

# Member Briefing

Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands

## Raising Your Game

### Self-Assessment Tools and their Importance to Culture and Sport

#### Overview

Culture and sport are valued for their benefits to individuals as well as their wider impact on communities. However, because they are largely discretionary services, they have to work hard to demonstrate their value to local residents and the Members representing their interests.

The self-improvement agenda in local government is now well established. A crucial element of this is the development of self-assessment tools which help local authorities to understand more deeply the scope and quality of services they provide.

#### Why it Matters

The Local Government White Paper (see separate briefing sheet) offers real opportunities for culture and sport to be placed at the heart of the community agenda, and importantly calls for this to be reflected in the way local authorities prioritise their work and aspirations for their communities. The White Paper also favours less external scrutiny and a greater emphasis on self-improvement – including the use of self-assessment tools. As well as allowing comparison between local authorities and helping to improve services, self-improvement tools can also identify areas for improvement and offer a new or more in-depth way of looking at services.

#### Key Messages

- **Self-improvement tools help improve delivery of local services.**
- **The trend is away from external monitoring towards self-regulation and self-improvement.**
- **The cultural agencies have already developed a set of self-assessment tools to assist local authorities and other organisations.**

- **The cultural agencies are working with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) to develop a single improvement tool for culture and sport.**

#### Background

The trend towards self-improvement has been gathering pace in the culture and sport sector over the last three to five years. Sport England, Arts Council England (ACE) and Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) Council have all developed self-assessment tools which can help local authorities to develop a better understanding of the scope and quality of their services.

This briefing note deals with four self-assessment tools – each of which supports self-improvement in a different way. Utilising the ‘right’ improvement tool is critical. As a sector we have historically provided different improvement tools. However, work is now underway to develop a single cultural improvement tool (see 4 below). The tools currently available are:

#### 1) Towards an Excellent Service (TAES)

TAES is a self-assessment tool designed to improve performance management. Originally developed for sport and recreation services, TAES has been adapted for use across cultural services. TAES was developed within the East Midlands and is now widely used across the country. In the East Midlands the model has been, is, or will be programmed for use in over 50% of local authorities. The model is also being piloted for use within a parks and open spaces setting.

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=5638651>

#### 2) Arts at the Strategic Centre

Arts at the Strategic Centre has been developed by Arts Council England North East and the Improvement and Development Agency to explore what it means for local authorities to put arts at the ‘strategic centre’. The model seeks to help position the arts at the centre of corporate policy making in addition to strengthening the same aspects of performance management that appear within TAES. Arts at the Strategic Centre is being piloted in Derby in the East Midlands.

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=5638646>



### 3 ) Inspiring Learning for All

Developed by MLA, Inspiring Learning for All aims to help museums, libraries and archives transform the way they deliver and engage users in learning. The tool is currently being developed to strengthen the performance management aspects of the framework and to develop wider community outcome measures. <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=5638660>

### 4) Future Development

A consultation exercise has been carried out to look at the potential for a self-assessment tool which reads across culture and sport. The New Single Improvement Tool, developed in response to local authority feedback for a more coherent approach to improvement tools, is being piloted from the end of June across eight local authorities and is planned for roll-out in December 2007. Promoting the tool will be a key aspect of the work of the Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands (CIPEM).

## Case Study: Self-improvement for Culture

A strategic approach to self-improvement is now in place in Northamptonshire with all eight local authorities undertaking a modified version of TAES (TAES+). The model has been adjusted to incorporate questions drawn from Arts at the Strategic Centre around how culture and sport are positioned within the authorities' corporate centres.

This is the first time any self-assessment model has been utilised across all local authorities in any given County and will drive the self-assessment agenda, as well as offer peer support and benchmarking among local authorities. Five of the assessments will be validated (where a peer assessor comes in and 'checks and challenges' the findings from the review) and the Northampton Borough Council validation costs are being funded by Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands.

"Without a doubt TAES has raised the profile of culture in Northamptonshire" Cllr Brendan Glynane, Cultural Portfolio Holder and Deputy Leader, Northampton Borough Council



Photo:Northampton Borough Council

### Your next steps

- Find out what self-improvement regimes are being used (if any) in your cultural services, and in your authority in general.
- Ask how your council is gearing up for the new performance framework heralded by the Local Government White Paper.
- Explore introducing a suitable self-improvement tool if your cultural services do not already have one.



**Cultural Improvement Partnership  
East Midlands**

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