

June 2007

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report of the Scrutiny Review Group

Review of cultural services

FINAL REPORT

Members of the Review Group

Cllr Mitzi Green (Chairman)

Cllr Jean Lammiman

Cllr Bill Stephenson

Cllr Nana Asante

Cllr Paul Scott

Community co-optee: Tim Oelman



Table of contents

Chairman’s Introduction and Acknowledgments	3
Methodology	5
Executive summary	9
FINDINGS	15
Introduction	15
Strategic overview	19
Cultural facilities	27
Community involvement	33
CASE STUDIES	37
Gayton Road	37
Bernays Gardens	47
Beacon Centre	51
Conclusion	53
Appendices	55

Chairman's introduction and acknowledgments

The key drivers in deciding to conduct this review were how to involve the whole community more fully in cultural provision in Harrow through the impact of the cultural strategy and the imminent development of the Gayton Road Library site. We soon realised that the Cultural Strategy covered too wide an area for us to cover with limited resources in one review and decided upon three case studies to highlight the areas that most concerned us - Bernays Gardens, The Beacon Centre and Gayton Library. The main themes that came out during the course of this review were that consultation with the wider community should be central to the development of cultural services; to develop clear aims and priorities; planning for sufficient capacity and sustainability and robust performance management.

We would like to thank all the council officers who assisted us over the course of our investigations. The help of Jim Shutt, Lesley McConnell, Javed Khan and Ian Wilson has in particular been invaluable. Special thanks are also due to the then Portfolio Holder, Cllr Christine Bednell, who provided the group with full and frank responses to all our queries when we met on 3 May 2007.

Further thanks are due to Cllr Nana Asante, for taking the lead on this review on some occasions when necessary. Additionally, the report would not have been possible without the help of Lynne McAdam and Ed Hammond in the Scrutiny Unit.

Full acknowledgements can be found in the appendix to this report.

I would like to thank Mr Tim Oelman for contributing his time, expertise and experience to this report and all the Councillors who took part. It is unfortunate that members of the Conservative Group have been unable to take as full a part as we would have preferred in this review, however my thanks go to Councillor Jean Lammiman for her contributions in the early stages and to Councillor Sheinwald for his observations in the latter stage.



Cllr Mitzi Green
Chairman, Cultural Services Review Group

June 2007

Drafting note

Appendices are provided at the back of the report. They contain details on the recommendations, a bibliography and a glossary of frequently-used terms.

A separate set of background papers is also available, containing notes from meetings and site visits and other information on the evidence-gathering carried out by the review group. It can be provided by the Scrutiny Unit to any interested person; contact details are located at the end of the report.

Methodology

The scope can be found at the end of the report, at Appendix 4. The review comprised a number of elements.

- Visits to sites within Harrow. Members visited the Harrow Museum, Canons Park, Bernays Gardens and the Beacon Centre in Rayners Lane.
- Visits to sites outside Harrow. Members visited the Arts Depot¹ in Barnet, Camden Arts Centre in Hampstead, Swiss Cottage Central Library in Camden and Willesden Green Library Centre in Brent.
- Meeting with the Portfolio Holder. In early May, members of the review group met Cllr Christine Bednell and discussed issues relating to arts and leisure development.
- Meetings with officers. Evidence was received from a number of officers working on cultural services. A full list of acknowledgments is provided at the end of the report.
- Best practice evidence. Evidence on national and regional practice was collected, as well as information on arts and cultural provision in other London boroughs.

What did the review not consider?

The review is one of cultural services generally, with particular reference to the 2006 cultural services strategy. The scope is attached as an appendix to the report. However, there were certain matters that it was decided should be excluded. These were:

- libraries. Harrow's library service is acknowledged to be one of the best, if not the best, in London. Naturally, as part of our discussions we looked at libraries in the broader context of their role as cultural hubs, but this was only insofar as their use to anchor other cultural spaces such as performance space and exhibition space, as is proposed at Gayton Road. It should also be noted that an executive-side review is about to commence, a significant element of which we understand to relate to library services. We considered that work by scrutiny on this issue would constitute unnecessary duplication.
- parks, recreation and public green spaces. An in-depth review was carried out on this issue was carried out in autumn 2005 by the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee, and we consider that further

¹ The centre calls itself "artsdepot" in its promotional material, but for the sake of clarity we have capitalised this name in our report.

examination of this area is unnecessary for the moment. However, sports provision has been considered by members in their review².

As such readers will find that, where specific cultural services have been mentioned, most attention has been paid in this report to the arts and arts provision. However, this fact should not preclude its relevance to culture services more broadly; in fact, the issues relating to strategic fit in the first section should be construed as applying to cultural services in general terms.

Why did the review not actively seek views from members of the public?

Under ordinary circumstances, in-depth reviews involve an element of public involvement. Sometimes this will be a public meeting, or it might be a survey or focus group.

However, this review has not taken these steps. It is certainly valid to ask why, for an issue as important to local people as cultural services, local people's views have not been considered, save for the involvement of a community co-optee on the review panel. This is doubly pertinent when considered in the light of the group's recommendations on community involvement, at section 3.

The group decided not to pursue this course for a number of reasons.

- 1) A broad indication of public involvement and satisfaction with cultural services can be acquired by looking at recent MORI data, and specific responses to the council's 2006 cultural strategy refresh.
- 2) A public consultation would have duplicated steps which will be put in train shortly, both as part of the Fundamental Service Review process, and the development of the council's new Cultural Strategy, for changes to council policy.
- 3) The nature of the review is not particularly conducive to public involvement. It has been planned and delivered as a review looking at strategic fit and best practice elsewhere, as a predominantly desktop exercise to feed into the development plans as part of the Fundamental Service Review.
- 4) Resource implications have meant that meaningful public involvement is particularly difficult to deliver quickly at this time, when the council is subject to some significant financial constraints.

² Sports provision is included within the council's Sports, Recreation and Open Spaces Strategy 2006-2016.

The recommendations

Each recommendation is supported by one or two key findings. The recommendation summarises these findings, extrapolating from the evidence a suggested way forward for the council to follow. These recommendations should not be considered in isolation, but viewed as elements in the review group's overall consideration of the topic.

Report structure

The main body of the report is divided into three sections – strategic overview, cultural infrastructure and community involvement. The second part of the report concerns the three case studies considered by the review group – Gayton Road, Bernays Gardens and the Beacon Centre. Each of these is also subdivided by the three main themes of the report.

Following up the recommendations: the next steps

In Appendix 2, a table is provided, listing the recommendations and identifying both whether the recommendation is short, medium or long term, and what the “measures of success” are. This allows scrutiny members, when they return to the issues in six months, to assess whether the implementation of the recommendations has been carried out, and has been successful.

We intend to propose to Overview and Scrutiny that our group reconvene in a year, to assess progress and to carry out further investigative work on the Beacon Centre. It may be that Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers that a challenge panel will be the most appropriate forum for this additional study.

Executive summary

Strategic overview

The council needs to identify a clear set of aims for the development of Harrow's cultural services. The council will look again at its cultural services strategy in 2009, and when it does it should address the many competing priorities and visions for the purpose of cultural services and seek to work closely with contracted partners and voluntary groups to reconcile these differing views. This may, in the longer term, lead to a decision to contract out certain services in particular to an independent body.

Internally, the council should take the opportunity of drafting a new cultural strategy to examine and capitalise on the way that cultural services impact on other services provided both in-house and by other bodies, and to establish a more robust approach to performance management.

Recommendation 1: The first step towards developing the Harrow Cultural Strategy in 2009 should be to identify key aims for cultural provision in the borough. Local people and groups should be consulted and enabled to take an active role in working with officers to carry out the work to identify these aims.

Recommendation 2: In the long term, the council should consider entering into partnership with an independent, charitable organisation to deliver arts services.

Recommendation 3: The opportunity should be taken as part of the council's new cultural strategy to maintain the council's commitment to placing the arts, and culture, at the centre of the way it thinks about the services it provides to local people, through strategic, tactical and operational links to high-level service plans and strategies.

Recommendation 4: A robust approach to performance management is key to the successful operation of cultural services. Officers should recognise this by seeking to establish a more robust approach to performance management, leading to a performance management culture in cultural services. Performance management must be kept under review by the scrutiny function.

Cultural facilities

The council needs to acquire an understanding of its current provision and of current needs as a first step in planning for the future. Strategically, the provision of cultural facilities should be linked both to where demographic indicators such as the Harrow Vitality Profiles indicate that need is most pressing, and to the council ultimate strategic aims.

Steps should be taken, as a part of the development of the strategy towards 2009, to examine and further integrate the role of Harrow Arts Centre and the Harrow Museum within the general arts service provided by the council.

Recommendation 5: The council should justify plans for the future based upon firstly a baseline understanding of current facilities and their use, and secondly on a robust analysis of the needs which need to be met for cultural services in the borough. The review group would like to see evidence of this at a later date.

Recommendation 6: The council should put its reference and reliance on a wide range of demographic information, including the Harrow Vitality Profiles, on a more formal footing for the planning of cultural services, recognising them as key tools for analysing the needs of local people and making long term plans accordingly.

Recommendation 7: Cultural infrastructure, and its development, should be planned with reference both to perceived exemplars of best practice in this field, and to the aims and aspirations of the council's cultural strategy, as part of a robust performance management process.

Recommendation 8: In the medium and long term, provision at Harrow Arts Centre and the Harrow Museum should be fully integrated within the rest of the borough's cultural provision.

Recommendation 9: Steps should be taken as part of the process for the development of the 2009 cultural strategy to outline a vision, for the HAC in particular, that permits long-term decisions to be made about the physical fabric of the main building and the site as a whole.

Community involvement

A more directed approach to community involvement is necessary, not typified by ad hoc consultation but led by local need. Consultation should be central to the development of cultural services, with the council using its current methods of consultation as a base to communicate with the wider community and to allow

their vision for the future of culture in Harrow, and the council's view of this future, to integrate on equal terms.

This will mean that the council becomes an enabler of local activity, providing support and – where appropriate – funding for local projects, carried out by local people.

Recommendation 10: The council should not consider resident satisfaction data as a standalone issue. Surveys should be integrated within a range of other methods of community involvement, thus allowing a more holistic view to be taken on the success of cultural services from the point of view of service users.

Recommendation 11: The council should reassess the effectiveness of the cultural forums. They should be used as one of a raft of measures to involve the local community. Community involvement should extend to individual residents and users on their terms, rather than on the terms of the council as a method to achieve its own ends in consultation.

Recommendation 12: The council's 2009 cultural strategy should be designed to place the needs of the local community, as expressed through community involvement activities, in a strategic context.

Recommendation 13: The council should take immediate steps to ensure that current consultation activities identify community need, established both by conventional needs analysis and community involvement activities, as the paramount concern in any cultural development.

Recommendation 14: The council and ward councillors should investigate the possibility of creating community funds which can be used by local people to carry out specific projects. Local people should be provided with the support necessary to be able to apply for and use these funds effectively.

Recommendation 15: The cultural services strategy should ensure that Gayton Road's pre-eminence as the borough's flagship community cultural facility is established and maintained.

Case Study: Gayton Road

Although the ultimate rationale for the project is clear, its method of delivery gives some cause for concern. We are concerned about the proposal for a 350-seat performance space, especially given the fact that the financial security of the site, in terms of ongoing funding, has not yet been guaranteed.

That said, we recognise that the council is having to make a difficult decision balancing the need for financial sustainability – which we consider to be a fundamental consideration – and the needs of the local community. We hope that a solution can be found which compromises neither.

Recommendation 16: Consideration should be given to the potential of the Gayton Road project to act as an element of, and driver for, the redevelopment of the town centre.

Recommendation 17: The main gallery space at Gayton Road should be professionally curated.

Recommendation 18: The Council should look critically at the proposal for a commercial performance space seating 350 in the context of the financial viability of such a venue.

Recommendation 19: The Council should make clear estimates of, and firm commitments to, ongoing revenue funding for the Gayton Road arts centre.

Recommendation 20: We consider an ongoing library facility in the centre of Harrow to be essential over the transitional period.

Recommendation 21: More detailed community involvement work, consulting local people and groups about the design brief, eventual architects' plans and fit-out for the site, needs to be carried out in tandem with the physical construction of the project.

Case Study: Bernays Gardens

The Bernays Gardens development plans have stalled, but evidence from their development illustrates the importance of effective prioritisation of capital projects according to need and local utility, neither of which has been made clear to us in this instance. The renovation itself is a commendable aim, but when funds again become available the council should look again at its plans to ensure that they deliver value for money.

Recommendation 22: Capital improvements to be undertaken within cultural services should be prioritised, to identify which are the most important for the council and to manage competing project priorities accordingly.

Recommendation 23: Artists' studios – and other space for creative industries – should be developed to meet need in such a way that the volume of space and the number of potential studios is maximised. Some

sites may not be appropriate for certain developments; a strategic approach should be taken.

Recommendation 24: As part of a prioritisation exercise, definite plans on the use of the site should be drawn up and the appropriate community groups consulted before any further action is taken.

Recommendation 25: Local councillors should be approached regarding providing funding for some elements of the development through the Prosperity Action Teams, in conjunction with community fundraising.

Case Study: Beacon Centre

The Beacon Centre has only just opened; little evidence exists on its success so far, and as such the group has decided to look at its operation in six months time.

Recommendation 26: The Cultural Services Review should reconvene in six month's time to consider the success of the Beacon Centre and report their findings to Overview and Scrutiny.

FINDINGS

Introduction

All councils are responsible for providing “cultural services” to their citizens. But when we talk about a responsibility for making arts, sports and educational provision for local people, what is our intention – or the intention of any local authority - in doing this?

We have found that there are a large number of reasons for council investment in this issue – some complementary, some occasionally contradictory. It can be to promote social cohesion, encouraging mutual understanding and the sharing of experiences. It can be to provide the catalyst for economic growth, in fostering the creative industries. It can be because, for certain services, we are obliged to do so by law. It can be to promote local well-being, and therefore improve residents’ satisfaction with the borough and overall happiness. It can occasionally be a box-ticking exercise, to ensure that the council performs well when it is externally inspected. Or it can be just for its own sake, because cultural services are intrinsically good and providing them through government funding is the mark of a civilised society.

In fact, we have come to the conclusion that the purpose of cultural services must be a combination of all of these factors. The balance between these factors is something which the council must consider and decide; different stakeholders are likely to have different views as to which of these numerous “priorities” should take precedence.

The only thing on which all are agreed is the importance of cultural services. We were pleased by the then Portfolio Holder’s statement, when we met to discuss our evidence in May, that she considers cultural services to be **central to what the council does, as important as rubbish collection and street lighting.**

Perhaps this is why it is so difficult to assess the success of cultural services. Recently it has been an area in which many authorities have dropped their Audit Commission “scores” for cultural services. We think that this reflects what is nationally, regionally and locally, a confused public policy picture that consists of a number of objectives and aspirations for cultural services that exist together in a form of precarious tension.

However, there is no reason why a firm hand cannot be taken locally to decide where priorities lie within Harrow. Prioritisation and robust planning are difficult in the current policy landscape, but hopefully this review will provide some guidance and direction for officers balancing competing priorities.

Many local authorities, grappling with financial issues and additional demands being placed on them by government legislation, find it tempting to scale back their commitment to cultural services, viewing them as a soft target for potential savings. In Harrow, we have been pleased to see that this has not happened. Plans are already afoot for improvements in this area. New local community centres are planned, with four to be opened in areas of particular need around the borough³. A new central library, alongside a town centre performance and exhibition space, is also planned at Gayton Road. The developments at Gayton Road having been a key driver in our decision to review this subject. Harrow Arts Centre and the Harrow Museum have also been successfully reopened after the collapse of Arts Culture Harrow. A number of other initiatives are planned as part of the refreshed Harrow Cultural Strategy. Additionally, it is important to note that Harrow's cultural services performance is high compared to other London boroughs, as judged both by the Audit Commission and a "value for money" comparison⁴.

That said, there is a challenging picture for the future. The Audit Commission carried out a cultural services inspection in March 2005, which while it revealed promising prospects for the council also identified some significant problems with the authority's cultural strategy. This has been followed by the insolvency of Arts Culture Harrow. These are all issues with which we shall be engaging later in this report.

Members and officers within the council, and interested parties outside, are now starting to consider the long-term issues relating to cultural services provision. This review aims to contribute towards this process. The report, and its findings, is divided into three sections. The first provides a strategic overview – a detailed assessment of the council's current strategies and how they compare to best practice, and high performing authorities in London. The second examines cultural facilities more specifically, looking at a couple of examples of sites in Harrow, and examining how the facilities they provide fit in with the overall strategy, to identify whether a robust "golden thread"⁵ exists between high-level strategy and operational reality. The third section relates to community involvement, examining the processes by which the council engages with local people, and plans for increasing participation.

³ As indicated in the 2006 refreshed cultural strategy.

⁴ Full details on the VFM comparisons used can be found in the bibliography.

⁵ That is to say, a clear link between a high-level council strategy and services being delivered to residents on the ground, passing through directorate and group service plans.

The review group has considered at some length the findings and recommendations of the Arts Culture Harrow Challenge Panel, finalised in March 2007. It is our intention that this report builds on the recommendations made in that report.

Cultural services – the officer structure

Changes are supported by a number of senior officers in what is currently the People First directorate. Ultimate responsibility for those areas considered by this review lies with Javed Khan, Director of Lifelong Learning and Culture. Three group managers within Lifelong Learning and Culture are responsible for cultural services generally. They are:

- Bob Mills (Libraries)
- Lesley McConnell (Sports and Culture - interim)
- Anita Luthra-Suri (Lifelong Learning)

However, the structure will soon be changing as a result of the organisational review. Sports and Culture will be redesignated as Cultural Services, sitting under a Head of Service post. This will be part of the new Community and Cultural Services department, led by a Director.

Strategic overview

Historical background

This review has been very much about identifying a future vision for culture in Harrow, rather than dwelling on past problems. However, to understand the position in which the council finds itself it is obviously necessary to examine some of the historical context to these aspirations for the future.

The council first developed a cultural strategy in 2003. Cultural strategies are not required by law – although the Mayor of London has asked that London boroughs introduce them, to give effect to the Mayor’s Cultural Strategy.

In 2005, the Audit Commission (AC) undertook an inspection of Harrow’s cultural services. The results were released in March 2005. Although the AC were complimentary about much of the work that the council was undertaking at the time, identifying “positive prospects for improvement” in their final report, they had a number of concerns, many of which related to the robustness of the Cultural Strategy itself, the high-level statement of the council’s aims, priorities and intentions.

The council attempted to respond to these concerns in a refresh of the cultural strategy, approved in summer 2006. We have looked at the extent to which the 2006 strategy, combined with the 2003 strategy, provides the council with the capacity and ability to deliver a robust cultural service to local people through to the coming into force of the next cultural strategy, which is expected in 2009.

Finding: Identifying aims

The first issue to note is the need to identify a clear aim, or a small selection of aims, for the development of Harrow’s cultural services. Examining the 2003 strategy, and the 2006 refresh, we noted that although both contain a number of relevant and important projects, operational actions did not seem to be supported by an overarching rationale.

Action points therefore range between the strategic, tactical and operational with little separation between the three; that is to say, strategic actions⁶ sit side by side with very precise, operational ones⁷. This may well make measuring the success of each action difficult.

⁶ For example, the development of linked management between area services and community groups.

⁷ There are several actions pertaining to specific DDA improvements at specific sites, for example.

This shortcoming was referred to by the Audit Commission, who said⁸,

A weakness of the [2003] strategy is that it lacks focus and objectives are not clearly prioritised. It contains a wide spectrum of priorities across the entire service area and as such is not sufficiently focused or streamlined. Good cultural services strategies contain clearly defined and prioritised objectives, supported by realistic timescales and indicators of success.

The establishment of aims and objectives was attempted by the 2006 refreshed strategy, but beyond responding to the inspection, and linking with priorities identified as part of other strategies, it is not clear exactly how the actions listed in the refresh have arisen. These are a composite list of previously identified actions that have been drawn together from a number of different locations.

The integration of the Audit Commission's recommendations and their potential impacts has been incorporated in a reactive way. This has resulted in the creation of a number of "key issues", which have been identified by officers as priorities for the service, which will "affect the delivery of the council's cultural services in the strategy's timeframe [2006-2009]." It is not clear how these issues have been identified, or why these six have been chosen above any others, or what the others might have been. They do, however, accord closely to the issues raised in the Audit Commission report (although other issues raised at inspection are not explicitly considered).

Taking a reactive approach will help with immediate, baseline improvements but we do consider that it may act to the detriment of long-term planning. Now that the council is clearer about its medium term aspirations, and has made commitments to building capacity (both in infrastructure and in officer support), we hope that the new strategy, in 2009, will take a more strategic approach.

We discussed some of the difficulties with identifying a specific rationale for investment in cultural services in the introduction. The complex interplay between competing interests to which we referred does not lend themselves easily to prioritisation exercises (for example, deciding which projects should be first in line for funding). However, the new cultural services strategy, when drafted, should at least address this tension. Wrestling with esoteric questions about the nature and delivery of cultural activities in modern Britain is of course not appropriate in a local strategy document. However, identifying how the council, its partners and local people aspire, through the actions in the strategy, to improve people's lives would go some way to setting out a way forward.

An ambitious exercise, working with local people and groups to identify aspirations and aims with cultural services can deliver would have a twofold aim – it would

⁸ Audit Commission, Cultural Services Inspection, March 2005, p11 para 32

engage local people at an early level in the formulation of the fundamental basis of the new cultural strategy, and it would ensure that operational activities developed as a result would be based on the firm foundation of a shared vision for this area of the council's responsibilities. These aims need to be translated into firm operational action on the ground, being mirrored in the same terms in group and service plans as they appear in the highest level strategic documents, thus ensuring that officers at all levels are aware of the council's cultural services priorities.

Enabling this significant level of sign-up to a concrete set of aims at the beginning of the process is we think crucial to ensuring that the council is able to properly engage with the voluntary sector in the years to come.

Recommendation 1: The first step towards developing the Harrow Cultural Strategy in 2009 should be to identify key aims for cultural provision in the borough. Local people and groups should be consulted and enabled to take an active role in working with officers to carry out the work to identify these aims.

Finding: Partnership working

The most successful councils have been able to work closely with contracted partners and voluntary groups to deliver cultural services – particularly arts and leisure provision. In Harrow, there are a number of active cultural organisations run by volunteers. Many of these are involved in the cultural services forums, which are discussed later in this report.

The most significant elements of partnership working in the sphere of cultural services are in service level agreements (SLAs) with organisations tasked with delivering a core function that previously would have been delivered in-house⁹. Leisure Connection Limited, for example, provides the council's leisure services. This agreement is currently performing well. The council is currently looking to expand its cultural service provision through the provision of some additional leisure sites, a programme with which we assume Leisure Connections will be closely involved.

Until recently, arts services were provided by Arts Culture Harrow (ACH), under an SLA. As has been widely publicised, a number of circumstances conspired to lead to the financial failure of ACH. A great deal of work has already been carried out to establish what these circumstances were, not least by the Arts Culture Harrow challenge panel, whose findings, published in April 2007, we have considered as part of our evidence gathering process. Aside from endorsing these

⁹ These agreements form contracts between the parties, setting out financial arrangements and the particular service that the council requires to be delivered in return for the funds provided.

findings, there is little point in revisiting these arguments. The important issue is the future for partnership working in the arts in Harrow.

The Portfolio Holder has informed us that arts provision will continue to be provided in-house for the foreseeable future. Voluntary organisations and officers alike need a period of consolidation and stability before any future structural changes are carried out. The capacity of the arts service also needs to be built on and strengthened before contracting-out can be considered again¹⁰.

We do consider though that the future for the arts in Harrow lies with an eventual return to a contracted-out relationship. A large number of venues, and services, across London have adopted an arms length approach. For example, Barnet's Arts Depot is operated by a charity under an SLA with the council, with a £300,000 grant from Barnet providing around a third of the centre's expenditure, with the additional cash provided by box office takings and, crucially, Arts Council matched funding. The Camden Arts Centre – in common with a large number of inner London arts centres¹¹ - is operated by a charity.

It might appear that this offers a convenient opportunity for the council to pass control and responsibility of this important element of the borough's day-to-day life to a democratically unaccountable body just because it is financially expedient to do so. Furthermore, funding bodies are, we recognise, drastically reducing their contributions at the moment. The evidence we have gathered, in fact, indicates that, with strong board leadership and independence guaranteed by a robust service level agreement, an independent organisation would be able to operate far more freely within the arts and cultural landscape.

This is by no means to say that we are approving of a return to the Arts Culture Harrow model of arms-length management – a model which demonstrably failed. We however agree with the conclusions of the Arts Culture Harrow challenge panel, which indicated that the failings of that organisation were because of organisational problems rather than problems systemic to the central idea of an independent charity limited by guarantee and delivering services to local people under a service level agreement with the council. We have seen examples of strong and successful SLAs operating and delivering these services across London. In some places, councils have SLAs with a number of organisations, each providing a particular service to local people¹². Some authorities have chosen to use the SLA framework to deliver the majority of arts services through a single organisation¹³. What seems clear is that – when carried out effectively – it can be economically and socially advantageous. As is the situation with Camden Arts Centre, it opens the door to the prospect of financial independence, with less

¹⁰ Evidence received from Portfolio Holder: notes can be found in the background papers (see Appendix 5).

¹¹ Including, in particular, Battersea Arts Centre, as well as the "artsdepot".

¹² For example, in Camden.

¹³ For example, in Barnet

reliance on council funding and a diversification into grant funding applications and fundraising¹⁴.

However, the important step lies in using council funding to build capacity before providing more autonomy to these services. We are convinced that the new vision for the Harrow Arts Centre in particular, and the thought being put into ensuring continued, sustainable finance and policy stability for that site, provide a firm foundation for a strong service that will, in time, mean that use of an independent organisation will be a viable option for the delivery of arts services, learning from the experience with Arts Culture Harrow.

Recommendation 2: In the long term, the council should consider entering into partnership with an independent, charitable organisation to deliver arts services.

Finding: Cultural services within the context of wider council activity

It is tempting to view cultural services as an add-on optional extra to the work of the authority. We were pleased to hear the Portfolio Holder's assertion when we met that **she considers cultural services to be central to what the council does, as important as rubbish collection and street lighting.**

There is a wealth of best practice in existence of how councils should integrate cultural services fully within their strategic planning, as Harrow has been taking steps to do. The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), in their document "Arts at the Strategic Centre"¹⁵ (AatSC), identify a number of places where performance management can have a role to play in making a strategy more robust. In the cultural sphere, effective performance management is especially important given the highly cross-cutting nature of cultural services themselves, which can impact upon a wide number of other council service areas. AatSC also suggests that an ideal authority will link its targets with those of its partner organisations, thereby making activity being undertaken more relevant to local people and by doing so increasing local capacity by opening up opportunities to work more closely with partners.

This is echoed by the situation in a number of local authorities with "good" or "excellent" cultural services scores. In a wide variety of contexts, local authorities have found that linking rigorous performance management targets with more general actions under their strategies have made it much easier to maintain the "golden thread" between high-level strategy and delivery of operational outcomes

¹⁴ Camden Arts Centre has moved from a business model which relied heavily on council funding to one which receives only 7% of its income from the local authority. 40% is delivered through an Arts Council grant and the rest through funds raised by the centre's three-person fundraising team.

¹⁵ Improvement and Development Agency, "Arts at the Strategic Centre: a self-assessment tool for positioning and embedding the arts at the strategic centre of local authorities", October 2006

(ie, links between plans and results on the ground). For example, of Nottingham City Council the Audit Commission has said¹⁶,

The Council has a good awareness of its weaknesses and where it needs to make improvements. This is clearly set out in its plans for the future direction of the service. The service has already delivered a number of improvements which local people recognise and is planning further developments.

This demonstrates that organisational self-awareness is key to ensuring that targets can be delivered effectively – linking back to the central principle of value for money. Performance management is one of the key areas where the council's recent corporate assessment has stated that improvement is necessary.

Of course, a robust performance management culture makes links to other high level strategies more straightforward. This ideal is at the core of "Arts at the Strategic Centre". A cultural strategy must link at high level into general council policy but these links also have to be strengthened at a local level. AatSC envisages a situation where,

[M]anagers are able to make imaginative connections between apparently unrelated agendas and policy areas to the benefit of the arts [...] arts and non-arts staff understand each others' priorities and ways of working, enabling them to engage effectively and to influence and deliver on each others' agendas.

In an ideal situation, then, formal links would exist between a culture strategy and others, but these would be enhanced by informal operational ties. For example, a culture strategy and a crime reduction strategy might share a target and an aim, of using community sentence orders to engage offenders in cultural activities (this is not an example of an actual target). Having the link in writing would not be enough. Officers on the ground would be responsible for using it to guide their work, thinking about the cross-cutting links and examining ways in which they can be enhanced and built on. This is an example of strategies being springboards to further action. AatSC proceeds from an assumption that strategies will not contain small-scale, stop-start operational actions, but that they will set ambitious – but achievable – general targets, leaving freedom for officers at operational level to deliver those outcomes within the parameters of the timescales and resources with which they are provided.

How does this ideal tally with the situation in Harrow?

¹⁶ Audit Commission, Nottingham City Council Cultural Services Review, 2006

There is significant evidence that links have been drawn with other strategies, which demonstrates that cultural services have indeed been considered within the context of wider council activity. The 2006 refresh clearly seeks to integrate the council's cultural plans within the broader aims of the authority. While these links are identified, it is still possible to see instances where duplication has the potential to occur – especially where cultural services and goals fall across both service directorates. Without a mapping exercise defining the impacts of all the actions in the strategy – and without an original assessment of all council projects and programmes affected by the cultural strategy, which does not appear to be present – links between the Cultural Strategy and other council business will be difficult to maintain at operational level. This is given further credence by the presence of a number of small-scale, stop-start targets in the strategy (in particular, a number of actions related to DDA compliance), which being operational in nature should perhaps be present in service plans.

Recommendation 3: The opportunity should be taken as part of the council's new cultural strategy to maintain the council's commitment to placing culture services at the centre of the way it thinks about the services it provides to local people, through strategic, tactical and operational links to high-level service plans and strategies.

Finding: Capacity

Capacity, both in terms of staff and financial resources, is constrained at the moment, and the bold aims of placing arts and culture at the centre of the council's strategic thinking, considering the opportunities that it can provide to all council services, cannot be delivered immediately.

We have learned of significant staffing issues in cultural services which are limiting the council's ability to deliver improvements and changes. The key role of Group Manager, Sports and Culture, has had to remain vacant for the last 9 months. Although there is an interim arrangement at the moment, this stopgap solution has, we are told, affected the leadership of services.

Effective delivery of key services, then, requires consideration of what aspirations the council has for the arts and culture; what the service is for, an issue we have raised earlier in this report. Can cultural services help to involve young people, develop social and community cohesion, improve educational and employment opportunities? All these outcomes are entirely possible but require **a strategic overview based on cross-cutting thinking**, which can take account of capacity issues and use the available resources to the maximum possible effect.

In many respects it is clear that high-level buy-in amongst both officers and members has resulted in some cross-cutting targets with significant potential

impact. For example, the strategy demonstrates that some thought has been put into how cultural services can impact on non-arts targets and outcomes (in particular community and social cohesion).

But the root cause for any perceived shortcomings must be said lie corporately rather than with the service involved. The council has a great deal of work to do to create a performance management culture organisation-wide. Building this within cultural services is crucial to the future of the arts, leisure and libraries within Harrow, but it is a challenge for the entire organisation rather than for just one unit.

Recommendation 4: A robust approach to performance management is key to the successful operation of cultural services. Officers should recognise this by seeking to establish a more robust approach to performance management, leading to a performance management culture in cultural services. Performance management must be kept under review by the scrutiny function.

Cultural facilities

We have looked in some depth at the cultural facilities available in Harrow. We have examined them in light of the Cultural Strategy and compared them to the facilities available in other boroughs. Although there seems to be a general perception that services available in Harrow are inadequate, it is surprising to note that they seem, for the most part, very similar to those available in many other outer London boroughs.

Harrow benefits culturally from its proximity and ease of access to the West End. However, this suggests that large theatrical venues, such as the Rose of Kingston Theatre, or even the Beck in Hillingdon, would not be sustainable in Harrow¹⁷, despite the borough's large and active theatre community¹⁸. Our investigations generally demonstrate that a concentration on physical infrastructure – which is expensive and risky to build and maintain – risks overlooking the important role within communities that can be provided by judicious use of grants funding. Likewise, neglecting considerations relating to infrastructure, seeking to fund local groups and outreach work while failing to provide a “cultural anchor” in the form of facilities, cannot be justified. As with many things, a balance must be drawn somewhere.

Finding: Effective needs analysis and the Harrow Vitality Profiles

The first step in identifying what services local people want and need – particularly when related to infrastructure, where intelligent and justifiable decisions about investment must be made to ensure that value for money services are being delivered – is carrying out an analysis to establish local needs. The first step towards this aim is to map existing provision in detail. This self-assessment of current activity¹⁹, leads into analysis of local needs, which can be carried out through a combination of surveys, direct community involvement and best practice comparison, things which will be considered in the “community involvement” section of the report.

An imperfect needs analysis significantly affects the way that a council can deliver services to local people. In the AC's cultural services inspection of Manchester Council, it was reported that²⁰,

the Council has yet to ensure that it has a full picture of all its users so that it can monitor usage and target promotion to underrepresented communities

¹⁷ This view was echoed by the consultants responsible for assessing the borough's cultural services in 2004, who, having conducted a needs analysis, found no evidence to justify a venue seating more than around 300 people.

¹⁸ This is an issue to which we will return, in depth, in our case study discussion of the Gayton Road project.

¹⁹ As suggested by the document Arts at the Strategic Centre, discussed in the previous section.

²⁰ Audit Commission, Manchester City Council Cultural Services Inspection, 2004

effectively [...]Community outreach work in sport and leisure is clearly targeted, however, Indoor Leisure facilities with the exception of the Aquatics Centre only track total usage of those facilities and so are unable to monitor usage by target groups.

In contrast, instances where councils have been able to ascertain the nature and needs of service users demonstrate an ability to base local services on local needs (in this instance Nottingham City Council)²¹:

The service understands the needs of the local community. It uses the results of a range of surveys and other consultation work to develop and improve services [...]Local people are satisfied overall with the services provided. The Council has improved services following consultation with residents and service users.

Needs analysis is, however, about more than user surveys, and the potential outcomes are more wide ranging than “merely” higher levels of user satisfaction. Understanding local needs ensures that services can be delivered in a targeted, and thus value for money, manner. Needs analysis can also provide important answers to questions about capacity and ongoing use, allowing future provision to be targeted²².

In Harrow, it is not clear that this baseline work has been carried out, or that proposals in the cultural strategy are linked to this kind of baseline analysis. London-wide data, providing mapping information collected by a number of arts agencies and providers, does exist. However, although officers also have access to information on the use of cultural facilities, and some baseline data is being used to assess the capacity of the service as it currently stands, more work needs to be carried out to assess whether the potential of existing facilities – not only operated by the council but by external agents - is being met.

We have been told that officers use the Harrow Vitality Profiles to establish need, for example in terms of procurement for local libraries, but the Portfolio Holder has said that the authority should not attempt to provide services directly targeted at a unique users group in an area where that group was prevalent. We understand the importance of providing an integrated service for people, which does not isolate them into notional “communities”, but we also consider that use of the Harrow Vitality Profiles to plan services more broadly would be a sensible approach. Their use does not appear to be institutionalised across cultural services and we feel that they are an extremely powerful tool which can be used across all levels of the service planning process.

²¹ Audit Commission, Nottingham City Council Cultural Services Inspection, 2006

²² Evidence from Arts at the Strategic Centre

Recommendation 5: The council should justify plans for the future based upon firstly a baseline understanding of current facilities and their use, and secondly on a robust analysis of the needs which need to be met for cultural services in the borough. The review group would like to see evidence of this at a later date.

Recommendation 6: The council should put its reliance on a wide range of demographic information, including the Harrow Vitality Profiles, on a more formal footing for the planning of cultural services, recognising them as a key tool for analysing the needs of local people and making long term plans accordingly.

Finding: Mapping and comparison

Normally it is standard practice in scrutiny reviews of this type to compare facilities in the borough to those across London, in boroughs that perform well in this field further afield and against nationally-recognised exemplars of “best practice”. In the field of cultural services, however, this is particularly difficult. There are many instances of “best practice”, but few if any authorities can be compared to Harrow directly. Many authorities have had high investment in culture for many years (particularly metropolitan boroughs in the North of England²³) and many are home to nationally-regarded venues on account of their location (many inner-London authorities fall into this category²⁴), in particular.

Population makeup also plays a significant part, as we have seen above, and as will be considered in more detail as part of the section below on “community involvement”.

It is, therefore, difficult to map current provision and compare it to a notional “high-performing” authority, because local circumstances vary markedly. However, proposals for improvement can be examined on the basis of their inclusion in the 2006 strategy. In fact, the strategy tends to hang around the concept of improvements to physical infrastructure. Admittedly, these are easy to identify and complete in performance management terms²⁵, but it is unclear whether, in the current financial situation, they are realistic or achievable. Many actions require additional resources.

This is a point that we will be developing further in respect of the Gayton Road project later in this report.

²³ eg, Rotherham MBC

²⁴ eg Camden, Wandsworth, Southwark LBCs

²⁵ A improvement to infrastructure as an action in a performance plan has the potential to be demonstrably SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed. See the section on performance management in the earlier section on “strategic planning”.

Recommendation 7: Cultural infrastructure, and its development, should be planned with reference both to perceived exemplars of best practice in this field, and to the aims and aspirations of the council’s cultural strategy, as part of a robust performance management process.

Finding: Harrow Arts Centre and the Harrow Museum

The function of Harrow Arts Centre is to be recast in light of the Gayton Road project. Now that the council’s aspirations for the HAC have become clearer, a vision for it as a cultural incubator has emerged which provides a new opportunity to enhance its potential as a site²⁶. The first steps towards this aim are being taken quickly, with the relocation of the Harrow Music Service to the site. Success is, at the moment, difficult to assess. We have been told that, as the conventional arts season runs from September to March²⁷, it is difficult to assess whether usage has returned to pre-insolvency levels, or indeed whether it has increased. However, initial evidence does indicate that lettings use has increased, although it must be borne in mind that part of the reason for this may lie in the move of the Adult and Community Learning, and Harrow Music, services to the site.

The future of the physical infrastructure at the centre seems insecure. The Council has committed itself to operating both the Harrow Museum and the HAC in-house for the next three years but beyond that no decisions – include any relevant to a potential disposal of the site – have been made. On one hand, an open ended approach is appropriate, since important decisions about the future cannot be made yet, while the HAC is still very much in recovery. On the other hand, persistent uncertainty about the future of the HAC might be counterproductive. It will deter decisions about improvements to the physical fabric of the buildings, and may result in uncertainty amongst service users. On balance an open ended approach is more appropriate, since the council cannot tie itself into a long term plan so soon in the recovery process – these issues require delicate consideration, thought and consultation.

Consultants were engaged in 2005 to look at the role of cultural services in transforming the town centre, taking account of the relationship with the Arts Centre. They said of the HAC that²⁸,

There is no doubt that that the Arts Centre will be needed and well used after the developments in the Town Centre. The Arts Centre would still be the major centre for participation, classes and workshops, and the hall would still be a good venue for the types of programmes that it currently hosts (this activity will be built upon to widen its appeal). Local performing arts groups

²⁶ Harrow Arts Centre Business Plan, April 2007

²⁷ Perhaps true for conventional performances, but we expect that community activities are ongoing all year.

²⁸ “Harrow Town Centre – Performing and Visual Arts Facilities – An Initial Study Report”, Brian Harris & Chris Moore (Arts Development Consultants), 2005.

will still use the storage and building areas. Some of the present users and programme would continue in the studio theatre, but this should, in due course, be replaced with a new studio theatre better suited to its activities and customers.

The Arts Centre has some attractive buildings and - potentially - a very pleasant setting. With investment in the buildings, improvement in support services (such as catering) and an overall plan for that site that provides landscaping, outdoor eating and drinking spaces, display areas and so forth, this could be a location that many people would want to visit: not just for the specific programmes, but also for a pleasant and interesting time out (in the same way, but on a smaller scale, as South Hill Park in Bracknell).

Whether the council's vision for the arts will allow investment in the HAC such as to make this a reality remains to be seen, but the potential of the site as a major arts venue should not be underestimated.

As for the museum, its future seems more settled. Our group visited it along with a number of other cultural sites in the borough. Progress on restoring Headstone Manor itself is on track, with work on the "ancient parts" having recently been completed. A number of proposals have been made for the site²⁹ which relate to its future as a major community resource. A combination of use of the buildings on site – the Manor House, the Tithe Barn, the Granary and the other outbuildings – could well result in the site becoming a significant hub for community activity. Inevitably, however, this will depend on the allocation of significant amounts of capital investment to properly restore and maintain the infrastructure.

Recommendation 8: In the medium and long term, provision at Harrow Arts Centre and the Harrow Museum should be fully integrated within the rest of the borough's cultural provision.

Recommendation 9: Steps should be taken as part of the process for the development of the 2009 cultural strategy to outline a vision, for the HAC in particular, that permits long-term decisions to be made about the physical fabric of the main building and the site as a whole.

²⁹ Continuum Consultants, "Headstone Manor Consultancy Project: Options Appraisal", December 2006

Community involvement

Community involvement is fundamental to cultural provision, particularly in the arts. Involving local people and ensuring that the services that the council and its partners provides is crucial to whatever aims that cultural services are trying to achieve.

We have, in this section, sought to identify those methods that the council uses to ascertain the views, aspirations and needs of Harrow's diverse communities, and to assess how current strengths in this area can be built on.

Many of the issues discussed here cut across our findings on "needs analysis", summarised in the first section of this report. The two should be read in conjunction with one another.

Finding: Resident satisfaction

One of the methods that officers use to identify community need is surveys on resident satisfaction. They are not, we consider, especially probative, and measuring satisfaction is not the same as assessing need. However, the council is obliged to take such surveys seriously, as resident satisfaction is a "key performance indicator" (KPIs) under the Audit Commission's inspection regime. Cultural services scores – and Comprehensive Performance Assessment scores as well – directly reflect KPIs such as this and maintaining a high level of performance in such areas is thus a matter of priority for officers.

Our examination of other authorities across London³⁰ demonstrates, however, that performance is uniformly low on this KPI. In many councils, scores sit below the target threshold, and resident satisfaction seems to be an issue with which even good authorities struggle. With this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising to see this position mirrored in Harrow, although at first sight it might seem alarming. Officers advise that work is ongoing to improve performance here.

Despite the understandable impetus to affect scores under KPIs, it is important that resident satisfaction surveys not be seen as the be-all-and-end-all of community involvement, nor that they be seen as something separate from the council's ongoing consultations on cultural services. The council needs to use this KPI as an opportunity to build a coherent approach to community involvement, which will help to improve resident satisfaction.

³⁰ See Appendix 4. Performance comparisons were made with three local authorities in particular – Barnet, Ealing and Richmond.

Recommendation 10: The council should not consider resident satisfaction data as a stand-alone issue. Surveys should be integrated within a range of other methods of community involvement, thus allowing a more holistic view to be taken on the success of cultural services from the point of view of service users.

Finding: Cultural services forums

The council has in recent years established a number of cultural services forums with which it can consult. These council-led and council-funded bodies aim to bring voluntary groups and interested members of the local community into the local authority to have a direct and sustained impact on decision-making³¹.

There are currently a number of forums, which are each at very different levels of capacity – Visual Arts, Dance, Music, Literature, Youth, Disability and General Arts. Each forum is endowed with £2,000 of council funds annually for its running costs. According to officers, the forums are viewed by the council as a “vital asset” – we agree with this, and with the concept that they play a very important role in germinating community involvement.

However, some of us thought that the forums are too rigid a method to use to consult with local people. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s Hear/Say review on community engagement, completed in 2004/05, highlighted the importance of communicating effectively with those who form networks and groups of which the council is unaware – this is particularly important for young people.

There is a place for the cultural forums. At the moment at least one is not fully operational³², but when all are up and running they may well provide one of a number of involvement techniques for the council to use. They seem to be representative of the local community, and they contain a wide variety of people with different skills and expertise. We know that officers are committed to using every avenue possible to communicate more effectively with local people, but there is an obvious risk in having a number of established forums that engagement and involvement activities will start and end with these groups – especially when they are funded and run by the council on its own terms.

This is not simply a suggestion that the council does more to involve “hard to reach” groups, a term which is in any case becoming more and more difficult to justify. It is instead a proposal which suggests building relationships on the terms of individuals and groups both working in the voluntary sector and those who may be, individually or with a group, informally involved in cultural activities. Supporting

³¹ The 2003 and 2006 strategies both make references to the forums in these terms.

³² Our community co-optee provided us with this information.

existing groups is a useful way of doing this, and we were pleased to hear that actions are under way to use the existing voluntary sector forums to do this, and that “street engagement” activities with youth workers, and with organisations such as Media 4 Life, are also under way.

However, the important issue remains that those being consulted should feel that their participation is having a genuine impact.

Recommendation 11: The council should reassess the effectiveness of the cultural forums. They should be used as one of a raft of measures to involve the local community. Community involvement should extend to individual residents and users on their terms, rather than on the terms of the council as a method to achieve its own ends in consultation.

Finding: The council as a leader in cultural services provision

We asked the Portfolio Holder whether she considered that the council’s role was to provide services or to facilitate local residents and groups. She said that it was probably a little of both; that the council needed both to lead in certain areas but also to service the needs of the local community where appropriate.

The council is not doctrinaire in its approach to cultural services provision. Consultation does happen and actions undertaken do reflect local interests. However, in an environment where citizens are demanding that public services are increasingly responsive to their needs, the council needs to do more both to understand what these needs are and to work with local people to achieve them. In this sense, we think that a more facilitative approach is appropriate. However, this is not to say that the council should constantly adapt itself to the changing whim of the public – especially as different local people have different needs.

We consider that, in the long term, the new cultural strategy should aim to embed this facilitative approach into the council’s plans. In the short term, this approach should be applied to consultations and large-scale development projects already underway.

Recommendation 12: The council’s new cultural strategy should be designed to place the needs of the local community, as expressed through community involvement activities, in a strategic context.

Recommendation 13: The council should take immediate steps to ensure that current consultation activities identify community need, established both by conventional needs analysis and community involvement activities, as the paramount concern in any cultural development.

Finding: Wider involvement and participation: managing and encouraging risk

The consultation responses to the 2006 cultural strategy refresh demonstrate a certain amount of cynicism amongst a number of local people regarding the effectiveness of consultation exercises. This reflects a general issue with “consultation fatigue” that tends to occur when consultation exercises are frequent but of a cursory or limited nature³³.

The solution lies in an approach that promotes community empowerment. In our case study on the Gayton Road project, we will talk about empowerment with reference to some specific examples. Briefly, however, involving the local community should feel that their participation should have some demonstrable impact on the issue being discussed and, moreover, that they are taking decisions on concrete issues for which they are responsible.

We think that the best way of doing this is not merely to consult over tactical issues which may be of only limited importance to many people, but to promote grass roots activity by establishing a fund from which grants can be applied for³⁴, specifically designed to allow local people to carry out community projects. This would be a separate project to the Prosperity Action Team (PAT) funds already operating across council wards, but with additional council support made available to local people to enable them to use the funds effectively. Community funds might be used to finance revenue spending as well as capital costs.

Inevitably this approach risks diluting some of the council’s strategic aims if it is not done effectively. Ad hoc activities being carried out all over the borough might be said to risk clarity and promote both confusion and duplication in terms of service provision. However, in these circumstances we believe that an organic approach is most appropriate. A community fund would most effectively be used to promote grass roots activity, but the council’s cultural strategy would have to be designed to integrate, and to respond flexibly, to activities in which local people are engaged. In this sense, the council could – in accordance with our earlier recommendations above – seek to facilitate community needs through being able to integrate them within the authority’s overall strategy for cultural services.

Recommendation 14: The council and ward councillors should investigate the possibility of creating a community fund which can be used by local people to carry out specific projects. Local people should be provided with the support necessary to be able to apply for and use these funds effectively.

³³ Overview and Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement, pp42-43

³⁴ These have elsewhere been called “risk pots”.

CASE STUDIES

Gayton Road: A New High Quality Cultural Hub for Harrow

Strategic planning

Gayton Road Library was constructed in the late 1960s, and now needs replacement. The decision has been made to use the opportunity to construct an ambitious new cultural centre on the site, incorporating a new central library, a performance space, an exhibition gallery and other community space, perhaps including an open-air theatre³⁵.

This is not the first time that it has been proposed to construct an arts venue in the town centre. Recent attempts date back to 1983, when the St. Ann's development was in the planning stages. There is now, however, clear political will on all sides to complete them, although there remain some uncertainties regarding the costs of the capital construction, notwithstanding the fact that these costs are to be borne by Fairview, the site's developer.

We have had an opportunity to examine the design briefs for the project, which will be commencing upon the closure of Gayton Road Library in 2008, and which is expected to be completed by 2010. The plans seem impressive and detailed. The cost of the building work will be covered by the developer, their costs being met through the sale of the Gayton Road site itself by the council. However, it is important to note that this arrangements covers only the building work, and that capital costs for the fit-out will have to be borne by the council.

We started by attempting to establish whether there was a need for an arts venue on the current site, considering the principles on the basis of need established in the main part of this report. Initial consideration of the plans raised significant questions about whether the construction of the proposed arts centre was justified. Our early evidence-gathering failed to reveal how the needs of the local community had been assessed, and how the development would fit within the rest of the council's existing cultural facilities and programmes.

However, evidence received more recently has given far more credence to the executive's approach. Our earlier concerns have proven to be largely unfounded. Although we have some concerns about community involvement, the ultimate rationale behind the project is now clear. Links with the Harrow Arts Centre and

³⁵ The report to Cabinet on 14 December 2006 stated that "Provision of a suitable outdoor space will be investigated as part of the proposals for land at Harrow-on-the-Hill station".

with the council's other community based arts venues has been made explicit, and the Gayton Road development has been cast as a venue to complement the Harrow Arts Centre, which it seems to be planned to treat as a cultural incubator rather than as a traditional, performance-based venue, as was considered in the last section.

The next step is to ensure that, in the renewal of the council's cultural strategy, Gayton Road should be seen as a central element of the borough's cultural provision, and thought should be given to its wider role in the regeneration of Harrow town centre. Valuable first steps have already been carried out in this regard: the Gayton Road library (and car park) is identified as a development "opportunity site" in the Town Centre Development Strategy adopted by council in July 2005.

Recommendation 15: The cultural services strategy should ensure that Gayton Road's pre-eminence as the borough's flagship community cultural facility is established and maintained.

Recommendation 16: Further consideration should be given to the potential of the Gayton Road project to act as an element of, and driver for, the redevelopment of the town centre.

Cultural infrastructure

The design brief for the Gayton Road development is very detailed, as is perhaps to be expected. The brief will form the basis of the agreement between the council and the developer and care has been taken over a number of months to make sure that it is explicit on the council's needs and requirements in as many respects as possible.

Inevitably perhaps, the brief concentrates on library provision. The part of the brief relating to the arts provision runs to three pages and contains information on the performance space, the exhibition space and public art.

Finding: Exhibition space

The design brief makes provision for exhibition space on the site. We have been informed that this will consist of 80 m² of professional space in a separate gallery and 15m² as part of the library, to be operated as a community exhibition space. This is smaller than space available at Barnet's Arts Depot, but a little bigger than that at Swiss Cottage Library.

Without sight of the final plans it is obviously difficult to come to a judgment on the suitability of this amount of space, but if the space is to be used for professional

artists' exhibitions, as we have been told, it might not be sufficiently sized. It is important to note that floor area needs to be considered alongside the amount of wall space available.

However, it is possible to comment upon the management and curation of such a space. We have seen different models for the operation of gallery space at four different sites – Camden Arts Centre, the Arts Depot at Barnet, Swiss Cottage Library and Willesden Green Library. All had different curatorial arrangements. However, we found that the Arts Depot's approach probably had the most to commend it. To support a professional gallery – different to the more community-oriented spaces at Swiss Cottage and Willesden – equally professional curation is, we think, necessary. Professional curation has, at the Arts Depot, led to the staging of varied exhibitions, bringing in professional artists which are producing works of quality which are also relevant to the local community. Such an approach is crucial to stimulating an interest in the arts.

Recommendation 17: The main gallery space at Gayton Road should be professionally curated.

Finding: Performance space

The provision of a 350 seat performance space is a bold move. Consultants, who were engaged on a project in 2005 to consider the prospects of a performance space in the town centre, stated of a 300-500 seat venue that³⁶,

There is very little subsidised drama, dance and music likely to be available to such a venue; much is funded specifically *not* to tour London [...]

Commercial product in drama and music of this scale is in good supply, however little is likely to be attracted to a Harrow venue. Most producers see the whole of London as one market for which there are established venues, a number owned or operated by the same producers [...] Most of the product is aimed at central London spaces and then regional venues around Britain and well beyond the Greater London catchment area.

Some of the product available in this area is already programmed into the Elliott Hall. Any new venue should not compete with this activity.

The north-west sector of London and surrounding area is well provided with a range of larger venues, many of which are currently used by Harrow groups for larger productions [...] All of these theatres, to varying degrees, rely on sub-regional catchment areas for both users and audiences. Each of the longer established of these has had periods of real struggle to survive, all suggesting that this size of theatre is difficult to sustain.

³⁶ "Harrow Town Centre – Performing and Visual Arts Facilities – An Initial Study Report", Brian Harris & Chris Moore (Arts Development Consultants), 2005.

These would all seem to be reasons for preferring a smaller, flexible performance space, as the consultants have suggested. However, the Council has decided that a 350-seat space – providing scope for larger, commercial productions – is more appropriate. We are pleased to note, however, that following earlier indications that the space would be a traditional theatre, it has now been confirmed that it will take the form of a more multi-functional performance space.

The design brief states that provision of the 350 seat venue is³⁷,

In order to provide a performance space for Harrow that can accommodate the professional touring and commercial productions that Harrow currently misses out on due to lack of suitable public venues [..]

This is further fleshed out in a business case which has been made for the provision of a 350 seat venue³⁸. This is based on the presumption that the space will be operated as a commercial enterprise. It relies on the calculation that an initial 65% occupancy yield on opening of the venue will rise to an 85% yield within a couple of years. On this calculation a 350 seat theatre will be more financially secure than a 250 seat theatre (due, it can be assumed, to economies of scale).

That said, the council has to make a particularly difficult decision here. The potential for difficulties was brought home to us when visiting the Arts Depot in Barnet. That site has two theatres. The first is a larger 400-seat venue, with an extremely high technical specification (it is a flexible space, with removable hydraulic seating which can clear the entire stalls and stage area to create a single flat space suitable for fairs, markets, community celebrations and so on). It tends to be used for commercial productions, as touring companies are attracted by its technical facilities which rival those in the West End. However, it is expensive to maintain and therefore its use for community-based productions represents a big risk – moreover, its high technical specifications and consequent high hire cost prices out a lot of smaller groups.

The second theatre, a 150-seat studio space, tends to be used for more community-based work. Commercial productions, by and large, will not be attracted to the theatre as it is too small for their purposes.

The management of the Arts Depot has proved challenging, although it only opened a couple of years ago. It is attracting commercial productions, but is still trying to maintain a community presence – indeed, this is its central ethos. This it is managing to deliver successfully – but with these two theatres serving different needs. Moreover, occupancy yields have proved difficult to maintain. Upon

³⁷ Gayton Road Development Design Brief, 2006, p15

³⁸ "Gayton Road Development: 250 or 350 seats?", Community and Cultural Services, June 8 2007

opening we were advised that they were only achieving yields of around 45 – 50%. Even now many productions are at a level of around 65 – 70%. This reflects the extremely competitive nature of the north London (and outer London) theatre market.

This presents the essential tension between the two uses – commercial and community – quite well. In our view, the experience at Barnet demonstrates the difficulty of trying to be all things to all people. Trying to provide one theatre for a wide range of needs makes this tension all the more potent. The original consultants’ proposal was for a 200-seat space, which would be suitable for all types of performance – a community venue for community functions, rather than a commercial space. Harrow’s proposal is for a flexible space that accommodates more people, which we feel combines two purposes (commercial and community performance) which, in our view, are mutually incompatible.

We do not consider that officers have, in changing this emphasis, fully considered the ramifications for community performance. The Gayton Road project as a commercial venue may offer more potential for financial security. But, with the north London theatre marketplace almost saturated³⁹, commercial productions may prove difficult to attract. Even if they are, with the West End twenty five minutes away by Tube many residents may consider that theatres in London are more attractive (given their heavy marketing on public transport and across all forms of media).

So, if a commercial venue might not prove viable, would a community venue be any more so? Possibly not. Although maintenance would cost less, income would also be reduced. It would operate more as a subsidised venue, providing an outlet for grass roots cultural activities. This is, we feel, what is envisaged by the Harrow Arts Centre Business Plan. However, in terms of financial viability, this also raises questions. Commercial productions, as we have seen, would definitely not be attracted by such a space. Marketing for community events would have to be much more aggressive and funding would have to be sought from sources other than the box office – fundraising would be necessary, and a robust business model would have to be developed to secure a long term future for the site.

Although – as we have stated above – we are of one mind that Harrow needs a performance space in the town centre, the appropriateness of seeing it as a place for accommodating touring and commercial productions is not proven. The financial rationale for this assumption needs to be looked at again. Thought should be given to the needs of the local community, particularly regarding the issue of pricing. An overambitious venue with very high specifications may well

³⁹ Evidence from the Director of artsdepot indicated the extreme competition between the number of medium to large venues in north London at attracting touring commercial productions. Evidence received from other London boroughs, and other nearby authorities (eg, Hillingdon, Hertfordshire, Watford), backs up this conclusion.

price out local groups, and although the aim of the performance space is not to provide a space to any amateur group who might want to use it, a professional approach can still be taken without compromising the needs and interests of those local groups who exploit the significant talent of local people but might not have significant financial resources at their disposal.

We consider that, on balance, the risk of constructing a larger venue is more significant. However, it is still possible to provide a smaller space with a relatively high specification for local groups, and thus to construct a venue with facilities which are currently unavailable in the borough but which is still accessible enough for local groups to use. However, the rationale and funding implications for this are significantly different.

This issue returns very much to the points expressed in our opening thoughts. What is council cultural provision for? Is the council trying to provide facilities for community activities – art for arts sake, with a space easily available for grassroots service users? Or is it a mainstream venue for popular entertainment? Maybe the two can be reconciled in some respects, but it is an issue that we consider deserves further urgent consideration in the run-up to the approval of the architects' final plans.

Recommendation 18: The Council should look critically at the proposal for a commercial performance space seating 350 in the context of the financial viability of such a venue.

Finding: Finances

The Portfolio Holder has informed us that the capital cost of the new library/arts centre is being borne entirely by the developer. Although we have not been able to examine the agreement in detail, we feel that the council has managed to secure a good deal in providing the substantial capital costs towards this valuable community resource as well as much-needed high density housing stock in the town centre, thus taking development pressure away from more sensitive areas such as the green belt. However, it should be remembered that the developer will only be financing the capital cost of the construction, and that fit-out costs (which may approach £1 million) and ongoing revenue funding will have to be provided by the council.

We consider that the Gayton Road arts centre must be sustainable financially. We also agree with comments made by officers⁴⁰ that the centre must have a robust business plan. We were therefore concerned when told by the Portfolio Holder that, as yet, revenue funding has not been secured for the ongoing maintenance of the arts centre. Of course, we are still at an early stage in

⁴⁰ In the "Gayton Road Development: 250 or 350 seats?" paper at p3

the process. With the design brief not yet finalised and agreed (at the time of writing), and with the opening of the centre unlikely to occur before 2010, it is perhaps not realistic to expect that officers and the executive will have developed detailed income and expenditure plans for the centre quite yet. However, the preparation of estimates of the likely annual cost of the centre, and consideration of funding sources for this cost, should be carried out as soon as possible – certainly before construction begins - to allow the cost of the centre to be taken into account in the council’s medium term and long term budget strategy.

Recommendation 19: The Council should make clear estimates of, and firm commitments to, ongoing revenue funding for the Gayton Road arts centre.

Finding: Interim provision

During the process of construction, the town centre will lack any library facilities. At our meeting, the Portfolio Holder indicated that some lending facilities will move to the Civic Centre. We agree with the Portfolio Holder that it is difficult to maintain the breadth of provision that currently exists at Gayton Road in a temporary site, and that this should not be attempted. However, the success of the Gayton Road project will depend on a smooth transition from the old library, through any temporary facilities to the new library. It seems that the maintenance of at least some library presence in the town centre is essential to make this transition easier, allowing the high footfall that Gayton Road currently experiences to be maintained. An earlier proposal to house some library services in a temporary venue in the site of the old MVC shop on Station Road seems ideal, but of course there are associated capital costs which, it being a temporary venue, it would be difficult to justify.

Initially, we considered that a way round this might be by negotiating with the developer to provide some of the costs – capital and revenue - for such a temporary facility. However, officers have informed us that such an arrangement is extremely unlikely. Despite this, we consider that the ongoing provision of library facilities in the town centre is so crucial that the issue should be re-examined, and all possible options considered. We do not think that relocation of some of the lending facilities to the Civic Centre will be sufficient, given the long period of time for which the building work will be underway, and the necessity amongst other things to accommodate the council’s central book storage and archive facilities.

Furthermore, officers inform us that staff currently working at Gayton Road are being retained for the duration of the build, and we consider that a temporary town centre site might provide an excellent opportunity for redeployment.

Recommendation 20: We consider an ongoing library facility in the centre of Harrow to be essential over the transitional period.

Community involvement

Finding: Design briefs and consultation

A high level of community involvement in activities will be crucial to the success of the Gayton Road project. Without it, and with the council attempting to make the site a hub for commercial productions, a potential tension can be immediately identified which could, in some eyes, affect the future viability of the project. The council needs to make the centre financially viable, so is committed to its use as a “commercial” venue, complementing the community use at Hatch End. But with the pressure to put on commercial productions, community utility of the site will necessarily be diminished to accommodate them.

Although this concern may well not be borne out, it is important that local people be given the opportunity to have a say on the development of the site. The design brief seems to have been put together by officers without any significant community involvement. The designs produced by the architects may not meet community needs, resulting either in costly delays to the project or a centre that is ultimately not fit for purpose.

The opportunity must not now be lost to produce a cultural space useful to a wide spectrum of the population. We have been told of plans to involve local people in the branding of the centre, but consultation should be more meaningful than this. On our visit to Swiss Cottage Library, we learned how four different consultation exercises were carried out between the initial design work on the project and the final construction. Obviously quantity does not mean quality, but consistent public engagement does demonstrate a willingness to take local people’s views into account. The time pressures do not allow the luxury of long, drawn-out engagement, but real conversations with the likely users of the library, performance and exhibition space is needed to ensure that, when opened, the building is fit for purpose. At this stage in the project, any consultation will inevitably have to be linked to issues relating to layout, probably taking the architects’ plans as the first consideration.

Moreover, public involvement in what can be seen as mundane or unimportant aspects of the building’s fit-out are actually empowering for residents. At Swiss Cottage, this approach was used to determine the colour and nature of internal fittings, and in particular the fittings for the Children’s Library, which were designed by a local artist who was given £30,000 for the project. Residents given this opportunity to have a real impact on the fabric of the building will have a

deeper sense of ownership and pride in the building than those who are relatively unengaged.

The most important issue is to ensure that such work is not seen as a piece of PR, or a sop for local people in place of meaningful engagement.

Recommendation 21: More detailed community involvement work, informing local people and groups about the design brief, eventual architects' plans and fit-out for the site, needs to be carried out in tandem with the physical construction of the project.

Bernay's Gardens: Artists' Studios in the North of the Borough

Bernays Gardens is a small walled public garden in Stanmore, located between the Broadway and the new Stanmore Park development. It is on the site of the original manor house of Stanmore which was demolished in the 1930s by the site's owner, who built a number of mock-Tudor buildings in the vicinity.

These buildings include Cowman's Cottage and a small park shelter known as the Cow Sheds. The Cowman's Cottage has recently become vacant, but the Cow Sheds have been empty and dilapidated for some time.

We are using the restoration of the site as an example of the development of community cultural facilities, something the council has, as an element of the 2006 cultural strategy refresh, committed itself to doing over the next few years.

Strategic planning

Finding: Strategic development

The council originally planned to renovate the Cow Sheds, but before long the plans had changed into a proposal to convert the site to provide five artists' studios⁴¹.

These plans have now stalled, mainly because of the council's financial situation. We understand that this is a temporary measure, until such time as a more detailed feasibility plan can be undertaken.

Capital costs were originally estimated (in 2004) as £208,202 for the renovation of the Cow Sheds, and an additional £40,350⁴² for the renovation of the cottage. These estimates will need to be revised in conjunction with any future, more detailed, feasibility study. Ongoing revenue funding would also have been significant – the project brief identifies the need to fund a full-time officer as a priority, and obviously there would be additional maintenance costs.

We consider that shortcomings in the 2003 cultural strategy, not fully resolved by the 2006 refresh, have led to this problem. The fact that actions under the strategy do not seem to have been prioritised, or timescales given, as well as the council's

⁴¹ Budget Estimate and Proposal for Conversation of Existing Cowsheds and Cowmans Cottage into Artists Studios at Bernays Gardens, December 2004

⁴² Ibid, p3. It was initially hoped that this money could have come from a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

financial situation, have resulted in projects such as the one at Bernays Gardens being put on hold.

When capital projects such as this are not prioritised it makes their delivery more uncertain. This adds to the risk that they will not be completed as a direct result of an identified need, but because it may be easier to do so at a particular time, which leads to the possibility of provision being ad hoc or not being able to demonstrate that it is value for money.

Recommendation 21: Capital improvements to be undertaken within cultural services should be prioritised, to identify which are the most important for the council and to manage competing project priorities accordingly.

Finding: Needs assessment

We have been advised that the construction of the studios do satisfy a particular need - that there is a shortage of space for professional artists in the borough is not in doubt. The site at Bernays Gardens was identified as a possible way to fill this previously identified need. This demonstrates that the council has in this case identified a shortcoming in its existing provision and found a way to fill a gap in provision.

The next section will consider whether the plans fulfil the identified need.

Cultural infrastructure

Finding: Artists' studios plans

We consider that, although they are not part of the same development, the plans for the renovation of the Cow Sheds and associated buildings can be viewed as an element of the regeneration of Bernays Gardens generally⁴³.

Renovation and re-use of disused buildings is always to be commended, and here it seems that the intention is to use them as a hub for the regeneration of the landscape in the immediate area. However, it is not clear from the plan whether the studios, as laid out in the plans, will meet the needs of the likely users. Given the information we have gathered from other London boroughs, artists' studios are provided in high volume in many places. Harrow is at a disadvantage here – many of these sites are based in former industrial units, of which Harrow has few. However, there may be opportunities at certain sites – for example, at Kodak – for developing a resource such as this in the long term.

⁴³ The business plan indicates at p1 that the report does not include the Bernays Gardens landscaping proposals, but the fact that they are mentioned indicates that there has been some cross-cutting discussion between the relevant officers.

Inevitably, renovation of an existing, but semi-derelict, building (including the installation of services) will end up being more expensive than converting a more flexible space. The volume of space being provided by the development may not offer the best value for money, given the potentially high costs of maintenance, which do not seem to have been taken into account in the business plan.

Given the evidence that we have received on the subject, it may well be that the Bernays Gardens plans – while clearly fulfilling a much-needed local requirement – may not provide the best and most value for money opportunity for a development of this type.

Recommendation 22: Artists’ studios – and other space for creative industries – should be developed to meet need in such a way that the volume of space and the number of potential studios is maximised. Some sites may not be appropriate for certain developments; a strategic approach should be taken.

Community involvement

Finding: consulting the community over developments

Significant consultation on the proposals was carried out in 2005. The pressure for arts studios has come from professional artists in the borough, and the architects’ plans were discussed with a number of groups before their eventual agreement.

However, the briefs and papers available do not make clear why Bernays Gardens is the most appropriate site for this development, notwithstanding the consultation exercise. For example, it has also been suggested to us that Bernays Gardens might better be used as the site for a cafe or a more general community space.

At the moment, with the project on hold, this discussion is somewhat academic, but it holds for the development of sites such as this across the borough in general. The likely user groups for the sites should be engaged throughout the design process, to ensure that maximum local use and value can be attached to any given project.

Recommendation 23: As part of a prioritisation exercise, definite plans on the use of the site should be drawn up and the appropriate community groups consulted before any further action is taken.

Recommendation 24: Local councillors should be approached regarding providing funding for some elements of the development through the Prosperity Action Teams.

Beacon Centre: An Innovative Model for Culture in the Community

The Beacon Centre, in the Rayners Lane Estate, has just opened.

The community centre provides sports, leisure and arts facilities in a part of the borough that is traditionally deprived. Massive investment in the built environment in Rayners Lane are transforming the area, and the Beacon Centre is the centrepiece of this regeneration. The council has entered into a partnership with the Home Group (previously known as Warden Housing) to develop this project, in what we have been informed is one of the first partnerships of its kind in the country. The eventual intention is to hand control of the community centre directly to the local community once it has become established.

Making a judgment on the Beacon Centre is, at the moment, not possible. Not only has the Centre only been operational for a few weeks at the time of writing, but two thirds of the housing units in the locality have yet to be occupied. Only when the Centre and the projects it funds have an opportunity to bed in, and it has an opportunity to integrate within the local community, will it be appropriate to analyse it.

For this reason, we have decided that we will return to look at the Beacon Centre in a year, and are recommending to Overview and Scrutiny that our group reconvene at this point to revisit the issue.

Recommendation 25: The Cultural Services Review should reconvene in six month's time to consider the success of the Beacon Centre and report their findings to Overview and Scrutiny.

Conclusions

Many of the conclusions we have reached – other than the specific ones relating to Gayton Road and community involvement – are long term in nature. This is intentional. Cultural services, particularly in the arts, are undergoing a period of consolidation at the moment. Staff and structures alike need stability and the best way to deliver that is to take stock of the current cultural and financial situation, and then begin to make long-term plans for the future, to build on the council's demonstrable successes in building the arts service back up from the low point of last December.

We envisage that the bulk of this will occur next year, in the run-up to the drafting of the 2009-2015 cultural strategy. This will present an ideal opportunity to put into action the recommendations we have made on strategic planning and cultural involvement. It will allow the council to integrate effective and robust performance management into the working practices of officers within cultural services. It will also allow the council to assess what it wants to deliver through cultural services, and what residents and users want. **Where views and aspirations collide, conversation, negotiation and agreement will be required on equal terms.**

That said, we also consider that many recommendations can be put in place immediately. Those relating to community involvement in particular can be put in place soon, and we hope that our recommendations relating to Gayton Road can be considered as soon as possible, taking into account the speed of the process leading up to the development plans being finalised.

At all times we have had consideration for the overriding principle of value for money. Our proposals deliberately do not try to circumscribe the council into taking specific policy decisions. We have intended instead to provide a possible route, through the 2009 cultural strategy, to a more stable and secure future for cultural services, and in particular the arts, in Harrow.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Recommendation matrix	57
Appendix 2: Full acknowledgments	67
Appendix 3: Glossary of terms	69
Appendix 4: Bibliography	71
Appendix 5: Additional information	73

Appendix 1: Recommendation matrix

The aim of this matrix is to allow members to monitor the implementation of the recommendations they are making.

Prioritisation – (TS)
 Requiring action immediately: S.
 Requiring action in medium term: M
 Requiring action in long term: L

Incorporated information - (Info)
 Evidence received from officers O
 Evidence received from “best practice” BP
 Evidence received from local people LP
 Evidence received from vol gps VG

Recommendation	TS	Identified officer/ member/ group to action	Info	P/ship (Y/N)	Action taken (6 months or 1 year)	Measure of success
Recommendation 1: The first step towards developing the new Harrow Cultural Strategy in 2009 should be to identify key aims for cultural provision in the borough. Local people and groups should be consulted and enabled to take an active role in working with officers to carry out the work to identify these aims.	M	Community and Cultural Services	BP	Y		1 year: key aims and objectives for cultural services either identified, or in the process of being identified, through active consultation with local people on the council’s priorities.
Recommendation 2: In the long term, the council should work towards the aspiration of entering into partnership	L	Community and Cultural Services	BP	Y		1 year: performance of HAC assessed and process for identifying future options for the

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CULTURAL SERVICES

Recommendation	TS	Identified officer/ member/ group to action	Info	P/ship (Y/N)	Action taken (6 months or 1 year)	Measure of success
with an independent, charitable organisation to deliver arts services.						site in progress.
Recommendation 3: The opportunity should be taken as part of the council's new cultural strategy to maintain the council's commitment to placing the arts, and culture, at the centre of the way it thinks about the services it provides to local people, through strategic, tactical and operational links to high-level service plans and strategies.	M	All senior officers	O, BP	Y		6 months: links to have been built between cultural services and other council services (in the form of an officer group) to better identify how cultural services can contribute to the council's corporate priorities. 1 year: preliminary work on the new cultural strategy to have been carried out, identifying high-level links between cultural and other service priorities.
Recommendation 4: Part of this re-examination of links throughout the organisation should result in a robust approach to performance management, leading to a performance management culture in cultural services, to be kept under review by Overview and Scrutiny.	M/L	Corporate Performance, Service Improvement, Community and Cultural Services	O, BP	N		1 year: identification of measures of success for all key cultural services priorities. Officers aware of areas of poor performance and able to target resources accordingly. Initial steps being taken to apply performance management best practice to development of cultural strategy.
Recommendation 5: The council should justify plans for the future based upon firstly a baseline understanding of	M	Community and Cultural Services	O, BP, LP,	Y		6 months: needs analysis carried out, or in the process of being carried out.

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CULTURAL SERVICES

Recommendation	TS	Identified officer/ member/ group to action	Info	P/ship (Y/N)	Action taken (6 months or 1 year)	Measure of success
current facilities and their use, and secondly on a robust analysis of the needs which need to be met for cultural services in the borough. The review group would like to see evidence of this at a later date.			VG			1 year: actions and priorities being developed for the new cultural strategy leading directly from this needs analysis.
Recommendation 6: The council should put its reliance on a wide range of demographic information, including the Harrow Vitality Profiles, on a more formal footing for the planning of cultural services, recognising them as a key tool for analysing the needs of local people and making long term plans accordingly.	S/ M/ L	Strategic Planning, Community and Cultural Services, PH	O, BP	Y		Now: officers to plan cultural services and ongoing funding on the basis of need as identified by demographic data. 6 months: Demographic trends identified that will affect the delivery of cultural services in the future. 1 year – 2 years: Actions and priorities established to meet these demographic challenges.
Recommendation 7: Cultural infrastructure, and its development, should be planned with reference both to perceived exemplars of best practice in this field, and to the aims and aspirations of the council's cultural strategy, as part of a robust performance management process.	M/ L	Community and Cultural Services	BP	N		1 year: officers to examine and assess best practice in preparation for its use in formulating the priorities for the cultural strategy.

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CULTURAL SERVICES

Recommendation	TS	Identified officer/ member/ group to action	Info	P/ship (Y/N)	Action taken (6 months or 1 year)	Measure of success
<p>Recommendation 8: In the medium and long term, provision at Harrow Arts Centre and the Harrow Museum should be fully integrated within the rest of the borough's arts provision.</p>	M/L	Community and Cultural Services	O, BP	Y		<p>1 year: Clear action plan in place for joint working and integration of staff and services within the council's cultural service unit.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9: Steps should be taken as part of the process for the development of the 2009 cultural strategy to outline a vision, for the HAC in particular, that permits long-term decisions to be made about the physical fabric of the main building and the site as a whole.</p>	M	Community and Cultural Services, PH	O, BP, VG, LP	Y		<p>1 year: consultation carried out to ascertain community need for the HAC site, and work carried out to identify key projects on the HAC site which will deliver maximum value for money improvements, to allow a long-term vision to be set out in the 2009 cultural strategy.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10: The council should not consider resident satisfaction data as a stand-alone issue. Surveys should be integrated within a range of other methods of community involvement, thus allowing a more holistic view to be taken on the success of cultural services from the point of view of service users.</p>	S	Corporate Performance, Community and Cultural Services	O, BP	N		<p>Now – 6 months: development of a suite of community involvement techniques to sit around and support the resident satisfaction KPI, to enable officers to develop ways to increase performance under the KPI in question.</p>

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CULTURAL SERVICES

Recommendation	TS	Identified officer/ member/ group to action	Info	P/ship (Y/N)	Action taken (6 months or 1 year)	Measure of success
<p>Recommendation 11: The council should use the cultural forums as one of a raft of measures to involve the local community. Community involvement should extend to individual residents and users on their terms, rather than on the terms of the council as a method to achieve its own ends in consultation.</p>	S	Community and Cultural Services, Policy and Partnerships	O, BP	Y		<p>Now – 6 months: strategy put together by officers to identify a new approach to community involvement in culture and the arts, with the cultural forums at its core.</p>
<p>Recommendation 12: The council's 2009 cultural strategy should be designed to place the needs of the local community, as expressed through community involvement activities, in a strategic context.</p>	M/ L	Community and Cultural Services	O, BP, LP	Y		<p>1 year: community involvement central to the plans for developing the needs analysis for the new cultural strategy. Detailed feedback provided to residents being consulted, providing information on action taken as a result of their input.</p>
<p>Recommendation 13: The council should take immediate steps to ensure that current consultation activities identify community need, established both by conventional needs analysis and community involvement activities, as the paramount concern in any cultural development.</p>	S	Community and Cultural Services	BP	Y		<p>Now: all activities being carried out by cultural services currently or planned for the near future should be specifically justified on the basis of a clear needs analysis, with that analysis being the overriding factor in any decision being made to take action.</p>

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CULTURAL SERVICES

Recommendation	TS	Identified officer/ member/ group to action	Info	P/ship (Y/N)	Action taken (6 months or 1 year)	Measure of success
Recommendation 14: The council and ward councillors should investigate the possibility of creating community funds which can be used by local people to carry out specific projects. Local people should be provided with the support necessary to be able to apply for and use these funds effectively.	S/ L	Community and Cultural Services	BP	Y		6 months – 2 years: investigation into the organisational capacity needed to provide this service, followed by commitments given on funding for future years.
Recommendation 15: The cultural services strategy should ensure that Gayton Road's pre-eminence as the borough's flagship community cultural facility is established and maintained.	L	Community and Cultural Services	O, BP, VG	Y		1 – 2 years: cultural services strategy to set out a coherent plan for complementary use of all cultural sites across the borough, particularly Gayton Road and HAC, on the basis of wide consultation on future use.
<u>Case Study: Gayton Road</u> Recommendation 16: Consideration should be given to the potential of the Gayton Road project to act as an element of, and driver for, the redevelopment of the town centre.	M	Community and Cultural Services, Strategic Planning	O, BP	Y		1 year: officers to integrate Gayton Road development and its likely effects within the town centre redevelopment plan and the planned private sector redevelopments being undertaken.
Recommendation 17: The Council should look critically at the proposal for	S	Community and Cultural	BP	N		Now: amendment of the design brief, and the final architects'

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CULTURAL SERVICES

Recommendation	TS	Identified officer/ member/ group to action	Info	P/ship (Y/N)	Action taken (6 months or 1 year)	Measure of success
a performance space seating 350 in the context of the financial viability of such a venue.		Services				plans, to reflect wider evidence base and provide firm justifications for size of theatre based on market information and best practice from elsewhere in north-west London.
Recommendation 18: The Council should make clear estimates of, and firm commitments to, ongoing revenue funding for the Gayton Road arts centre.	S	Community and Cultural Services, Finance	BP	Y		Now – 6 months: robust financial plans to be put in place for the ongoing revenue funding of the Gayton Road site, based on firm estimates of ongoing revenue costs.
Recommendation 19: We consider an ongoing library facility in the centre of Harrow to be essential over the transitional period.	S	Community and Cultural Services	O, BP, VG, LP	Y		Now – 6 months: proposals developed to deliver a seamless link between the closure of the Gayton Road library and the opening of a small lending facility in the town centre.
Recommendation 20: More detailed community involvement work, consulting local people and groups about the design brief, eventual architects' plans and fit-out for the site, needs to be carried out in tandem with the physical construction of the project.	S	Community and Cultural Services	BP, O	Y		Now – 6 months: demonstrable resident input, led by an information campaign in Autumn 2007, into the final interior design of the centre.

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CULTURAL SERVICES

Recommendation	TS	Identified officer/ member/ group to action	Info	P/ship (Y/N)	Action taken (6 months or 1 year)	Measure of success
<u>Case Study: Bernays Gardens</u>						
<p>Recommendation 21: Capital improvements to be undertaken within cultural services should be prioritised, to identify which are the most important for the council and to manage competing project priorities accordingly.</p>	M	Community and Cultural Services	BP	Y		<p>1 year: large capital projects to be prioritised on value for money criteria and funds allocated appropriately.</p>
<p>Recommendation 22: Artists' studios – and other space for creative industries – should be developed to meet need in such a way that the volume of space and the number of potential studios is maximised. Some sites may not be appropriate for certain developments; a strategic approach should be taken.</p>	M	Community and Cultural Services; Strategic Planning	O, BP, VG	Y		<p>1 year: needs analysis to be integrated within GIS or other geographical tools, to allow officers to identify and target areas where objective need for particular services is highest.</p>
<p>Recommendation 23: Local community groups in Stanmore should be consulted to ascertain whether the proposed development is appropriate in its current, and the project's priority assessed – and action taken – as a result.</p>	S	Community and Cultural Services; Policy and Partnerships	BP	Y		<p>Now – 6 months: relevant groups to be identified and consulted, with clear feedback given on the results of the consultation.</p> <p>6 months: firm approach on future for Bernays Gardens cowsheds to be identified.</p>

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CULTURAL SERVICES

Recommendation	TS	Identified officer/ member/ group to action	Info	P/ship (Y/N)	Action taken (6 months or 1 year)	Measure of success
<p>Recommendation 24: Local councillors should be approached regarding providing funding for some elements of the development through the Prosperity Action Teams.</p>	S	Community and Cultural Services	BP, O	Y		<p>Now – 6 months: ward councillors and officers to examine feasibility of part-funding with PAT resources.</p> <p>6 months: officers and ward councillors to develop strategies for the use of PAT funding for community developments more generally.</p>
<p>Case Study: Beacon Centre</p> <p>Recommendation 25: The Cultural Services Review should reconvene in six month's time to consider the success of the Beacon Centre and report their findings to Overview and Scrutiny</p>	M	Scrutiny	BP	N		<p>6 months: members to reconvene to consider Beacon Centre and report to O&S as appropriate.</p>

Appendix 2: Full acknowledgments

The Review Group would like to take the opportunity to thank the following people, all of whom made a much-appreciated contribution to the gathering of evidence and formulation of findings and recommendations.

Harrow Council & partners

Job titles are those pre-organisational review.

Javed Khan	Director of Lifelong Learning
Lesley McConnell	Interim Group Manager, Sports and Cultural Services
Jo Saunders	Service Manager, Arts and Leisure
Ian Wilson	Senior Professional, Heritage Projects
Jim Shutt	Regeneration Manager, Home (Rayner's Lane)
Phil Greenwood	Strategic Planning Officer
Lynne McAdam	Service Manager, Scrutiny
Ed Hammond	Scrutiny Officer

Other people

Tracy Cooper	Chief Executive, Barnet Artsdepot
Rebecca Gooby	Office Manager, Camden Arts Centre
Beki Pope	Deputy Director, Camden Arts Centre
Bob Gryspeerdt	Group Manager, Libraries (Camden LBC)
Neil Davies	Deputy Head of Libraries (Brent LBC)
Sue McKenzie	Head of Libraries, Arts and Heritage (Brent LBC)
Paul Forrest	Manager, Willesden Green Library Centre
Alex Sydney	Curator, Brent Museum

Appendix 3: Glossary of terms

Some terms used in the report are technical or relate to internal council procedures which may not be familiar to general readers. Although definitions are provided in the text or in footnotes, a general list is provided below for the sake of clarity.

AatSC	“Arts at the Strategic Centre”. This document sets out methods for integrating arts services at the strategic core of a local authority’s work, recognising them as key to deliver many of an organisation’s key objectives.
AC	Audit Commission. Body responsible for inspecting local government’s performance.
ACH	Arts Culture Harrow. Before its bankruptcy in December 2006, the organisation responsible for delivering services at the Harrow Arts Centre and Harrow Museum.
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Until 2008, the system by which central government assesses the performance of local government.
(D)CLG	(Department for) Communities and Local Government. The successor department to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
IDeA	Improvement and Development Agency. Government body established to promote best practice. Responsible for the administration of the Beacon scheme.
GLA	Greater London Authority
HAC	Harrow Arts Centre. Currently the only council-run building in the borough providing substantial services for those involved in the arts.
HVP	Harrow Vitality Profiles. Important demographic data relating to the population of the borough.

KPI	Key performance indicator. An important measure relevant to the council's external inspection regime.
Needs analysis	Assessing current provision, and planned future provision, and, from this base, going out to the local community to assess whether this provision meets the needs of local people.
Performance management	A discipline that permits the success of a particular service or organisation to be measured relative to targets established either internally or externally.
People First	The former council directorate responsible for cultural services. Following the organisational review, the department responsible for cultural services is "Communities and Cultural Services".

Appendix 4: Bibliography

The following sources are among those used as evidence in this review. Further documents are contained in the “background documents” pack (see appendix 5)

Council documents

Strategic

Harrow Council Cultural Strategy 2003

Audit Commission, Harrow Council Cultural Services Inspection, March 2005

Harrow Council Cultural Services Improvement Plan, October 2005

Other council documents

Members Information Pack for tour of Heritage Sites containing:

Proposals for the conversion of existing Cowsheds and Cowmans Cottage into Artists’ studios at Bernays Gardens, December 2004

Headstone Manor / Harrow Museum and Heritage Centre: “Future Development Proposals”,

Headstone Manor Consultancy Project: Options Appraisal, December 2006

Gayton Road Project Design Brief, April 2006

Harrow Arts Centre Business Plan, 2006

“Harrow Town Centre – Performing and Visual Arts Facilities – An Initial Study Report”, Brian Harris & Chris Moore (Arts Development Consultants), 2005.

Best practice

Audit Commission Cultural Services Inspections:

Rotherham, 2006

Nottingham, 2006

Manchester, 2004

Improvement and Development Agency, “Arts at the Strategic Centre”, Oct 2006

Audit Commission, “Public sports and recreation services”, June 2006

“Towards an Excellent Service: A Performance Management Framework for Cultural Services”, January 2006

Borough arts strategies: Camden, Barnet, Merton, Lambeth, Wandsworth, Brent.

Appendix 5: Additional information

Further information on the review can be obtained by writing to:

Ed Hammond
3rd Floor, W3, Civic 1
Harrow Civic Centre
Station Road
Harrow, Middx HA1 2XF

Tel: 020 8420 9205

E: ed.hammond@harrow.gov.uk

A background materials pack is also available, which contains the following:

- Minutes of members' meetings
- Evidence gathered from the Portfolio Holder
- Best practice evidence from other boroughs
- Notes from visits to Willesden Library Centre, Swiss Cottage Library, Barnet Arts Depot, Camden Arts Centre.
- Précis of various strategic documents

This pack is available as a PDF from the Harrow Scrutiny website.