

Member Briefing

Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands

Scrutiny of Cultural Services

Improvement through challenge

Overview

The key objectives of a council's Overview and Scrutiny role are to provide a "critical friend" challenge to the Executive or Cabinet as well as external authorities and agencies; reflect the concerns of the public and communities; lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of communities; and make a positive impact on the delivery of public services.

These objectives are the "successful scrutiny criteria" adopted as Best Practice by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. The power for Councils to operate Scrutiny Commission and Select Committees are enshrined within the Local Government Act 2000.

Why it Matters

Scrutiny Commissions and Select Committees can influence the delivery and shape of cultural services. As well as helping the Council in the development of its policy framework and questioning the decisions and performance of the Council on cultural issues, they can also help to ensure that culture is placed at the heart of strategic policy development. By raising questions and making recommendations for the Cabinet, Executive Members and senior officers, the Scrutiny and Select Committee functions can drive research and consultation; enhance community participation in the development of policy; and liaise with external organisations involved in delivering cultural services to ensure that the needs of local people are being met.

Key Messages

- **The Overview and Scrutiny process provides an opportunity for you to challenge the effectiveness of the delivery of cultural services within your area.**
- **You can influence and shape policy on the future provision of cultural services in your locality.**
- **You can invite experts to advise on the development of future cultural provision within your area.**

Background

As a Councillor sitting on a Scrutiny Committee, you can:

- Advocate the positive role that culture and sport can play in enhancing the quality of life of communities and individuals when considering major policy and strategy development;
- Suggest ways in which culture should be embedded into Council strategic priorities and the delivery of major projects;
- Challenge resource allocation through the budget process for the delivery of culture and sport services from your organisation and key partners;
- If necessary invite witnesses/partners to help champion the role of culture;
- Make use of 'call-in' arrangements should you feel that the value of culture and sport have not been adequately recognised in the development of strategy, policy and projects that impact on people and places.

In order to be effective, however, it is vital that Scrutiny Commissions and Select Committees are effectively supported by officers; have full engagement from the Members, cabinet and executive; and have high level awareness of the role of Overview and Scrutiny.

The Local Government White Paper published in 2006 has set out a range of proposals for strengthening the overview and scrutiny function within local government. In summary this includes:

- Making local leaders more powerful and more accountable
- More powers to scrutinise other public bodies and require them to attend scrutiny meetings
- Encouragement to set up 'area' overview and scrutiny commissions
- Encouragement to be more strategic and focused on local area needs.



Case Study: Scrutinising Cultural Tourism

The Scrutiny Commission of HBBC considered the Annual Tourism Report from Hinckley & Bosworth Promotions, the local destination management partnership for the area in July 2006.

The Commission requested a report to consider the impact that the partnership had made in improving the tourism offer within the area and specifically at the value for money achieved through the Council's contribution. The Chief Executive of Leicestershire Promotions, the agency procured to support the partnership and to help to directly deliver its blueprint for action, was called to provide evidence to the Commission, along with the Chair of the partnership, Steve Wegerif, who is the owner of a local tourism business in the Borough.

The Scrutiny Commission considered the evidence presented and agreed to an annual "value for money" review of the tourism partnership and performance in delivering its three year blueprint for action. The partnership was invited to report progress on the recommendations of Scrutiny at its meeting in March 2007. The Scrutiny Commission applauded the achievements in value for money when the Chief Executive of Leicestershire Promotions was able to report that for every £1 invested by the Council, it has attracted £13 of external investment in tourism promotion.

The Chair of the partnership said: "The Council and its lead Members and officers must be congratulated for bringing the partnership together to help deliver the Tourism Blueprint. I run a small antiques visitor centre in Shenton, which has seen visitor numbers dramatically increase over the last 18 months as a direct result of the collaborative work of this partnership."

Your Next Steps

- **Engage proactively in the scrutiny function of your authority.**
- **If you are a Cabinet/Executive Member, fully support and engage with your Scrutiny Commissions and Select Committees.**
- **Ensure cultural services and agencies involved in cultural service delivery are included in your annual work programmes for Overview and Scrutiny.**



Photo: Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council



**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.