction rates.
- The service provides well-attended community events and healthy activities throughout the borough, including in deprived areas.
- Visitor numbers are increasing for some facilities.
- Arts development work is good, with wide-ranging events throughout the area.
- It carries out some positive work for young people.
- There is above average satisfaction from users of the service compared to others.
- There are a number of initiatives to address the needs of some diverse groups.

## 12 However:

- there is not a clear up-to-date vision for the service that makes explicit links to the current regeneration agenda;
- there is a lack of clarity of the prioritisation for plans and activities within the service;
- some facilities appear rundown;
- the Council is not yet clear where there are gaps in the provision of services;
- some facilities do not provide a good visitor experience;
- access to and at some buildings is currently poor;
- the passport to leisure scheme is currently underdeveloped; and

- customer service standards are not fully in place.

13 Prospects for improvement are promising because of the following.

- There is strong managerial and political leadership and commitment to cultural services in the role it plays in the regeneration of the borough.
- There is clear commitment from staff to the development and delivery of services.
- Finances are managed positively.
- The service is successful at attracting significant amounts of external funding.
- A robust performance management system is in place.
- There is a strong commitment to addressing deprivation and social exclusion issues.
- Partnership working produces effective outcomes in providing a range of services and facilities.
- The Council has clearly set out important future specific schemes and actions for the next three years.
- Resources have been identified to implement key future plans.

14 However:

- management capacity is not fully developed with issues raised during the comprehensive performance assessment still not showing improvement;
- not all senior staff have had the opportunity to be involved in some of the regeneration plans for the area;
- the overview and scrutiny role in performance management is not fully developed;
- benchmarking is underdeveloped;

- community profiling is not complete and so the diversity needs of the area are not clear; and
- there is a lack of consistency in future plans.

## Recommendations

15 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendations.

<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b>R1</b>	<i>Ensure that management effectiveness within cultural services is improved by:</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>fully addressing the concerns identified in the comprehensive performance assessment relating to effectiveness and management style; and</i></li> <li>• <i>completing the management development programme and assessing the impact it makes.</i></li> </ul>
<b>R2</b>	<i>Ensure that the contribution that cultural services makes to regeneration is effective by:</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>making sure the staff, councillors, partners and the community are clear of cultural service outcomes;</i></li> <li>• <i>revising and making clearer the long-term vision and aims for cultural services to reflect the impact of the new regeneration work;</i></li> <li>• <i>linking these aims clearly to the service delivery plans;</i></li> <li>• <i>identifying clear outcomes related to the targets set;</i></li> <li>• <i>prioritising the plans within cultural services; and</i></li> <li>• <i>involving staff at all levels in key decision-making and plans.</i></li> </ul>
<b>R3</b>	<i>Improve the quality of cultural services</i>

	<p><i>experienced by the community by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>developing and publicising clear customer standards for what the community can expect;</i></li> <li>• <i>working with East Sussex County Council (the transport authority) to investigate with the major transport providers, how access to facilities and events can be improved through the provision of public transport;</i></li> <li>• <i>progressing web developments to provide robust on-line transactions for cultural facilities; and</i></li> <li>• <i>ensuring community profiles are completed and used to inform how the Council responds to diversity issues.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation</b>	
<i>R4</i>	<p><i>Increase the effectiveness of the service by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>developing local performance indicators that show what the Council is trying to achieve through cultural services;</i></li> <li>• <i>using benchmarking to help assess value for money; and</i></li> <li>• <i>ensuring that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to receive performance information and training that allows them to improve the way that they monitor performance</i></li> </ul>

16 We would like to thank the staff of Hastings Borough Council, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Jane Burns

Chris Jenkins

Inspectors

Dates of inspection: 19 to 23 September 2005

Email: [j-burns@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:j-burns@audit-commission.gov.uk)

[c-jenkins@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:c-jenkins@audit-commission.gov.uk)