

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	28 July 2005
Subject:	CPA Cultural Services Inspection and Action Plan
Responsible Officer:	Javed Khan, Director of Learning and Community Development
Contact Officer:	Ian Cooper, Interim Community and Culture Officer
Portfolio Holder:	Education and Lifelong learning Planning, Development and Housing
Key Decision:	No
Status:	Public

## **Section 1: Summary**

### **Decision Required**

That the inspection report and the actions being taken be noted.

### **Reason for report**

To report to Cabinet on the outcome of the Inspection of Cultural Services

### **Benefits**

The inspection report provides Members with a view of the effectiveness of these services, which are spread across three directorates.  
The action plan shows how the service planning process will be used to address the issues raised in the inspectors' report

### **Cost of Proposals**

Set out in Section 2.4

## Risks

None

## Implications if recommendations rejected

Not applicable.

## Section 2: Report

### 2.1 Brief History

2.1.1 Two inspectors from Deloitte on behalf of the Audit Commission undertook the inspection of Harrow Cultural Services. The on site inspection took place between 7 and 11 March 2005.

2.1.2 The services inspected were as shown in the table below:

<b>Chief Executive's</b> Tourism	<b>People First</b> Arts Unit Arts For Schools Libraries	<b>Urban Living</b> Sports and Leisure Built Heritage Parks Service
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2.1.3 This was the first time that this group of services had been inspected. The 2002 CPA inspection was of Sports and Leisure Services only.

2.1.4 Due to the cross-departmental nature of this inspection, a decision was taken in June 2004 to set up a representative officer team led by the Director of Learning and Community Development. The team worked to prepare the self-assessment and benefited from an independent Peer Review in December 2004.

2.1.5 The inspectors used the 2004 standard single tier authority methodology as the basis for the inspection. The council agreed in advance of the inspection that the inspectors would undertake detailed 'probes' into the libraries and the sports and leisure services.

2.1.6 To evaluate the effectiveness of council's services the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) were:

- **How good is the service?**
  - What links can be clearly illustrated between the Council's cultural services' ambitions and the ambition for the local area?
  - How effectively do cultural services contribute to local service priorities and achieve service priorities?
  - How good are cultural services at providing a quality user experience?
  
- **What are the prospects for improvement to the service?**

- Does the council have the capacity and the systems to deliver its cultural ambitions and drive improvements in cultural services for all sections of the community?
- How effectively do the councils future plans sustain a clear focus on achieving for cultural services?

2.1.7 The inspection also included an evaluation of:

- The council's self-evaluation;
- Supporting policy and strategy documents provided;
- Performance indicator data;

2.1.8 The inspectors carried out extensive 'Reality Checks' consisting of both formal and unannounced 'mystery customer' site visits. Sites visited included:

Roxeth Library; Roxeth Recreation Ground; Wealdstone Centre; Headstone Manor; Harrow Arts Centre; Harrow Leisure Centre; Byron Recreation Ground; Hatch End Pool; Hatch End Library; Pinner Park; Civic Centre Library; Roxbourne Park; West Harrow Recreation Ground; Harrow Recreation Ground.

2.1.9 Inspectors also looked closely at the effectiveness of the Council's web site in providing information on the services to residents.

2.1.10 The Council was complimented on its guide to services being inspected entitled 'A Taste of Harrow – cultural services for all our cultures'.

2.1.11 During their week on site the inspectors carried out a very full itinerary, which included:

- 21 interviews.
- 6 focus groups / group interviews.
- 71 people consulted in total.

## 2.2 Summary of the Report

2.3.1 The inspection was a positive activity both for the council and the inspectors. The subsequent report was welcomed as it identified service strengths as well as areas for improvement.

2.3.2 These council services were assessed as **'a fair service that has promising prospects for improvement'**. This equates to a score of two points, which contributes to the council's overall CPA score.

2.3.3 The service was assessed as a fair service because:

- There is a clear vision for cultural services, articulated at a strategic level through the corporate plan and community strategy.
- Satisfaction levels are fair overall, although there is variation across the different service areas.
- There have been a number of recent initiatives, which have resulted in improvements for services users. Notable examples include:
  - library opening hours have been extended across the borough;

- library book stock budget has been increased;
- renovations have been made to some library premises as part of an ongoing refurbishment programme;
- the new Wealdstone Centre opened in November 2004 and has significantly increased library membership at this library;
- some parks and open spaces have been revitalised as part of the Council's environmental improvement programme.

2.3.4 The inspection identified that the following issues need to be addressed by the council:

- The cultural strategy currently lacks clearly defined and prioritised objectives supported by specific, measurable and appropriate actions.
- Geographical location, scarcity of facilities in some parts of the borough and price are significant barriers to access.
- Whilst there are some notable areas of strength such as Arts for Schools and the library service, not all service areas are delivering to a consistent standard. In sport and leisure services in particular, progress has been hindered by capacity issues and a lack of clarity as to roles and responsibilities within the leisure contract.
- Whilst there are a number of successful partnership initiatives at an individual project level, the Council's approach to partnership working in specific areas of cultural services has been fragmented to date. This is evidenced by the many issues and problems that are apparent within the Council's partnership with its external leisure contractor, and the lack of consistency in aims and objectives with its main arts provider, which have hindered service improvement in these areas.
- The Council has not realised the full benefit of the very strong voluntary and community sector provision within its sport and leisure provision in the borough and has failed to maximise partnership opportunities in this respect.

2.3.5 The prospects for improvement were assessed as promising because:

- The Council has a clear vision for cultural services. The Council has completed and agreed its corporate plan for 2005/06, supported by service plans for individual service areas. This link should be further consolidated and strengthened through the forthcoming revision of the cultural strategy, the development of a new sport and leisure strategy and the creation of a community engagement strategy.
- In-depth vitality profiles have been produced for the borough, which illustrate multiple deprivation and need down to individual wards and will be used to develop an area-based approach to cultural services provision. An exercise to plot residents' satisfaction with cultural services against the results of these vitality profiles has also been carried out.

- There is clear leadership from councillors and senior officers, who have a strong vision for cultural services and have committed significant resources to achieving this vision. The directorates which share responsibility for the provision of these services work and communicate effectively together.
- Significant financial resources have been committed to achieving the vision for cultural services, including increased capital and revenue budget commitments.
- New posts within cultural services have been developed to increase capacity, as a result of the organisation-wide restructuring of the Council. Further posts are being created through the middle management review that is currently underway. In particular, a new senior post has been created for a Group Manager (Community and Culture).
- The Council's new performance management framework is designed to support the organisational change that is taking place.
- There is a clear commitment to improving cultural services within Harrow and recognition of the role that such services can play in improving the quality of life across the borough as a whole.

2.3.6 The inspection identified that the following issues need to be addressed by the council:

- Whilst the Council has an ambitious vision for cultural services, its strategic planning framework is still in its early days and not yet fully embedded within the organisation.
- The revised performance management arrangements are not yet fully implemented throughout cultural services and the delays encountered with the middle management review have caused capacity problems, as a number of posts are yet to be filled. This shortage of human resources has hindered the rate at which improvements can be made. There is still some work to do before the performance management framework is rolled out to all levels of the organisation.
- The full potential of the partner relationships between the Council and its leisure contractor and between the Council and the main arts provider have not yet been fully realised.

2.3.7 In conclusion, the inspectors made only **three recommendations**, which were that the Council should:

- Improve its relationships with key partner organisations in delivering cultural services, in order that shared ambitions and objectives can be better developed and the user experience enhanced. The Council should also fully exploit opportunities for better partnership working

with voluntary and community organisations in planning and delivering cultural services.

- Develop and implement a service-wide framework for measuring the impacts and outcomes of its cultural services provision against identified local and national priorities and ambitions. This framework should include specific targets, with agreed timescales, responsibilities and performance indicators.
- Ensure that its vision for cultural services is clearly articulated and fully understood by all stakeholders.

### Action Plan

2.3.8 Following receipt of the report an action plan has been prepared to address the recommendations. The service planning format and process has been utilised to:

- Introduce new service actions for the current year to address urgent issues
- Develop proposals for integration into the 2006/07 and onwards budget and service planning process.

2.3.9 The Action Plan is attached at Appendix 1.

### 2.3 Consultation

2.3.1 The inspection methodology involved a wide range of interviews, focus groups and group meetings as outlined previously. The findings were incorporated into the inspection report.

### 2.4 Financial Implications

2.4.1 The action plan contains 91 actions. The majority of these can be funded from existing resources. There are some areas that would benefit from additional funding and this will feed into the budget and service planning process for 2006/07 to be considered alongside other priorities.

### 2.5 Legal Implications

None

### 2.6 Equalities Impact

2.6.1 The Action Plan seeks to improve the planning and delivery of key council services for the benefit of all communities with a focus of ensuring that the customer base is diversified.

### **Section 3: Supporting Information/Background Documents**

#### Appendices

#### Appendix 1 Draft Action Plan (circulated in the Supporting Documents Pack)

The Plan has been prepared using the main framework of the Audit Commission's inspection recommendations. Within each recommendation actions are sub divided into Harrow's five corporate objectives.

This approach ensures a good audit trail for future reference.

A copy of the inspection report has been placed in the Members Library and is publicly available on the Council's web site.