

ACTION PLAN FOR THE CULTURAL SERVICE CPA REVIEW

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

CABINET

6TH SEPTEMBER, 2007

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To consider the Action Plan emerging from the CPA inspection of Cultural Services by the Audit Commission.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation

THAT the action plan be endorsed.

Reasons

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 over 100 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 has promising prospects for improvement”*.

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.

A set of “key lines of enquiry” was supplied by the Audit Commission which formed the basis of the inspection. 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.

A full copy of the inspectors report is available in the Members Room.

Considerations

1. 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. It was noted 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. It was also concluded, that there was good leadership and management, with strong commitment from staff and partners. The inspection also identified a number of areas where improvements could be made and these form the focus of this report, with proposals for an action plan to address the issues raised.
2. The key areas which are reflected in the recommendations focus on:
 - Not meeting all the public library standards, concerned with book stock and opening hours;
 - Not all areas have service standards displayed and therefore there is 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.
3. An action plan is attached (Appendix 1) which sets out the steps the Council will take to address the Inspectors recommendations and findings. A number of the actions have a cross directorate responsibility and as such relevant officers have been involved in developing the action plan. The action plan will be monitored by the Head of Economic and Community Services on a bi-monthly basis, with regular progress reports to the Cabinet Member.

Risk Management

There are several risks associated with implementation of the action plan:

- Some areas need resource to implement and a judgement needs to be made in terms of level of resource balanced with value of the return, e.g. investment in crèche

facilities at leisure centres

- Reliance on factors outside the control of the council, e.g. decision by the Big Lottery Fund on supporting a new library for Ledbury, or government guidance on performance indicators.

Alternative Options

Recommendations submitted by the audit commission are not addressed and the consequences accepted by the local authority.

Consultees

Lead officers as highlighted on the action plan.

Appendices

Action Plan for CPA Cultural Services Inspection

Background Papers

Cultural Services inspection report for Herefordshire, 2007