March 2008

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report of the Scrutiny Review Group

Review of cultural services
Beacon Centre case study

FINAL DRAFT

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*Harrow*COUNCIL
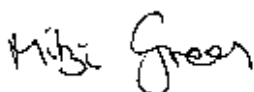LONDON
Scrutiny

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Chairman's introduction and acknowledgments

When the Cultural Strategy review group visited the Beacon Centre in 2007 we were very impressed by the state of the art premises built to serve the needs of a community in a socially deprived part of Harrow. We had chosen it as a study to assess how it would encourage greater involvement in sporting and cultural activities. At that time the centre had only just opened and therefore it was impossible to assess the impact it had had and therefore we resolved to return to the study in six months time, hence this report.

As this report shows the centre clearly has had a major impact on the community. Evidence was presented to us of tensions between Home and the local community over access to the centre and participation in its activities. The fact that such tensions exist demonstrate that there is clearly demand for sporting and cultural activities on the Rayners Lane Estate. It is hoped that the recommendations of this report will enable resident's wishes to fully partake of activities in the Beacon Centre, contribute to the programme of activities and eventually take more control.

We would particularly wish to highlight Recommendation 6 that in the first instance, the Council should convene a summit to set out a new strategic vision for the Beacon as the first step in the way forward.

We would like to thank everyone who helped us with this review especially residents and users of the centre. Special thanks must go to Ed Hammond at the London Borough of Harrow Scrutiny Unit for his support with this review.

Cllr Mitzi Green
Chairman, Cultural Services Review Group

February 2008

Methodology

This case study is the final element of the review of cultural services, undertaken during 2007. Its findings and recommendations should be interpreted as forming a part of this review.

Three meetings were held to gather evidence.

1. Meeting with officers from Home Group at the Beacon, 6 February 2008
   a. Jim Shutt, Beacon Centre Manager
   b. Maria Power, Project Director (Development)
   c. Ian Taylor, Community Centre Manager
2. Meeting with community groups / service providers:
   a. Bob Vesey, Harrow College
   b. Margaret Opare, RLETRA
   c. Tammara Mattingley, Light and Sound Workshop
   d. Karen Bhamra, Harrow Council (providing evidence on operational matters relating to the provision of ICT classes)
3. Meeting with Harrow Council officers responsible for providing a strategic lead for the council.
   a. Lesley McConnell, Interim Head of Service, Culture
   b. Steve Porter, Community Events Manager

The review group spoke to those involved in the strategic delivery of the service. Consequently, the recommendations relate to the strategic direction of the Beacon and the relationship between the key partners involved, which we have identified as Home, the Council, RLETRA and, to the extent that they are integral to the provision of education services, Harrow College.

Version History

Version 1   18/2/08 (first draft)
Version 2   20/2/08 (first draft)
Version 3   26/2/08 (second draft)
Version 4   28/2/08 (second draft)
Version 5   12/3/08 (final draft)
Version 6   18/4/08 (final report)

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Home and the Council to take effective steps to fundamentally reassess the performance management framework for the Beacon Centre, addressing concerns relating to data quality through an examination of the methodologies used for data collection.

Recommendation 2: The Council and Home should foster increased liaison between the different stakeholders in the Beacon, to ensure that local needs are being met and that funds and resources are being targeted at the areas of maximum need.

Recommendation 3: Home should develop a strategy to engage more effectively with the local community, and to put forward transparent policies reflecting the tension between the community use of the Beacon and the need for it to be financially sustainable, where such a tension exists.

Recommendation 4: The suggestion to appoint a Community Development Officer for the Beacon should not be pursued.

Recommendation 5: Steps should not be taken, at present and in the current management and organisational context, to establish a Community Trust.

Recommendation 6: In the first instance, the Council should convene a summit to set out a new strategic vision for the Beacon.

Recommendation 7: A multi-agency forum, incorporating all the key "professional" stakeholders, should be formed to establish a new performance management framework for the Beacon, and to maintain buy-in to the central principles enunciated by the local community.

Recommendation 8: That capacity-building needs to be carried out with RLETRA to enable them to operate as an effective representative organisation on the multi-agency forum.

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this case study is to look at the Beacon Community Centre in Rayners Lane. The Beacon is a community centre providing training, work and leisure opportunities for people living on the Rayners Lane Estate, an area which ranks highly on a number of different indices of deprivation.

The Beacon cost £2.7 million to construct. It opened in early 2007. The Cultural Services Review, carried out by Overview and Scrutiny last year, had intended to look at it then, but as it had only been open a couple of months at the time it was thought more prudent to allow more time for the centre to gather further information, in particular performance information.

The Review report will show that the Beacon is making a contribution to the regeneration of the Rayners Lane area, through the focus it provides on services for young people and skills development. However, the report will also show the possibility that the huge potential of the Beacon might be at risk from a number of problems deriving from the management and monitoring of its operations both by Home and the Council.

The report aims to build on the work carried out as part of the Cultural Services Review in examining the Beacon and the wider implications of its work. Many of the review recommendations relate specifically to the Beacon but they might have more general resonance relating to the way that the Council and its partners choose to provide community and cultural services.

The main report assesses the first year of the Beacon's operation, and its prospects for the future, in the light of the strategic context, the performance management framework, the relationship with the local community and user groups, and finance and governance. It then goes on to draw out some of the key findings from these sections to make some recommendations on a potential way forward.

Strategic context

The Beacon operates under a Community Use Agreement (CUA), agreed between the council and Home Group. The Agreement provides for a payment of £330,000 to be made to support the centre, and for the delivery of a certain number of key "aims".

The review group found that the CUA has some significant shortcomings. Firstly, the five key aims established within it are not defined or explained in any detail,

rendering it impossible to establish success or failure. There are also no measures in the CUA to establish what reasonable standards of provision and community involvement might be.

The CUA does not link, in any way, with the Council's Cultural Strategy[1], nor in any meaningful manner with either of the two Neighbourhood Strategies for Rayners Lane (neither of which are themselves consistent with one another). In the preparation of these disparate strategies and policies, the central concept of the "golden thread", the Audit Commission's assertion that high-level policies should link in strategically to tactical and operational priorities, seems to have been entirely absent. Instead, staff and members are presented with a series of aims, objectives, visions, priorities and outcomes, none of which link in with each other effectively and many of which, consequently, lack internal logic.

This is a conclusion which reflects, again, many of the concerns raised in the main Cultural Services Review report[2].

To be more specific:

- None of the aims in the CUA directly reflect the "issues", or refer to the aims, in the refreshed 2006 Cultural Strategy – except in the broadest possible terms.
- None of the "themes" or "principles" in the Rayners Lane Cultural Framework, "Celebrating Change", reflect the aims of the CUA. There are also a number of "priorities" and "actions" listed in "Celebrating Change", but it is not clear how they help to deliver the "themes" or "principles", or indeed how they link to the aims in the CUA. "Celebrating Change" makes no clear reference to assessments of local need and makes no reference to actions other than those which are extremely short term (ie nothing specific beyond April 2007). It is unclear whether "Celebrating Change" is still an "active" document. Council officers have led us to believe that it should still be regarded as such, although this remains to be seen.
- The Rayners Lane Neighbourhood Plan 2007-2012 – a document produced by Home Group – makes no reference to any of the above documents and consequently does not share any of its priorities, aims or actions with any of them.

All the above is notwithstanding the fact that the Council and Home Group have been party to all the above documents.

This all suggests **a significant strategic disconnect which is the root of some of the more operational problems that the Beacon, and local stakeholders,**

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[1] Although it should be pointed out that, as found in the main report on Cultural Services conducted last year, the 2003-2009 Harrow Cultural Strategy, as refreshed in 2006, itself has some significant shortcomings in terms of strategic focus, needs analysis and resource prioritisation.
[2] pp19-21, and Recommendation 1

have experienced. Fundamentally, there is no communal understanding of what – or, more importantly, who - the Beacon is "for". Consequently its cultural and community impact is at risk.

This reflects evidence received in the main body of the review and the findings which went towards supporting **Recommendations 1 and 3[3]** of the main cultural services report.

Performance monitoring and management

The performance monitoring situation is concerning. There is a performance monitoring framework in existence for the Beacon, which according to Home follows the terms of the CUA with the Council. **Home's evidence on this point is not realistic; the current performance framework is not adequate**.

Performance management has to stem from a clear idea of what is being measured and why. It relies on a sense that some issues need to be prioritised over others, on the basis of a set of aims for a particular service. Establishing an effective and balanced scorecard is only possible where the individual measures all contribute towards the delivery of the organisation or service's aims.

In the case of the Beacon these aims are unclear. The CUA provides only the loosest methods for controlling performance, although it does purport to establish a set of performance indicators. **The Council has provided £330,000 to Home but has not attempted to specify, at any point, in any meaningful way, what standards it expects Home to fulfil in the operation of the Beacon**. A lack of strategic guidance means that performance monitoring cannot possibly reflect either the Council, or the community's, requirements. The imperfect specifications in the CUA represent, in many ways, the root cause of many of the Beacon's current problems and go some way to explain why Council officers have been dissatisfied with many aspects of the centre's first year of operation, while Home are able to insist that they are exceeding all agreed targets. Both are correct in their divergent assessments firstly because the aims and objectives of both organisations differ significantly (as explained above) and because what performance indicators do exist are highly operational in nature, and relate only tangentially to the aims or to the wider community development purpose of the Beacon itself.

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[3] Recommendation 1 was that, "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 3 was that, **"**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."

Home have provided an assessment of their first year's performance. Indicators are focussed on the numbers of attendees and the number and frequency of clubs and learning programmes available to local people. There is a subset to identify whether attendees are from the immediate Rayners Lane area.

Home are meeting or exceeding all of these targets, and some of the evidence that the review has gathered encourages confidence in the future of the Beacon and a firmly held belief that it is an excellent and well-used resource. The centre is well-used – attendance even on the basis of the small amount of data that it has been possible to collect shows that the Beacon has more than exceeded its targets for users and attendees. The Beacon is a base for a huge range of services which are of a high quality and which have the potential to have a significant impact on the lives of local people.

However, the question is whether the existing performance data, on use particularly, reflect the reality of the situation.

Data quality - To be meaningful, targets and measures have to be built on reliable data. If sources of raw data are partial or incomplete it makes it extremely difficult to judge whether the final figures are reliable. This is the situation with regard to the Beacon Centre.

Much of the information relied upon to reach judgments about performance compared to targets comes from the deliverers of the particular services at the Beacon. Attendance statistics are based upon returns provided by those who run courses, but only 25-30% of the data required by Home for monitoring is being collected, even though the data requested is not particularly detailed. The paucity of information available means that its statistical significance is reduced. The figures are, therefore, not necessarily representative of the true position.

This issue needs to be addressed urgently if the Council, the community, and Home are to have confidence that the performance information is reliable and meaningful. This will involve looking at the methodology – how the data are collected. It may also involve looking at the performance measures that exist and examining whether they are appropriate. Requiring course leaders to fill in forms about their classes' attendees – which some have refused to do – does not seem to be working effectively at the moment. Officers might consider trying to address the reasons why some people might be unwilling to provide information, and amending their data collection techniques accordingly – subject to the broader implications of the review's next recommendation.

In brief, the problems with the performance management framework have manifested themselves in four key ways.

- No mutual understanding between Home and the Council about what the Beacon is meant to be doing, and what activities and opportunities are provided at the centre.
- Judgment on what to measure, when and how, taken entirely by Home, without any clear input from third parties.
- Home's judgment on measurement and performance management significantly hampered by an inability to collect accurate data.
- A consequent inability on all sides to agree on what improvements need to be made – or whether improvements need to be made at all.

The Council in particular should take responsibility for this failure. Work should have been undertaken at the outset to set some clear standards which could be easily measured and defined. No doubt the Beacon represents a new venture , many activities are experimental and that success is difficult to measure. But this should have been a reason to take much more care to establish an effective monitoring regime.

The focus should now turn to how this situation can be improved. The Council should work with Home to identify the potential for such improvements. It is clear that the current performance management framework is ineffective. An entirely fresh start would redefine the measures of success and failure for the centre.

Recommendation 1: Home and the Council to take effective steps to fundamentally reassess the performance management framework for the Beacon Centre, addressing concerns relating to data quality through an examination of the methodologies used for data collection.

Relationships with the local community

Management - This case study has not been able to carry out widespread public consultation on the success of the Beacon. The evidence from RLETRA may not necessarily reflect that of the wider community; furthermore, the evidence which has been gathered on how Home engage with the wider Rayners Lane community, can only be indicative in nature. However, the fact that RLETRA, who are expected to be directly involved in the management of the centre, have expressed a number of significant concerns leads towards the conclusion that relationships with the local community are a challenging area.

Many issues relate to involvement. One witness expressed an opinion that most activities are "private" – that most activities are not "for" the local community. Young people, according to this witness, wanted something more relevant to their needs, that the Beacon was currently unable to provide because of funding issues.

There is a perception that people from the local community are being "turned away" – that they are deliberately being excluded from activities. There is also a view that there is a clear divide between the community, and those who run the centre – "us and them". There is not a feeling that the Beacon really belongs to the local community.

The fact that this perception exists is incredibly damaging to the activities of the Beacon, given that community involvement in cultural activities is its primary purpose. There is a further perception that Home, managing the building, are unhelpful and unwilling to engage in community-led plans and projects because they do not fit in with what Home themselves are trying to achieve. This came to a head in October 2007 with a front-page story in the Harrow Leader, in which local young people expressed frustration about precisely this issue. One of the witnesses at the review expressed the view that the "fingerprints" of the local community could not be seen in the Beacon itself – it is still seen by some as a pristine, white box, totally divorced from the cultural context, and the community, which it is meant to serve. Even elementary steps towards improving community input into the operation of the centre – a suggestion box, for example – do not appear to have been taken.

The Beacon is clearly used by the local community, for a number of purposes and the local people are "involved". But they are passive recipients of services – mainly educational classes – not local people active in the operation of "their" facility. This is apparently not for want of trying. There have been a number of incidents where members of the local community have felt "blocked" in their intention to carry out activities at the Beacon. This is unlikely that this is due to an active wish on the part of the Beacon's management to exclude local people.

The Beacon's management team are committed to delivering a high-quality service for local people under very challenging circumstances. But a lack of consultation and active steps to promote community development and involvement contributes to a view that the Beacon does not "belong" to local people. Although meetings between Home and RLETRA have been frequent the perception from RLETRA is that these have been unproductive. It probably does not help that Home are responsible for the day-to-day running and management of the building, which further distances RLETRA from any semblance of responsibility for or ownership of the facility. Local people told us that they "have to go through Home for everything".

Attempts have been made by Beacon staff to further involve the local community, but there have been mixed success. Following the initial work around the redevelopment of the estate[4], the Council, considering that community involvement and development work at the Beacon was stalling, carried out more work with Home to try to prepare them for the imminent increase in community

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[4] By and large, the first "Celebrating Change" festival in September 2005.

development work they would be expected to carry out as a result of the Beacon's opening, but there were problems engaging with Home. Council officers have suggested that this might have been due to a lack of capacity within Home to carry out this kind of work. It is most likely that Home were not fully aware of what was expected of them, given the strategic confusion over exactly what the objectives of the community development work was, and is. A principal reason for this is that Home, as an organisation, appears to be inexperienced in terms of community development.

Direct communication and engagement – Home's principal means of communicating with the local community is through its "Grapevine" newsletter, which covers all aspects of their work on the Estate with a significant focus on the Beacon. "Grapevine" has been running for several years now. The witness evidence demonstrates that RLETRA in particular disagreed with the accuracy of some contents of the newsletter, which again reflects a mismatch between the expectations of local residents and the housing association.

Effective communication also requires public involvement and engagement. Council officers' view is that the input from Home in terms of engaging young people particularly has not been especially effective. Although engagement activity of a kind is being carried out, the view is that it lacks organisational backing and vision. Certainly this view is given credence by the significant concerns raised in this respect across the community in late 2007.

Relationships between partners

The relationship between some partners, the community and Home, is a difficult one.

Evidence was received from two major delivery partners of Home – Harrow College and the Council.

Harrow College is a major partner in the operation of the Beacon and is now responsible for providing a wide range of courses there. Harrow College informed that they are somewhat constrained in the nature of courses that they are able to provide on account of restrictions in Learning and Skills Council funding. All courses have to lead to a qualification to merit funding from the LSC[5].

Initially, courses were offered at the Beacon that failed to recruit. However, Harrow College subsequently carried out detailed needs analysis work, which identified some key perceived barriers. The timing of courses and language barriers both appeared to be key issues. Although it is unfortunate that these issues were not identified earlier, it is positive that steps were subsequently taken

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[5] This links in to some of the central points made in the 2006 scrutiny review into Adult and Community Learning.

to improve the situation, which has resulted in a situation now where takeup of courses is significantly increased. However, we still consider that further communication and needs analysis work would be prudent. Provision of educational services in this way is still highly experimental and Harrow College has taken some significant risks in trying to provide courses that are appropriate to local people, which makes the importance of close working between it, Home and other partners particularly important. In particular, liaison with local people should, we feel, be further developed. For example, we received evidence at one evidence gathering meeting that there appeared to be no links at any level between Harrow College and RLETRA, which seems surprising considering that they are such key participants in the development of Rayners Lane.

Further educational opportunities reflecting the needs of local people are now being put in place. ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes are being provided and uptake is strong. This success now needs to be built on.

Classes in ICT are also provided by Harrow Council. In an operational context, the Council's experience of involvement in the Beacon seems to have been overwhelmingly positive, in contrast to the problems which have occurred at a strategic level. Recruitment onto ICT courses run by the council has increased significantly since the opening of the Beacon[6]. The new facilities have clearly attracted people, and 4 ICT sessions are now run per week, where before the Beacon it was much more difficult to attract people. However, no evidence is seen to establish whether people on these courses then go on to use the Beacon's facilities in other ways. In many ways, this reinforces the view that users of the Beacon are only passive clients of governmental and third sector services.

The recommendation below should be viewed in the context of Recommendations 6 and 7.

Recommendation 2: The Council and Home should foster increased liaison between the different stakeholders in the Beacon, to ensure that local needs are being met and that funds and resources are being targeted at the areas of maximum need.

Finance and governance

Finances – **There is a systemic mismatch between what the community expect from the Beacon and what Home feel they are able to deliver**. A lot of this seems to centre on the issue of finances. Home are under significant financial pressure. The Beacon is – rightly – a high-quality facility and maintenance both of human and physical resources is expensive. Home's management expressed their view that the community do not realise that their expectations of what the Beacon can deliver must be different to what they could expect from the old

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[6] Classes were previously run at the old community centre.

community centre on Coles Crescent[7]. RLETRA advised that most activities at the centre seem to be "private" – conducted by, and for, paid-for guests who are using the centre for conferences, meetings, parties and so on, rather than for the benefit of the local community.

There is clearly frustration felt by some residents about the use of the Beacon. However, the centre must demonstrate that it can be financially sustainable and to do this there will, inevitably, need to be a role for the Beacon to operate semi-commercially, to bring in revenue which is crucial to supporting a community development function. Therefore, a balance must be struck. Council officers advised that the Beacon's prospective pricing, submitted before the Beacon opened, was too high, and as such the present pricing package in itself represents a compromise solution. The current solution, which provides free membership to local people and requires the payment of a nominal fee for services, represents an acceptable though not ideal compromise.

However the space is managed, there will be a tension between the need to provide facilities for the local community and the need to ensure that the Beacon is financially sustainable (in the absence of significant external funding). This tension needs to be managed in such a way that all parties agree with the balance that has been struck between community use and revenue. In some instances a way forward could be reached by which use for the community could be maintained while simultaneously securing revenue. Such an approach might be delivered through partnership working with other government agencies to carry out local community involvement and engagement work.

Some of the concerns expressed relate to the requirement that local people pay for certain courses and services. Home have stated that, as well as issues relating to financial sustainability, there is a secondary consideration in encouraging local people to "value" the facilities and services provided in the Beacon by charging a low fee. Certainly, the fees being demanded seem low, at the moment - £1 or £2 per session.

Notwithstanding this, further, effective, communication is necessary between the management of the Beacon and the local community to explain the decisions being made, and to ensure that decisions that have been made – and, most importantly, policies that exist to ensure the Beacon is financially sustainable – are fully transparent. It could be that the local community, represented by RLETRA, are dissatisfied because sufficient steps have not been made to explain to, and engage with, them on this important issue. This links back to the issues discussed earlier on communications.

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[7] The old community centre afforded local residents far fewer facilities and was managed as a rental space rather than in the more intensive manner of the Beacon itself.

Recommendation 3: Home should develop a strategy to engage more effectively with the local community, and to put forward transparent policies reflecting the tension between the community use of the Beacon and the need for it to be financial sustainable, where such a tension exists.

Community development officer - Officers from the Council suggested that these issues might be resolved through the appointment of a Community Development Officer at the Beacon, directly employed by the Council to bring partners together. Such an officer, it is suggested, would be able to provide more strategic direction to the Beacon's operations, complementing the facilities management role currently undertaken by Home Group.

It was suggested that a Community Development Officer would fill a gap in the management structure that Council officers consider has existed since the construction of the Centre. Management at the Beacon is, officers consider, focused on facilities operation rather than community involvement (there having been a post for a community development manager in the initial staff structure that was not filled)[8]. Appointing such an officer is therefore presented as a natural solution to the current difficulties.

Although this idea seems appealing it is unlikely to solve any of the problems identified above. The issues are far more fundamental and the appointment of a Council officer with permanent responsibility for some aspects of the operation of the Beacon, apart from having the cost implications, raises some significant concerns. When the suggestion was made it was expressed in terms of providing a link between Home Group, the Council, and the local community. Such an approach would not be viable within the strategic context described above. It would also incur a significant cost to the Council while delivering little community benefit.

There is a danger that such an officer would end up organising and managing compromise between three groups (Home, LBH and the community) with fundamentally different approaches. This is simply not viable in the long term.

Recommendation 4: The suggestion to appoint a Community Development Officer for the Beacon should not be pursued.

Community Trust - Other solutions have been suggested. Home Group have expressed an intention to establish a Community Trust to operate the Beacon in the future. This is a sensible aim and reflects a sincerely held view that the community need to become centrally involved in the management of the Centre itself. However, it is extremely optimistic to think that such a Trust could be effectively established as a natural successor to the existing Estate Committee

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[8] The reason for this is unclear.

management structure, within the existing organisational context in which the Beacon sits.

A Trust has numerous advantages. It would allow the Beacon to bid for funding streams currently not open to it under its present management structure. But a Trust would have to be effective. The concern is that placed within the organisational confusion, principally between Home and the Council, it would not be able to effect a strong, independent voice for the needs of the local community.

Recommendation 5: Steps should not be taken. at present, and in the current management and organisational context, to establish a Community Trust.

The way forward

Identifying aims – The suggestions outlined above, by Home and the Council, of a Community Trust and the appointment of a Community Development Officer respectively, are not wide-ranging enough. The governance regime for the Beacon needs to be completely overhauled. At the outset some new aims for the Beacon need to be identified, that replace the huge number of aims, objectives, priorities and so on that were identified in the earlier section.

All parties need to come together to develop a joint set of aims and objectives for the Beacon and for Council and Home Group community development activity in the area. Such a return to first principles, is necessary to draw a firm line under the strategic confusion that has existed, and that will continue to exist without a complete re-evaluation of all stakeholders' divergent views. Aims and objectives will need to be developed in the context of their being measurable, to allow the community, Home and all partners to evaluate whether they are being delivered.

This will prove to be extremely complicated. For a start, it will probably prove necessary to renegotiate the Community Use Agreement. It could be argued that the aims of the CUA being what they are, direct steps should be taken to achieve them. However, not only that they are vague, but they do not reflect the needs of the local community, as the local community would wish to express them. Any process which would result in the retention of these aims would, we feel, be flawed from the outset.

There should be a clear process for a new assessment of cultural and community need on the Rayners Lane Estate, in the context of the Beacon and the services it has the potential to provide.

This process should begin with a summit involving all the local community and those public and voluntary bodies responsible for providing services to local people. This would provide a forum for local people – which they have

hitherto lacked – to have a real impact upon the services that the Beacon provides and how they fit into the rest of the Estate, and South Harrow more generally.

It might be that the Council, Home, their partners and the local community might wish to take the opportunity to assess how the vision for the Beacon sits within the context of the wider Rayners Lane and South Harrow area, but findings are not being submitted on these wider issues as they sit beyond the scope of this review.

Recommendation 6: In the first instance, the Council should convene a summit to set out a new strategic vision for the Beacon.

Multi-agency working - The process should then continue through a multi-agency forum, bringing together representatives from Home Group, the Council, other bodies responsible for delivering services in the Rayners Lane area (for example, Harrow College, the Police and the NHS) and RLETRA. The forum would take as its central guide the aims and objectives outlined at the summit by the local community. Procedures would have to be established to ensure that it links effectively with the existing Rayners Lane Estate Committee, which is responsible for wider issues across the Estate.

The multi-agency forum would provide a strategic framework for the delivery of services to local people throughout the Rayners Lane area but would have particular regard to the Beacon as a key means for the delivery and access of these services. Consequently it would have a much broader approach to that of the proposed Community Trust.

The importance of cross-agency working was brought home to us at our round-table meeting with a handful of Beacon stakeholders. There seemed to be no regular communication taking place between, for example, Harrow College – responsible for significant education provision – and RLETRA, who represent potential clients for this service. This is an isolated example, but further research suggests that it may be indicative of a wider lack of communication amongst the Beacon's users. All users relate to the Beacon "vertically" – i.e. they communicate with Home, as the managers. But they do not communicate between one another "horizontally", allowing them to tailor what they provide at the Beacon to match other services. It does not appear that Home facilitates such a communication. The multi-agency forum, as a strategic body, would greatly assist to improve this situation.

The multi-agency forum would also, following a robust assessment of community need, be able to establish a clear set of reliable and meaningful performance standards for the Beacon, and for the wider community engagement work undertaken in Rayners Lane. This builds on Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 7: A multi-agency forum, incorporating all the key "professional" stakeholders, should be formed to establish a new

performance management framework for the Beacon, and to maintain buy-in to the central principles enunciated by the local community.

This is the only context in which the establishment of a Community Trust might be viable.

Recommendation 8: That capacity-building needs to be carried out with RLETRA to allow them to operate as an effective representative organisation on the multi-agency forum.

Conclusions

The Beacon was chosen as a case study for this review as there is the potential to use the lessons learned in its first year of operation to decide whether it, as a model, could be rolled out for similar sites around the borough. It was also chosen as a means of identifying how greater community engagement in cultural activities might be secured.

The potential is significant. The Beacon could provide a model for how such centres would operate in the future – led by local needs, providing crucial local services and acting as a catalyst for the regeneration of a whole community. The evidence gathered during this case study demonstrates that the Beacon is falling short of this aim, but it remains viable and represents the kind of innovative thinking that should, with the commitment of all stakeholders, lead to significant opportunities in terms of access to cultural facilities for some of the borough's most deprived residents.

Such ambition requires long-term commitment on all sides. The experience of the Beacon, though mixed, is extremely valuable.

The fundamental issue relates to what, and who, the Beacon is "for". It is clearly a vital community asset but its worth is being constrained by a collective uncertainty defining its objectives and the aims for its use. To resolve this issue, it will be necessary to return to first principles, and to remove the confusing array of different strategies and policies, and different management bodies, and replace it with a single, multi-agency regime with the local community at its centre.

The findings on how the local community should be involved build on the work that Overview and Scrutiny undertook in 2005 as part of the Hear/Say Review of Community Engagement. Evidence was received of a number of instances where RLETRA feel that they have been cut out of the management of the Beacon, a facility ostensibly run for their benefit.

It is easy to defend such actions by saying that community groups, and individual residents, lack the capacity to engage consistently with complex issues and fail to understand financial and organisational pressures, but the responsibility exists on professionals, as Recommendation 7 emphasises, to build capacity in the local community to assist in the performance of these functions.

If a facility – whatever its principal purpose - is to be built for the benefit of the local community then the local community have to be directly involved in its operation, in a meaningful way. The impetus for public involvement in cultural activities is even stronger. Culture and cultural experiences are irrelevant unless they speak directly to their audience.

As investigations regarding the Beacon continued it became more and more clear that a fundamental reappraisal of governance – involving all partners – would be necessary to secure effective improvements.

If the council wishes to plan for more community cultural centres like the Beacon in Harrow, the approach that they will have to take for each one will have to reflect the broad principles established in this report – that the public need to be directly involved, that other partners needs should be fully integrated, and that planning must be carried out within the framework of the broad priorities for both the borough, and, most importantly, for the area in which the proposed centre or facility will be sited.

If the Council expects such new facilities to serve community needs, it has to be prepared to step up and support the community, who will lead actively on what these needs are.

Appendices

Appendix 1
Summary of evidence supporting recommendations and explanation of methodology

Appendix 2
Additional evidence received from Home Group

Appendix 1
Summary of evidence supporting recommendations and explanation of methodology

Recommendation	Evidence base
Home and the Council should take steps to fundamentally reassess the performance management framework for the Beacon Centre, addressing concerns relating to data quality through an examination of the methodologies used for data collection.	Community Use Agreement Cultural Strategy Rayners Lane Cultural Framework Rayners Lane Neighbourhood Plan Rayners Lane Community Centre Business Plan Performance data from Home Group Oral evidence from Home Oral evidence from LBH Recommendations 1 and 3, Cultural Services Review report, 2007
The Council and Home should foster increased liaison between the different stakeholders in the Beacon, to ensure that local needs are being met and that funds and resources are being targeted at the areas of maximum need.	Oral evidence from Home Oral evidence from RLETRA Oral evidence from LBH Oral evidence from Harrow College Oral evidence from Light and Sound Workshop Performance data from Home Group Grapevine newsletter, various editions
Home should develop a strategy to engage more effectively with the local community, and to put forward transparent policies reflecting the tension between the community use of the Beacon and the need for its to be financially sustainable, where such a tension exists.	Oral evidence from Home Oral evidence from RLETRA Oral evidence from LBH Community Use Agreement Beacon Centre Business Plan
The proposal to appoint a Community Development Officer for the Beacon Centre should not be pursued.	Oral evidence from LBH Findings from previous recommendations
Steps should not be taken, at present and in the current management and organisational context, to establish a Community Trust.	Oral evidence from RLETRA Oral evidence from Home Oral evidence from LBH Community Use Agreement Evidence from www.partnerships.org.uk
In the first instance, the Council should convene a summit to set out a new strategic vision for the Beacon.	Findings from previous recommendations Community involvement section of 2007

	Cultural Services report.
A multi-agency forum, incorporating all the key "professional" stakeholders, should be formed to establish a new performance management framework for the Beacon, and to maintain buy-in to the central principles enunciated by the local community.	Oral evidence from RLETRA Oral evidence from Harrow College Findings from previous recommendations
That capacity-building needs to be carried out with RLETRA to enable them to operate as an effective representative organisation on the multi-agency forum.	Oral evidence from RLETRA Oral evidence from Home Oral evidence from LBH Findings from previous recommendations

Explanation of methodology

It has been thought useful to address some points on the review's methodology additional to the comments made in the body of the report.

Witnesses

The review's focus was on the strategic issues which the group felt sat behind the dissatisfaction about the operation of the Beacon Centre. For these purposes it was appropriate to involve those partners who are involved, in depth, in operational and management issues in the Beacon or who have a significant interest in it and its functions. It was decided that these key partners were Home, RLETRA. and the Council, as well as Harrow College in their role as a key education provider at the Centre.

Attempts were made to engage with a wider selection of groups and services who provide classes etc at the Beacon but these attempts were largely unsuccessful

Given the group's inability in the timescale provided by the review, and within the review's scope, to consult more widely with other users, the review does not purport to make recommendations which go beyond the strategic control of the Beacon itself. No evidence has been gathered that is not backed up by evidence from a partner (as identified above) and consequently validated by reference to the plans, policies and documents which the group has seen and to which detailed consideration was given in the report

Written documentation

Written documentation was provided to the review group by both Home and the Council. In summary, this documentation was as follows.

- Harrow Council Cultural Strategy
- Rayners Lane Neighbourhood Plan
- Rayners Lane Cultural Framework
- Beacon Centre Community Use Agreement
- Beacon Centre Business Plan
- Various issues of the "Grapevine" newsletter

Following the end of the evidence-gathering process, additional information was provided to the review group by the Council and Home Group. The content of the additional evidence from the Council is not referenced in the report, but the additional evidence was reviewed to ensure that it did not conflict with the review's findings. It was the group's view that it did not.

The further evidence from home was provided on 18 April 2008.