



Executive
29th May 2007

**Report from the Director of
Environment & Culture**

For Information

Wards Affected:
ALL

**Cultural Strategy for Brent 2006-2009: progress report -
May 2007**

Forward Plan Ref: E&C-06/07-043

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an overview of the Cultural Strategy for Brent (Appendix 1) and progress on the key priorities since January 2006 (Appendix 2). The Strategy outlines Brent's cultural assets (libraries, sports centres, theatres, parks, historical sites etc), identifies cultural priorities for the borough and a vision for Brent's cultural development based on the following themes:
- *Civic pride*
 - *Accessible places and spaces*
 - *Safe, healthy, cohesive communities*
 - *Building a cultural economy*
- 1.2 The Cultural Strategy is not service unit specific but draws together priorities from all of the Brent Council cultural services such as sports, libraries and the arts as well as giving a future direction for culture from all providers in the borough, partners and stakeholders.
- 1.3 Improvements are already in place across Brent's cultural services (e.g. Willesden Sports Centre and the Brent Museum) and further work is ongoing to ensure that cross-cutting cultural priorities are met. Cultural priorities are stated within Brent's Corporate Strategy 2006-2010 and the Community Plan 2006-2010 as well as other corporate plans such as the Brent Regeneration Action Plan 2007-2009.

- 1.4 There is now a need to bring together key council officers and relevant stakeholders delivering on culture in the borough to consider strategic priorities and joint opportunities and review progress of the Cultural Strategy

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Executive note the progress on implementation of the key priorities of the Cultural Strategy for Brent 2006-2009
- 2.2 That the Executive approve that the Progress Report is reported to the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for information
- 2.3 That the Executive approve the formation of a Culture and Sports Forum formed of key Council officers and relevant cultural delivery partners/stakeholders across the borough.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 In January 2006, Brent Council Executive agreed the adoption of 'A Cultural Strategy for Brent 2006—2009' (Appendix A). The Audit Commission definition of culture includes arts, heritage, libraries, parks, play and sports and the Cultural Strategy for Brent includes all of these services. The Cultural Strategy for Brent was developed after consultation with stakeholders, artists and creative practitioners, the voluntary sector and the relevant services; and through targeted public consultation activities (such as the BME Forum and the Cultural Debates programme) and via the Council website.
- 3.2 The strategy provides a way forward for cultural services in Brent and identifies ways in which Brent Council departments and other partners can work collectively to improve cultural provision, widen access, advance quality, and ensure that the distinctive cultural assets of Brent are explored and supported to their full potential.
- 3.3 The Cultural Strategy lists Brent's cultural assets (whether in local authority ownership or elsewhere) and identifies cultural priorities for the borough; with a vision for the future of culture in Brent based on three key themes:
- **Civic Pride:** Ensuring that local and incoming people recognise the unique cultural assets of Brent
 - **Social and Environmental Regeneration:** Working to develop safe, healthy, cohesive communities with cultural expression, participation and consumption at the fore.
 - **Employment:** Building a strong cultural economy with locally generated creativity and activity translated into local jobs in the cultural industries.

3.4 The Strategy outlines existing priorities for Brent Council's cultural service units (Sports, Parks, Children's Play, Libraries, Heritage, and Arts) and also identifies cross-cutting priorities for the three main themes outlined above in 3.3. Much progress has been made against these priorities in the 14 months since the approval of the Cultural Strategy. Improvements include:

- The opening of the state-of-the-art Willesden Sports Centre in November 2006 - attracting over 80,000 more visitors in the first five months of opening than the old sports centre in the equivalent five months in 2003/04.
- The opening of the Brent Museum in May 2006, now London's most visited community museum with over 35,000 visitors since opening compared to 7,000 per annum at the Grange Museum
- The refurbishment of Willesden Green Library in March 2006 with a 13% increase in loans and a 43% increase in visits in 2006/7 compared to 2005/6
- Brent Parks Service's award at 'London in Bloom' 2006 leading to Brent representing London in 'Britain in Bloom' in July 2007
- Enhanced facilities at Bridge Park Leisure Centre including a new second gym and new fitness equipment resulting in over 12,000 more in sports visits in 2006/7 compared to 2005/6
- Green Flag Awards for Roundwood and Gladstone Parks in 2006
- First Brent Community Day at Wembley Arena in July 2006 attracting 3,000 residents to watch children and young people from over 30 Brent schools dancing on the famous stage
- Brent Council cross departmental London 2012 Steering Group set up with 'Sports and health' and 'Culture and events' as key sub-groups
- New Multi-Use Games areas at Roe Green installed in 2006
- Targets on access to sports and libraries for looked after children and young people and those with disabilities included in Brent's Local Area Agreement with extra funding to support activities
- Improving programme of annual festivals celebrating Brent's diverse cultures, attracting over 60,000 people per year
- Launch of the B.Active leisure card with concessions on the use of sports/leisure facilities giving greater discounts to concessionary groups on the use of sports/leisure facilities resulting in over 800 more concessionary card sales in 2006/07 compared to 05/06.
- Improved resident satisfaction with parks (from 66% to 71%) and libraries (from 56% to 67%) in the three yearly MORI survey
- The introduction of free swimming for children during school holiday periods
- £740,000 awarded through Big Lottery funding to improve Brent's play areas for children and young people
- Tourism information for visitors to Brent has been launched on the Brent Council web-site and free giveaway tourist map produced

Detailed information about progress against the stated priorities is outlined in the Progress Report (Appendix 2).

- 3.5 Cultural priorities for Brent are now reflected in the Corporate Strategy 2006-2010 and the Community Plan 2006-2010. The Corporate Strategy states the following priorities in the vision for Brent as a great place:
- Provide a broad range of sports and leisure activities and ensure that they are accessible to all sections of the community
 - Make our Cultural services the forefront of our approach to community cohesion and through them enhance civic pride and encourage residents to celebrate their unique cultural identities

The Corporate Strategy outlines how the vision will be accomplished and sets out delivery targets such as increased visits to libraries, parks, sports facilities and the Museum.

The Community Plan states a vision of Brent as a lively place and has the following commitments to:

- Enhance civic pride by encouraging residents and visitors to celebrate their unique cultural identities and have greater interest in Brent's history
- Facilitate opportunities for physical exercise and sport by reducing barriers to participation and promoting healthy living

- 3.6 Further work now needs to be done to bring together the key partners and stakeholders delivering on cultural priorities across the borough on a regular basis to ensure that resources are maximised and that delivery on the key targets is coordinated and directed appropriately. A Culture and Sports Forum of key officers and relevant stakeholders/partners who are delivering culture should be constituted to consider strategic priorities and joint opportunities and review progress of the Cultural Strategy. This forum will ensure that partners work together to maximise resources and that delivery on the key targets is directed appropriately and coordinated.

- 3.7 Brent's cultural services will be subject to the Regional Commentary process in Autumn 2007 whereby services are assessed by regional bodies including Government Office London; Museums, Libraries and Archives Council London; Sport England and Arts Council England (London). This assessment will feed into the Corporate Performance Assessment and (from 2009 onwards) the Corporate Area Assessment processes.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 Resources for the priorities set out within the strategy come from a combination of sources including mainstream council budgets (libraries, museums and arts, sports, parks, youth service), Local Area Agreement funding, other government funding sources including the National Lottery, the London Boroughs' Grants Scheme, private contributions, and user contributions.

- 4.2 The council's medium term financial strategy requires the council to find ways of delivering its strategic priorities within a declining overall resource base. As part of this, the council has up-dated its efficiency strategy - agreed at the Executive on 16th April 2007 - to help the council deliver improved services despite declining resources. The council already uses its work with partners and other measures to ensure effective use of resources in delivering the cultural strategy but it will need to continue to look at new ways of working and meeting the public's needs to ensure delivery of the priorities within this strategy in the context of pressures on the council's mainline resources in future years.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 It is no longer a statutory requirement for local authorities to produce a Local Cultural Strategy. However, cultural issues are an important aspect of the process to produce the Council's Community Plan and Corporate Strategy and accordingly, most London authorities have completed a cultural strategy for their residents to demonstrate how culture is contributing to corporate strategies and community plans.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted for the Cultural Strategy and is available on request. The Cultural Strategy addresses the needs of all communities in Brent and identifies as a priority the need to widen participation in cultural activity to engage hard to-reach groups and disenfranchised communities with community cohesion a key priority in delivery of services.
- 6.2 For example, since approval of the Cultural Strategy, non-user focus group work was conducted by Sports and Libraries to investigate reasons for under-representation in usage by young people and children who are looked after or who have disabilities. From this work, targets to address the issues raised are now covered and monitored through the Local Area Agreement. All cultural services monitor and evaluate take-up of services by different groups within Brent and this evaluation feeds into service planning every year.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 There are no staffing or accommodation implications arising directly from the Cultural Strategy or the progress report. However, the strategic priority for accessible places and spaces (e.g. additional sports pitches; improvements to key Library sites; additional workplace, exhibition and rehearsal spaces) may impact on accommodation needs.
- 7.2 This is being addressed through existing or forthcoming strategies such as the Sports & Physical Activity Strategy, the Play Strategy; and a draft Library Strategy for future consideration at Executive).

Background Papers

Appendix 1: A Cultural Strategy for Brent 2006-2009

Appendix 2: Brent's Cultural Strategy: Progress Report May 2007

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