

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

EXECUTIVE MEETING

11th October 2004

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION, ARTS & LIBRARIES &
ENVIRONMENT

FOR ACTION

NAME OF WARD ALL

**REPORT TITLE : AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION OF CULTURAL SERVICES IN
BRENT 2004**

REPORT REF: ES-04/05-267

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report introduces the result of the Audit Commission's Inspection of Brent's cultural services in July 2004 (Appendix 1). The inspection result forms part of the Government's Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Brent Council and the inspection measures the impact and effectiveness of Brent's service delivery against the shared national priorities as well as the locally identified priorities.
- 1.2 For the purposes of this inspection, the service areas that were included were Sports Service, Parks Service (Environment); Cultural Services (Arts), Heritage Services, Library Service and Out of School Support Service (Children's Play) (Education, Arts and Libraries).
- 1.3 The report also outlines the recommendations of the Audit Commission Inspection and an Action Plan for service areas to take the recommendations forward (Appendix 2).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are recommended to:
- a) Note the inspection result and comments made in the Inspection Report.
 - b) Approve the Action Plan to address the issues raised in the report.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Inspection report commends Brent Council for its robust budget management systems both corporately and across the service areas and its ability to attract external funding to support initiatives.

- 3.2 Brent Council is also commended for its demonstrable commitment to improving cultural services delivery with growth in service area revenue budgets over the past three years and for its commitment to sustain this growth in medium term budget forecasting over the next two years.
- 3.3 However, the report also identifies concerns regarding the legacy of underinvestment in cultural services venues and building stock and highlights the significant investment issues which will need to be tackled in the near future to ensure the quality of venues is improved.
- 3.4 The funding for actions contained in Appendix 2 are identified within service budgets for 2004/05 but as mentioned above the report finds that improving the infrastructure for Cultural Services will require significant levels of investment and notes the planned growth for 05/06 and 06/07 in Cultural Services budgets. Details of how these infrastructure issues are to be met need to be addressed by each service area; in broad terms:
- Heritage Lottery Funding has been secured for the relocation of the Grange Museum to new premises and a capital sum has been approved as match funding for this project.
 - Consultants are currently undertaking a strategic review of the Library Service, looking to rationalise the service and identify potential new locations for libraries and sources of funding to achieve this.
 - Capital growth for the Parks Service has already been agreed and this is to compliment the significant levels of external funding this service area has already successfully obtained. The service will continue to work, where possible to attract external funding to address further infrastructure issues within Parks.
 - The Sports Service will also look to lever-in external capital funding where possible. PFI credits have been obtained for the new Willesden Sports Centre and a capital contribution of £1.6m has been agreed. Officers are continuing negotiations with a private company for a new public swimming pool at Kingsbury. The leisure management contract is to be retendered and will look to secure additional capital improvements at the centres.

Each of these services areas will report separately on future infrastructure needs as and when the situation requires.

4.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no staffing implications.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council has the power pursuant to Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to provide said recreational facilities as it sees fit. This includes the power to provide buildings, equipment, supplies and assistance of any kind. Under section 1.2 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, local authorities have a duty to “furnish such information, and provide such facilities for the

inspection of library premises, stocks and records” as are required by the Secretary of State to enable him/her to fulfil his/her duty under the same Act “to superintend, and promote the improvement of” library services.

- 5.2 The Government has placed a duty on local authorities to deliver services to clear standards of cost and quality using the Best Value framework and councils are required to assess their own performance to ensure continuous improvement. The Audit Commission are the independent inspectorate who have been appointed to scrutinise councils’ performance under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and their report is issued in accordance with their duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

6.0 DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 6.1 It was noted in the Audit Commission report that all cultural services in Brent are applying programmes targeted at the needs of local people in this diverse community and that diversity and equality issues are mainstreamed into service planning.

7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Cultural Services provide a range of services and activities across the borough and manage a number of different venues. Improvements to buildings and parks and open spaces contribute to the development of an enhanced environment.

8.0 DETAIL

- 8.1 Brent Council is the first local authority in the country to have a full inspection of its cultural services under the new Comprehensive Performance Assessment structure. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport’s definition of culture includes: the performing and visual arts including media such as video; museums and archives; libraries and literature; the built heritage and archaeology; sports facilities/development and events; parks and open spaces; children’s play & playgrounds; tourism, festivals etc; and other informal leisure pursuits.

- 8.2 In Brent, the services that were included in the inspection were:

- Cultural Services (EAL)
- Heritage Services (EAL)
- Library Service (EAL)
- Out of School Support Service (EAL)
- Park Service (ENV)
- Sports & Leisure Service (ENV)

Best Value Reviews had been undertaken internally for the Parks Service (2001) and Library, Museum and Archive Services (2003). Previous inspection by the Audit Commission in 2002 had found the Parks Service to be ‘*a fair service with promising prospects of improvement*’; and the Sports Service to be ‘*a poor service with poor prospects of improvement*’, identifying significant weaknesses in service delivery within the Sports Service.

8.3 Prior to the Audit Commission Inspection, the authority was required to submit a self-assessment of its cultural services; using the following headings:

- What is our vision for cultural services?
- How good is the service now?
- What are our plans for improvement?

Brent was commended for the clarity of presentation in its self-assessment, which is now being used as an example of good practice for other authorities. Additional information was also presented such as the Corporate Strategy, Service Development and Operational Plans, the Cultural Framework, the Sports & Physical Activity Strategy and the Public Library Position Statement.

8.4 The inspection itself took place during the first week in July 2004 and involved three Audit Commission inspectors interviewing key stakeholders such as elected members, members of the Corporate Management Team, service unit heads and frontline staff. Mystery shopping exercises and reality checks were undertaken both before and during the inspection and customer views were also taken into consideration.

8.5 The Audit Commission report produced as a result of this inspection (Appendix 2) assessed Brent Council cultural services as **'providing a good (two star) service that has promising (two star) prospects for improvement'**.

8.6 Inspectors found that cultural services in Brent are good because of the extensive consultation that has been undertaken with local stakeholders, the improvements in access to buildings and websites, demonstrable outcomes against the local priorities; and the significant improvements in the Sports Service over the past eighteen months, including the publication of the Brent Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity. The quality of service in Parks and Libraries was judged as strong.

8.7 We have promising prospects for improvement because there is clear leadership from councillors and senior managers, effective joint working between directorates, increased capacity in budgets, sound performance management systems, the mainstreaming of equality and diversity issues into service planning; and the effective link of cultural services with corporate and other plans through the strategic planning framework.

8.8 Examples of good service delivery in cultural services cited in the report include:

- The varied festivals programme delivered by the Cultural Services Unit which is a key vehicle for promoting diversity and equality issues and a good example of coordinated working across the services
- The work that Heritage Services has undertaken with the Youth Offending Team to offer three placements to young offenders which has had very positive feedback from the team, the young people and their parents.
- The increased take up of Library Services by customers, particularly since the refurbishment of Ealing Road Library, which involved close consultation with

customers and young people in the area and has resulted in a 25% increase in visitors and an 11% increase in book issues in 2003/4.

- The Parks Service's high quality provision of children's play areas and the improved environment in parks and open spaces, including the provision of park wardens, which has led to an improvement in resident's perception of safety in the parks as well as external recognition such as Charter Mark and Beacon Status.
- The considerable progress in improving the Sports Service over the last two years which includes the new Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity, increased customer satisfaction from 77% to 91% and projects directed at young people to increase participation in sporting activities.

8.9 A number of recommendations were made for future improvements:

- The council should target activities and actions that will improve the existing levels of customer satisfaction recorded through the three yearly survey conducted by MORI
- Improve the marketing of services, particularly in regard to sport, to encourage back previous users
- Ensure that the improvements being made in the sports service are sustained
- Measure the impact that cultural services have on local and national shared priorities and act on the findings
- All service operational plans should be of a consistently high standard (although some service units already have SOPs which could be used as examples of good practice).

In addition, the inspectors found that the quality of building stock is deteriorating and improving the infrastructure for cultural services will require significant levels of investment - and a robust framework to identify and attract this investment is lacking.

8.10 Recommendations from the Audit Commission report are incorporated into the Action Plan (Appendix 1) which also identifies lead officers and timescales for actions to be completed.

9.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following papers were used in the compilation of this report:-

- i) Cultural Services, London Borough of Brent: Inspection Report. Audit Commission, August 2004
- ii) Cultural Services Self Assessment. London Borough of Brent, May 2004.

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact Sue Harper, Assistant Director, Environment (Sport & Leisure), 239 High Road, Wembley HA9 6BZ. Tel : 020 8937 5192.

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Appendix 1

CULTURAL SERVICES INSPECTION: ACTION PLAN

RECOMMENDATION	TASK	LEAD OFFICER	TIMESCALE
1. The Council should target activities and actions that will improve the existing levels of customer satisfaction recorded through the three yearly survey conducted by MORI.	1.1 Identify the key issues which at the lowest resource level and in the most immediate timeframe will most effect service perceptions, and devise action to address.	SH/ML	Jan '05
	1.2 Progress work associated with the relocation of the Grange Museum.	AS	On-going
	1.3 Implement the Action Plan resulting from the Best Value Review of Library, Museum & Archive, including improvements to Library infrastructure	ML	On-going
	1.4 Implement the Action Plan resulting from the Best Value Review of the Sports Service and the actions within the Brent Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity.	GK	On-going
	1.5 Produce a revised Parks Strategy and implement the new Action Plan.	SF	Nov '04

RECOMMENDATION	TASK	LEAD OFFICER	TIMESCALE
2. Improve the marketing of services, particularly in relation to Sport, to encourage back previous users.	2.1 Develop a Cultural marketing plan. Produce a programme of press releases and other marketing materials to increase awareness of Cultural Services in Brent.	ML/SH	Dec '04
	2.2 Undertake research amongst identified low-user groups to highlight mechanisms to increase participation.	ML/SH	Dec '04
	2.3 Implement all the actions in the Brent Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity under the theme of 'Raising awareness of Sports Services and opportunities'.	GK	On-going
	2.4 Produce a Parks Service leaflet and improve website.	SF	March '05
3. Ensure the improvements being made in the Sports Service are maintained	3.1 Implement the Action Plan resulting from the Best Value Review of the Sports Services	GK	On-going
	3.2 Implement the Action Plan within the Brent Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity.	GK	On-going

RECOMMENDATION	TASK	LEAD OFFICER	TIMESCALE
4. Measure the impact that Cultural Services have on local and national shared priorities and act on the findings.	4.1 Ensure Cultural Services link to respective benchmarking clubs and contribute to development of outcome focused performance indicators.	ML/SH	On-going
	4.2 Ensure performance management processes are in place across all services and that all SOPs clearly reflect the Council's corporate priorities.	ML/SH	March '05
	4.3 Ensure that where appropriate, new projects developed by services are linked to the new National generic learning outcomes (GLO's) recently launched by DCMS.	ML / SH	On-going
	4.4 Consider new PIs in relation to health and crime prevention and ensure these are reflected in SOP's.	ML/SH	March '05
5. All Service Operational Plans (SOPs) should be of a consistently high standard by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that all actions detailed within SOPs are SMART. • Initiating cross-departmental SOP peer review for Cultural Services. 	5.1 All Cultural Services SOPs will contain annual team work programmes with identified actions with timescales and lead officers.	ML/SH	March '05
	5.2 'Peer Review' of the SOP production to be introduced at Quarterly Cultural Services meetings.	ML/SH	March '05
	5.3 Ensure that examples of current good practice contained within existing SOPs can be shared with all other service heads and incorporated into all cultural services SOPs	ML/SH	March '05