

CULTURAL SERVICES COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT REPORT

Report By: Head of Economic and Community Services

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

1. To inform the Committee of the outcome of the Cultural Services Inspection by the Audit Commission.

Financial Implications

2. The implementation of the improvement plan could have financial implications.

Background

3. The Audit Commission inspectors were on site between 5th and 9th February 2007 meeting a range of Members, officers and partners to make a judgement on the quality of cultural services provided by the local authority. As well as interviews this judgement was based on a review of documents sent to the inspectors. The judgement is divided into two parts – how good is the service and this can be out of poor, fair, good, or excellent, the second part is concerned with what are the prospects for improvement and that can be out of poor, uncertain, promising or excellent. The result for Herefordshire is *“fair service that have promising prospects for improvement”*.
4. The last cultural services inspection was in 2002 based on an evaluation of the library services which received a rating of a “fair service with uncertain prospects”. The inspection for 2007 was based on “a harder test” and the full range of cultural services provided and funded by the local authority covering arts development, public art, arts centres and theatres, sports development, leisure centres, parks and open spaces, heritage and conservation, museums, historic buildings, archaeology, countryside access, public rights of way, libraries, archives and records, and tourism.
5. A set of “key lines of enquiry” was supplied by the Audit Commission which formed the basis of the investigation. This specifically focused on outcomes for people, value for money, links to corporate and countywide plans, performance management, partnership and procurement. For this inspection there was a particular focus on the contribution cultural services makes to economic vitality and services for older people.
6. There were some very positive outcomes of the report. There was acknowledgement that there had been considerable improvement in the last four years with the building of the swimming pool in Leominster; establishment of the Bromyard and Kington centres which have improved library facilities; enhanced services at the Record Office and developments of neighbourhood parks. The report also concluded that the service was extremely successful in raising external funding, and a range of

schemes took place that improve quality of life for residents, particularly children and young people. Also, that there was good leadership and management, with strong commitment from staff and partners.

7. In terms of recommendations the key areas focus on the following:
- Not meeting all the public library standards, concerned with book stock and opening hours;
 - Not all areas have services standards displayed and therefore a lack of awareness by customers of what is expected from a specific service;
 - Ledbury Library is not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act and Hereford Library is inadequate for customer requirements;
 - Performance indicators show usage and satisfaction at about average compared to other local authorities, and this would be higher in a “good” service (though it was acknowledged that most services receive below average levels of funding);
 - A need to demonstrate value for money for cultural services as there is a lack of benchmarking for costs of services;
 - Demonstrate the value of cultural service to quality of life, health, social inclusion and economic vitality by introducing performance outcomes to be measured year on year;
 - Review contractual and procurement arrangements with partner organisations, namely Halo Leisure Trust and the Courtyard;
 - Assess the Value of tourism, specifically the cost of running tourist information centres.
8. Appendix 1 lifts comments from the inspection report which will form the basis on an action plan for improvement. This action plan will be presented to Corporate Management Board and Cabinet. A full copy of the inspection report is attached at Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT, subject to any comments Members wish to make, the report be noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified