

Councillor Briefing

Culture on the Strategic Agenda – why your council needs cultural services

This briefing outlines the most important areas where culture plays a strategic role.

Overview

Culture and sport are among any council's most used services, offering a mix of activities and assets that attract all sections of the community. Culture contributes to many strategic priorities and themes, benefiting every aspect of people's lives by helping to forge stronger, safer, healthier communities.

Why it Matters

There are many valid arguments for supporting culture in its own right, but it is the instrumental value of cultural services and how they help deliver against important corporate priorities that place them close to the heart of the strategic political agenda. At a time of significant budgetary pressure it is important to advocate the vital role of culture to ensure its contribution is understood by cabinet members, scrutiny members and the corporate management team.

Key Messages

- Cultural services have a particularly strong contribution to make to enriching the lives of children and young people and increasing educational attainment.
- They can help the council engage harder to reach groups and contribute to community safety initiatives.
- More than any other service, culture can play a part in improving people's physical and mental well-being.
- As visitor attractions cultural services underpin the tourism offer and boost economic vitality.
- Cultural services are effective at leveraging in external funding and support.

Background

Below is an overview of the partnerships, frameworks and corporate service areas that culture and sport contribute towards; it is acknowledged that new structures are emerging and we will update this briefing in line with revised policy.

Local strategic partnerships (LSPs) exist in nearly all local authority areas (at district, county or unitary level) They bring together representatives from the local statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors to address local problems, allocate funding, discuss strategies and encourage joint working. Council's work with their LSP to prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy. The best community strategies are also the result of extensive public consultation.

Children and Young People: Cultural Services deliver on all five outcomes of 'Every Child Matters', the framework for children and young people's services – for example access to libraries and the curriculum-based educational programme run by museums make an important contribution to the Every Child Matters outcome of 'Enjoy and Achieve', Sport and physical activity play an important role in delivering 'Be healthy', as well as encouraging young people to 'Make a Positive Contribution' through volunteering. Quality play provision can help children to 'Stay Safe', and arts, particularly the creative industries, provide a career path for young people on their way to 'Economic Wellbeing'.

Safer and Stronger Communities: Better parks and open spaces are an important part of quality of life, and Green Flag/Green Pennant awards are a key way to demonstrate these. Arts, libraries, sport and museums are among the most effective ways of building community cohesion and reaching people who are marginalised or disadvantaged. In almost every consultation young people say they want 'more things to do' - and culture can provide things which are fun, safe and easy to access. Participation in constructive leisure-time activities, particularly those that are sustained through the teenage years, helps reduce young people's involvement in anti-social behaviour, preventing them from becoming victims or perpetrators, and helps improve relationships between young people and the adults in their communities.

Healthier communities: There is strong evidence for the benefit of sport to health and well-being. People who are physically active reduce their risks of major chronic illness by up to 50% and their risk of premature death by 20-30%. The health costs of physical inactivity in the East of England alone are estimated to be £69 million annually.¹ Cultural activities like art, libraries and museums play an important role in the lives of older people with targeted services to reduce isolation and maintain independence, or to reduce falls. They also help maintain positive mental health and well being, from art classes for people with learning disabilities, to drama work with young people who have been bullied or abused.

Economic development and enterprise: Many cultural services support lifelong learning, from structured programmes in libraries and museums through to self expression in the arts, providing routes through to employment or personal development, increased confidence and self esteem. The creative industries are a rapidly developing part of the economy, and festivals, leisure facilities and other visitor attractions play an important part in economic growth. With Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) replacing the regional development agencies, consideration needs to be given to how culture and sport influence and align with the growth agenda.

1 Be Active, Be Healthy, Department of Health, 2007

Your next steps

- Discuss with the managers responsible what is being done to achieve the objectives set out in your Sustainable Community Strategy.
- Consider how cultural services can contribute to your councils priority outcomes, helping to tackle embedded issues and improving local places.
- Make sure that these and other benefits are realised by embedding culture into the council's strategic planning process.
- Develop a local outcomes framework for culture and sport to evidence the contribution these services make to local priorities².
- Find out more about your Local Enterprise Partnership and identify how best you can ensure culture and sport are acknowledged as an important part of growth plans locally.

2 www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=21649171