

Select Committee Culture and Recreation – 15 September 2005

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Cultural Strategy

Purpose of Report

1. To advise members of the current position regarding the production of a Local Cultural Strategy for the Borough.

Background

2. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) placed a responsibility upon local authorities to produce Local Cultural Strategies and issued guidance on how they should be developed with a suggested framework for their scope, timescale and implementation.
3. This requirement was enshrined in a Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) which measured whether or not an authority had a Cultural Strategy. In 2004 this BVPI was withdrawn when further guidance on mechanisms for the integration of Cultural Strategies within Community Strategies was issued by the DCMS.

4. In 2004 the Council's Cultural Service received a Regular Performance Inspection (RPA) from inspectors of the Audit Commission. As part of the recommendations contained within the final report the inspectors concluded that:-

“The Council should decide upon their cultural direction through a Cultural Strategy, which sets out their priorities and non-priorities, aligns resources accordingly and confronts the difficult issues around spending money on keeping open centres that are past their shelf life.

The approach adopted should be to take a fundamental and cross cutting look at the services to help answer the question as to why the Council should or should not invest in culture, how it can join up with other departments delivering against the Council's objectives and also cement links with the forthcoming revision of the Community Plan and the Council Plan.”

5. As Members will have noted in the report on the outcome of the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of Cultural Services conducted in early 2005, whilst the inspectors concluded that progress was being made and that services are improving the issue of the Cultural Strategy for the Borough is still outstanding.
6. Accordingly the principle recommendations of the CPA report both relate to the production of a Cultural Strategy for the Borough:-

- i) The Council should work with the LSP and other partners to develop a clear vision for Culture in the Borough, and
- ii) The Council should communicate a coherent and sustainable strategy as to how cultural services in Dudley will contribute to that vision which:
 - identifies priorities for improvement and clarifies and communicates clearly the Council's contribution;
 - establishes an outcome-based approach to performance management that measures impact and value for money;
 - ensures that resources are aligned accordingly and there is an accountability for delivery; and
 - ensures data is collected, evaluated and used to identify areas for improvement and inform target setting and critically to understand what impact its investment is having on the quality of life for the diverse range of local people.

- 7. In the context of the Council Plan priorities have now been established and there are clear linkages to Cultural Services and the contribution that it makes to the achievement of those priorities.
- 8. In 'Environment Matters' the Council's vision includes an aspiration that Parks 'are valued for being safe, attractive recreational spaces'. To achieve this the Council has a large scale park improvement programme following which the hoped for outcome is improved public satisfaction with the Parks Service.
- 9. In 'Caring Matters' the Council's vision includes the aspiration that 'People are health and active and have a range of leisure opportunities available'. In order to achieve this the Council will seek to improve Sport and Recreation opportunities, such as supervised activities for children and new facilities at Leisure Centres in order that we increase the number of people taking part in physical activity.
- 10. In 'Safety Matters' the Council recognises the preventative role that Cultural activities can play by providing children and young people with positive activities whether sports, arts or other leisure pursuits, and the impact that this can have on reducing anti-social behaviour and vandalism.
- 11. Whilst the Community Plan has yet to be finalised the role that Culture, Leisure, Sport, the Arts can play in supporting the Overall Vision of 'Stronger Communities' is already widely acknowledged in the Dudley Borough Challenge document 'A Vision for 2020'.
- 12. Across the five theme areas the role of Culture/Cultural activity as a means of achieving the respective themes vision is demonstrable, particularly in respect of the themes;
 - "Making Dudley a Safe and Peaceful Place to Live!;
 - "Promoting good Health and Well Being" and
 - "Safeguarding and Improving our Environment".

13. These are then supported by a further five cross cutting challenges, one of which is “Celebrating our heritage and the diversity of local culture”, and gives a further opportunity for Cultural Services to demonstrate its contribution.
14. With its partners the Council has supported the Dudley Borough Challenge exercise and the commensurate development of a Strategy for the Borough to take us to the year 2020. The Cultural Strategy is a necessary response to this exercise. Accordingly a task group of officers representing the Art, Heritage, Parks, Libraries and Sports Services has been established, receiving input from partner organisation and other cultural providers.
15. The benefits from producing the Cultural Strategy in the manner described above are that it links into strategic planning within the Council to reflect corporate policies and objectives and those of the council’s partner organisations, rather than being isolated at the margins.
16. It will provide a clear vision for Cultural Services in the Borough, reflecting peoples needs and aspirations, define priorities and helps to reconcile competing demands. It will articulate the ways in which Cultural Services and activities contribute to the economic, social and environmental well being of the Borough and encourages a partnership approach, recognising that the Council cannot deliver this agenda alone.
17. The current position is that there is a draft strategy structured around three strategic aims:-
 - Access and Participation
 - Quality and Diversity
 - Social and Economic Regeneration
18. At the heart of the proposed Cultural Strategy is the fundamental belief in the value that providing access to and increasing participation in cultural activity can derive for individuals not just in the context of their enjoyment of that activity but from wider benefits such as improved health and well being, learning or quality of life.
19. Providing greater opportunities and access for people to share in the cultural life of the Borough will not just benefit those individuals but will also be of benefit to wider society.
20. Key issues for the Council and partners to address in the life of the strategy will be to increase access and participation in cultural activities by currently under represented groups, improving health and well being in the Borough and supporting community learning.
21. A key factor in attracting people to participate and remain involved in cultural activities is the quality of the cultural product on offer. The Council, with its partners will seek to provide facilities and services of a consistently high standard in particular those aspects of the Borough’s cultural heritage that are unique to the area.
22. Similarly it is important to have an appropriate range of cultural opportunities available within the Borough in order that there is the opportunity to diverse cultural experiences that enlighten and challenge perceptions and leads to greater respect and tolerance within and across communities.

23. The social and economic benefits derived from a rich dynamic cultural environment can have a significant impact in transforming quality of life in the Borough and contributing to future success.
24. A key part in this is the sustainability of the social and physical cultural capital of the Borough, sensitive to both environmental factors and community capacity. There are marked differences in the quality of the environment and community capacity from place to place in the Borough and there is a clear need to focus efforts on specific areas in support of wider community regeneration initiatives.
25. Currently relevant Officers across the Council have been tasked to put forward actions and targets into a Strategic Action Plan framed against the three strategic aims identified above and subsequent fifteen strategic objectives. This exercise is scheduled to be completed by the end of September following which there will be some targeted public/agency specific consultation, further revision and its subsequent approval by the Council.

Financial Implications

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

Legal Implications

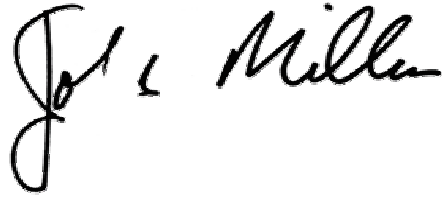
27. The various statutory powers relating to the contents of the report include the provision of recreation facilities under Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, and the Open Spaces Act 1906 and Public Health Act 1875 for the provision of parks and public open spaces.
28. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything that is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its various statutory functions.

Equality Impact

29. It is essential that measures are included within the Cultural Strategy Action Plan that address equality and diversity.
30. Members will note that within the suggested Strategic Aims of the strategy promoting access and participation in cultural activity by all sections of the community is prominent as is ensuring the diversity of the cultural offer within the Borough.

Recommendations

31. That Members note the progress of the development of a Cultural Strategy and comment accordingly.



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Background Papers:

- Regular Performance Assessment – Dudley MBC Cultural Services: 2004 (Audit Commission)
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment – Dudley MBC Cultural Services: 2005 (Audit Commission)
- 'Creating Opportunities' – Guidance for Local Authorities in England on Local Cultural Strategies (DCMS – 2000)
- 'Leading the Good Life' – Guidance on integrating Cultural and Community Strategies (DCMS – 2004)
- Dudley Borough Challenge – A Vision for 2020
- Council Plan : 2005/06 – Dudley MBC