

**Agenda Item:**

**Report to:** AUDIT COMMITTEE

**Date:** 26th 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 improvement plan.

**Recommendations:** **To approve the improvement plan.**

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## **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 Developing 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 was submitted to the Audit Commission's appointed Relationship Manager, Darren Wells. His comments on the draft plan were generally very favourable with specific focus on ensuring there were some additional actions added to assess progress and effectiveness of the output and output targets. This has been addressed in the final improvement plan (see Appendix 1).

- 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 proposed modification of roles for a small number of staff to redirect some of their work into supporting directorate policy work and client project work. The costs of the restructure will be met 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. The Audit Commission will review the Council's 'direction of travel' progress on the plan in 2007/2008.

Equalities & Community Cohesiveness	
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	
Risk Management	
Environmental issues	
Economic / Financial implications	
Human Rights Act	
Organisational Consequences	

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