

Member Briefing

Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands

What Makes Excellent Cultural Services Outcome focused leadership and partnership

Overview

Every local government service must demonstrate that its services are effective, efficient and economical. The new performance framework being introduced to local government puts a special focus on responding to the needs of the local community, and working with other agencies to achieve better outcomes for local people.

Why it Matters

Cultural services have to prove themselves in this new environment. The portfolio holder is responsible for ensuring that they make a genuine difference for local people. Scrutiny Members will be particularly keen to ensure that cultural activities contribute effectively to fulfilling the council's wider strategy.

Key Messages

- **With the shift from Comprehensive Performance Assessment to Comprehensive Area Assessment, cultural services have an unprecedented opportunity to help the council in its quest to improve its services.**
- **Cultural services have generally been slow to fall in line with good practice in performance management. They need to do more to prove their benefits.**
- **But don't re-invent the wheel – use the information and intelligence that is already out there to sharpen up your cultural services.**

Background

Cultural services are subject to the same improvement regimes as other local government services. In unitary authorities and county councils, cultural services have recently been assessed by the Audit Commission as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

Now, however, the Local Government White Paper ushers in a new inspection regime, with far greater autonomy for local councils. This represents a radical departure from the prescriptive nature of CPA. From 2009, Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) takes over from CPA. This aims to be more relevant to local people than CPA. However the Key Lines of Enquiry used by CPA will continue to be a useful self-assessment tool and will enable councils to develop a shared view of the challenges facing their area, and improve services accordingly.

There are a number of sources of support for improvement in cultural services:

- Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands (CIPEM) works to help cultural services raise their game. It is the largest and most ambitious regional project of its kind in the country and will enable East Midlands' authorities to deliver the fastest-improving cultural services in the country.
- The Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA) has a unit dedicated to improving local authority services. This three year project is aimed at supporting improvement specifically across cultural services. IDeA provides Cultural Connections, a comprehensive web-based resource for good practice in cultural services, available at: <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=76729>.
- The support agencies in the region are also providing their own support programmes for local authority improvement.

Beacon Status is awarded by government to local authorities who demonstrate excellence in key areas of service provision. In 2006/07 two East Midlands local authorities were awarded Beacon Status for Culture and Sport for Hard to Reach Groups: Leicester City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council. Leicester showcased its exciting cultural programme engaging diverse communities through arts, museums, sports and libraries; and Nottinghamshire demonstrated its sports provision, particularly with disabled people and residents of former coalfield areas. www.leicester.gov.uk/beacon and www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/beaconscheme



Any effort to improve performance relies on evidence – and such evidence has historically been thin on the ground in local authority cultural services. In some cases this has undermined the position of cultural services. However things are changing and there are now a number of initiatives to help councils quantify the public benefit of their cultural services:

- The Active People survey gives a picture of how physically active your authority is. This intelligence will help you increase participation in your area in sport and exercise. <http://tinyurl.com/cgb59> (Home page: www.sportengland.org).

- Public Library Impact Measures will help to quantify the contribution which libraries make to wider community agendas: <http://tinyurl.com/3wfre> (Home page: www.mla.gov.uk).
- The East Midlands Cultural Observatory will facilitate the coordination of research activity and the production of cultural data and intelligence, to inform and advance cultural development, evidence based policy making and public service delivery (www.emculturalobservatory.org.uk)

Case Study: Targeting Hard to Reach Groups

Nottinghamshire County Council has become the hub of a sophisticated multi agency sports development network, which works together to achieve a wide and impressive range of outcomes for the people of the county. Their Beacon status is recognition of a successful blend of community leadership, strategic planning, practical delivery and targeted intervention. Examples of the work include:

- The *Sport Direct* programme for disabled people, which helps people to acquire the life skills to pursue further education and ultimately employment through a structured and mentored programme of sports education.
- The unique *Inside Out* project which identified the failure of many mainstream schools to meet the needs of children with disabilities and special needs. It offers support to schools for inclusive PE and sport opportunities. Over 11000 young people and over 400 schools have been involved.
- The Active Nottinghamshire programme creating a network of 13 community based staff working with adults in specifically targeted areas of health inequality.
- A targeted free swimming initiative for low-income families.
- The *MASH Positive Futures* programme which has involved over 500 young people, many of whom have been referred by partner agencies.

Key factors in their success have been:

- Investing a significant amount of time and resource into consultation, research, piloting and evaluation.

- Using sophisticated and sometimes experimental methods of communication to refresh our message and reach our target communities, partners and clients.
- Creating sporting 'champions', from under represented social groups, to act as advocates and ambassadors.

'Culture and sport are important to the people of Nottinghamshire and we are proud to have a track record of extending access to services and improving the quality of life for residents'. Cllr Steve Carroll, Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration, Nottinghamshire County Council.



Photo: Nottinghamshire County Council

Your Next Steps

- **Find out how your cultural services fared in the last CPA inspection.**
- **Ask the director or head of service responsible for your council's cultural services about current improvement mechanisms (e.g. through self assessment, quality assurance schemes or Chartermark), and plans (e.g. their improvement plan for CPA).**
- **Discuss with them how to make use of Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands.**



Cultural Improvement Partnership
East Midlands

Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands is delivering a regional programme in 2007-2010 to strengthen local authority cultural services in the East Midlands. The partnership is funded by the East Midlands Improvement Partnership and support agencies for cultural services (Sport England, Arts Council England, MLA and Renaissance). Production of this briefing is funded by Sport England and Communities and Local Government.