

Service Inspection Report

March 2006



# Cultural Services

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

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## Service Inspection

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our Strategic Plan and Strategic Regulation. They also reflect the principles from *The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003)*.

Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater co-ordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's web site at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk).

This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

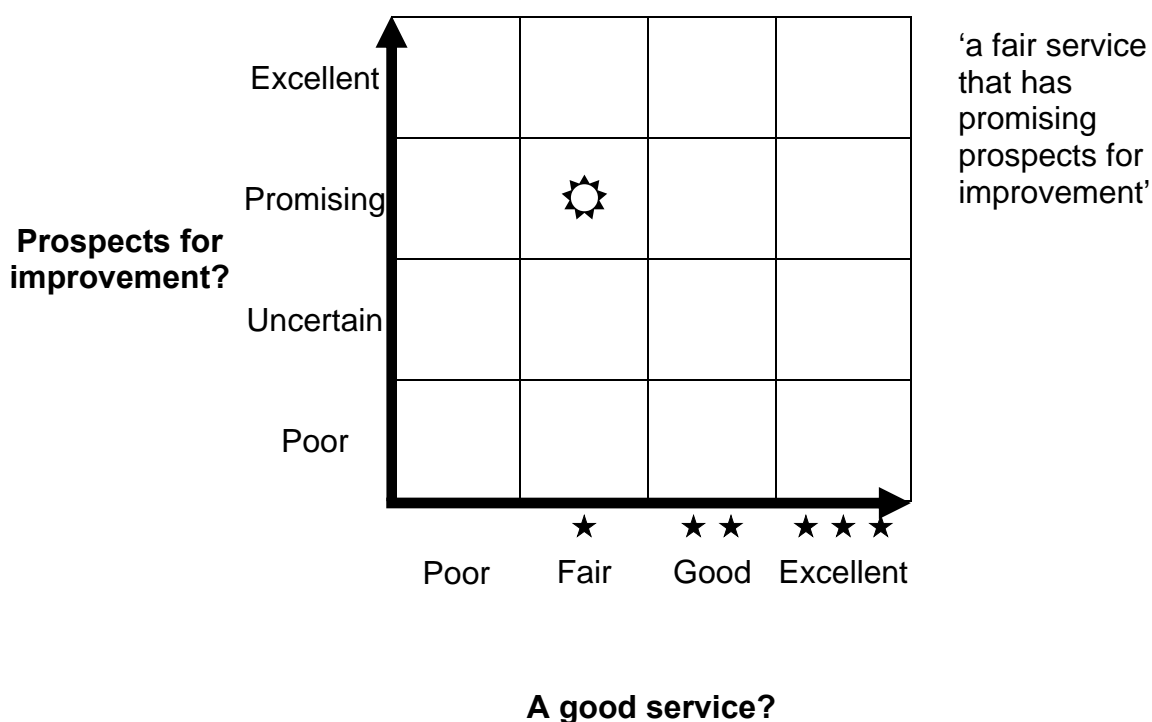
## Summary

- 1 The London borough of Barking and Dagenham provides **fair** cultural services, which have **promising** prospects for improvement.
- 2 The Council services are fair because the quality of users experience is variable. Some facilities are in need of refurbishment or remodelling and satisfaction levels for the services are low, when compared to other London boroughs. Analysis of the detailed needs of users and the local community is underdeveloped as consultation tends to be used to identify specific responses to discrete services or where large scale investment is planned but not generally to inform the development of day to day services. The Council struggles to evidence specific outcomes from the many of their cultural services and this makes it difficult to evaluate value for money. For example, some services, like sports development, have national accreditation and provide good quality at reasonable cost whereas other directly managed services attract above average costs and low satisfaction levels eg leisure services, so do not provide value for money.
- 3 The Council is using cultural services as a key vehicle for promoting community cohesion and investments over the last few years have significantly improved the Council's cultural facilities. Access to cultural services is generally good and facilities are geographically well spread across the borough. The range of diverse events and activities has increased for black and minority ethnic communities, younger people, older people and people with disabilities. Increased opportunities for learning has had a sustained focus, with increases in library usage and schools programmes provided across the services. The Council is tackling the fear of crime with the use of dedicated parks police and community wardens.
- 4 Prospects for improvement are promising because the Council has a clear commitment to ensure that cultural services are a key vehicle for creating learning opportunities, improving civic pride and making Barking and Dagenham a place where people will want to live. This is supported by a large capital investment programme, which has already delivered some significant improvements. The expansion of facilities is also linked to the longer term need to meet the needs of a changing and growing population. Performance management arrangements have improved, with strategies linked to local and national priorities.
- 5 However, service planning and management arrangements of cultural services are not fully joined up. Services are provided within two divisions and good practices are not always shared. An example of this is in consultation and the detailed analysis of users and non-users across the services. Some service sections do this well, leading to better planning but other sections do less well leading to lost opportunities to engage users and non-users. Finally, mechanisms to analyse the impact of services and investment are weak, particularly where linked to the shared outcomes.

## Scoring the service

- 6 We have assessed London Borough of Barking and Dagenham as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Table 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Audit Commission

- 7 The service is a fair, one-star service due to the following reasons.
- User satisfaction across most cultural services is low and has declined slightly in the last year in some areas.
  - It is not clear how current charging policies are ensuring that target groups, like older or younger people, have sufficient access to the full range of cultural services. Similarly, some concerns have been expressed by some user groups, that increases in charges for community halls will reduce access to meeting space, where they currently provide complementary cultural services.

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- Some facilities are in need of refurbishment and remain a source of user concern, ie some sport centres, pitch based changing rooms, pavilions and other features in parks. There are limited childcare facilities and revenue limitations have restricted some library opening hours.
  - The Council is not able to demonstrate that it is providing value for money from most of their core cultural services.
  - Evidence to show clear outcomes against some of the shared priorities is mixed. There are some good examples but little evidence in other areas.
  - However, the Council has a good geographical spread of cultural services and access to these services is good.
  - Investment in the last five years has led to significant improvements in cultural facilities, which have improved the user experience and expanded usage. Many of the improvements were made after significant user and local consultation.
  - Some services have been externally accredited for their good quality - eg the Sports Development Service and the GP Referral Scheme. The Council also meets 7 out of 10 Public Library Service Standards.
  - Cultural services increasingly reflect the diversity of the borough, which contributes to improved community cohesion - eg Sk8topia for young people, events that reflect the cultures of newer communities and leisure for older people.
- 8 The service has promising prospects for improvement due to the following reasons.
- The Council sees cultural services as a key driver for change in the borough, with clear contributions to corporate priorities - eg learning, celebrating cultural diversity and raising general pride in the borough.
  - Councillors and senior managers have a good grasp of the issues and concerns of local people, with the strategies and plans in place to address the key concerns. Large amounts of capital and revenue investment have supported the increased priority given to cultural services.
  - Performance management systems have improved and help councillors and senior managers to focus on what needs to improve.
  - However, the limited number of identifiable outcomes for the shared priorities and underdevelopment of comprehensive monitoring data, on current usage of services, is a potential barrier to further improvement.
  - The diversity of staff in cultural services does not reflect the diversity of the newer communities. This may affect the Council's capacity to effectively engage and increase levels of usage among these communities.
  - The Council do not always take a corporate approach to the planning of cultural services or share best practices for user and non-user engagement.

## Recommendations

- 9 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition we identify the approximate costs<sup>2</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context the inspection team recommends that the Council should do the following.

### **Recommendation**

*R1 Develop a more corporate approach to cultural service planning. This should incorporate the best practices from existing Council consultation, focusing on the needs and feedback from traditionally under represented groups.*

- *Currently planning is not uniformed across all cultural services.*
- *Some services have comprehensive consultation whereas in others it is quite limited.*
- *Consultation or feedback from users and local people should be ongoing and not just focused on planning for new facilities.*
- *The Council needs to be able to demonstrate how users and local people contribute to specific service improvements, beyond new infrastructure.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a more tailored and focused services, leading to better and measurable outcomes for local people.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs and should be implemented by October 2006.

### **Recommendation**

*R2 Collect data on the diversity of users and non-users and address any barriers to participation, with the aim of increasing participation across all groups in the community.*

- *The Council does not systematically monitor users by diversity across all cultural services and this is preventing the Council from having a complete picture of current participation levels or which groups need targeting to increase their usage.*

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<sup>2</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- an increase in the number of users with a better balance across the community.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by October 2006.

### **Recommendation**

*R3 Develop a co-ordinated approach across cultural services, to charging – particularly addressing affordability issues for young and older people.*

- *The Council does not have a consistent strategy for charging across cultural services.*
- *Some charges are making it more difficult for some individuals, community groups and voluntary organisations to participate and contribute to the Council's ability to address the shared priorities.*
- *The devolution of the community halls to community organisations and subsequent reductions in subsidies, will make it more difficult for some groups to use the facilities.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- to widen access to cultural services, venues and facilities for community activities, linked to shared priorities, and to further increase usage.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by October 2006.

### **Recommendation**

*R4 Refine local performance indicators and targets, with user and non user input, to better identify the outcomes of initiatives and projects against priorities and publicise clear service standards, beyond the internet and monitor with respect to user satisfaction and feedback.*

- *Some cultural service objectives still need to be better defined, so managers can identify priorities and more effectively monitor performance against objectives, eg to increase participation - target groups are not identified or the specific services where demand is particularly low.*
- *Service standards are not well publicised so users cannot easily identify the quality of service they should receive.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- users will be clearer of the services standards/outcomes they should expect and staff will be clearer of the standards and outcomes expected.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be implemented by April 2006.

**Recommendation**

*R5 Develop a systematic approach to assessing value for money across all cultural services ie:*

- *benchmarking of costs against quality of outcomes;*
- *market testing of non-tendered in-house services;*
- *measuring the effectiveness of partnerships against delivery of stated service outcomes; and*
- *evaluation of the impact of investment against increased usage and higher satisfaction levels.*

*The Council does not have a systematic approach to measuring value for money.*

*Some substantial services, like leisure services are not put out to tender or market tested.*

*The Council is involved in many partnerships but service outcomes are not always clearly measurable.*

*The Council does not systematically evaluate the relative satisfaction or increased usage gained from significant capital expenditure.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- to improve the capacity of the Council to provide good quality value for money services.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by October 2006.

# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 10 The London borough of Barking & Dagenham has a population of 163,944, living in 67,273 households. Fifteen per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities.
- 11 Unemployment stands at 6.4 per cent, just below the London average. A third of homes are council-owned, with 64 per cent owner occupied. The borough has the lowest average property prices in London and the lowest average income in the Greater London area. The Council own and manage over 20,000 homes.
- 12 Forty per cent of the working age population have no qualifications, which is higher than the London average and one fifth of the population have a limiting long-term illness.
- 13 The borough has significant areas of deprivation, with three wards in the 20 most deprived nationally.
- 14 The Council are very conscious of the outdated view of the borough - large problems with anti-social behaviour and a borough dominated by heavy industry, largely linked to the old Ford plant. In fact, crime in the borough is low for London and very large parts of the borough boundary include parks, open spaces and forestry.
- 15 Barking and Dagenham is located within the Thames Gateway, and there are substantial regeneration schemes at Barking Reach and Heart of Thames Gateway. The latter will provide 20,000 new homes and 25,000 thousand jobs by 2016.

### The council

- 16 The Council comprises 51 councillors and is controlled by the Labour party, which holds 42 seats. The Council has a leader, assembly, executive, scrutiny management board, regulatory boards and policy commissions.
- 17 The Council is currently debt free. The net revenue budget for the year 2005/06 is £232.2 million with a four-year capital programme totalling £145 million of which £70.6 million will be funded from capital receipts and £74.4 million from external resources. The Council Tax band D level for 2005/06 is £1,153.36.
- 18 The Council employs about 5,800 staff excluding teaching staff. The officer structure, like the political structure, has been streamlined, with a reduction in the number of departments from eight to five.

- 19** The Council's current Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) rating is Fair. Within cultural services only the library service has been previously inspected. The library service was judged as good (two-star) service with uncertain prospects for improvement in October 2002.
- 20** A 2020 vision for Barking and Dagenham was agreed in June 2001, and the work being undertaken by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) will develop this as part of the Community Strategy. Seven community priorities are clearly set out in the Corporate Plan and are consistent with those set out in the Community Strategy developed via the local strategic partnership. They are:
- promoting equal opportunities and celebrating diversity;
  - better education and learning for all;
  - developing rights and responsibilities with the local community;
  - improving health, housing and social care;
  - making Barking and Dagenham cleaner, greener and safer;
  - raising general pride in the borough; and
  - regenerating the local economy.
- 21** The Council also state that the first three priorities are overarching and collectively promote social cohesion, which are essential to local partners working towards the 2020 Vision.
- 22** In line with these priorities, the Council is clear about the need to raise the aspirations of local people and to continue to raise the educational attainment of both children and adults. The Council has identified cultural services as one of the key drivers to achieving their community priorities.
- 23** A strong financial position and considerable capital reserves has enabled the Council to embark on an ambitious investment strategy. This strategy includes building a cultural infrastructure that will make local people proud and to attract new households to the borough as a place of choice. The promotion of Barking and Dagenham as a safe, green and local cultural hub is a key component of this strategy.
- 24** The Council also accepts the need to meet the changing needs of the local community, the national priorities and the need to expand for the large increase in the population of the borough, due over the next ten years.
- 25** Another key issue for the council is community cohesion. The Council is very clear about the need to bring together the well established white working class community with newer communities, mainly Asian and African families. Some racial tensions that emerged in recent ward elections helped to focus the council on the need to unite their local communities. A Community Cohesion plan and an Anti-Discrimination Charter were agreed in January 2004.

## The Council's cultural services

**26** The Local Cultural Strategy for Barking and Dagenham runs from 2003-2008. It sets out a vision for culture for the borough. It sets priorities for the cultural development and the cultural life of the borough. The Strategy also includes an action plan.

**27** The Council's cultural activity and services include:

- Arts service;
- Community Music Service (managed by Education);
- two heritage sites and archive services (including one museum);
- 11 libraries (including two learning centres);
- four leisure centres including three pools;
- Millennium Centre and country park;
- 32 parks, open spaces and a wide range of sports pitches and outdoor facilities;
- The Vibe (Youth & Arts Learning Centre - managed by Education);
- Floral Nursery;
- a park ranger service;
- festivals and events programme;
- Sk8topia (skateboard park);
- sports development team;
- dedicated Park Police (in partnership with the Police); and
- allotments.

Other services enabled or facilitated by the Council:

- The Broadway (theatre leased to a Trust);
- 15 community halls (some leased to users groups);
- four toy libraries;
- four dual use leisure facilities (in partnership with local schools); and
- GP Referral Schemes (with the Primary Care Trust).

**28** These services are managed via two divisions. The combined budget for the service is £14.6 million in 2005/06. This represents 6.2 per cent of the Council's total revenue budget.

- 29** A key context for these services is the need for the Council to expand the capacity of Council services. This is in part due to some deficits in provision but mainly because of the projected population expansion based on the Government's Thames Gateway housing expansion programme. With current capital investment in facilities, the Council needs to have facilities that will be 'future proof' and allow for increased utilisation in years to follow.
- 30** This inspection of the Council's cultural services considered the effectiveness of the above service activity and approaches in meeting local needs, achieving value for money, delivering improvement, managing performance and ensuring there is sufficient capacity to improve services. In addition, and in line with the Government's national agenda, the inspection sought to assess how well services are delivering outcomes against the themes of learning and safer and stronger communities.

## How good is the service?

### What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 31** The Council's vision for culture is: 'To enable all who live and work in the Borough to participate in creative and cultural activity and to support the development of a thriving local cultural life that reflects the diversity of its communities.'
- 32** The three guiding principles for this strategy are:
- cultural activities for their own sake;
  - cultural activities supporting community priorities and Council objectives; and
  - cultural activities supported and stimulated by overall community development.
- 33** Reflecting these principles the five priorities are to:
- include everyone in Barking and Dagenham's culture and cultural activities;
  - improve the well-being of local people through culture and cultural activities;
  - support and encourage cultural growth;
  - support skills, talent, ideas and innovation; and
  - strive for cultural excellence.
- 34** The Council has identified two overriding issues that must be addressed for them to realise their vision:
- to increase the cultural infrastructure; and
  - to increase usage levels of cultural services.
- 35** These principles and priorities are linked the Council's Community Strategy and therefore local priorities and also captures the desire for the Council to use cultural services as a driver for change. These changes are based on the local need to raise educational attainment, increase pride in the borough and to promote cultural diversity and cohesion.
- 36** The Council's cultural ambitions also contribute to the Mayor of London's priorities and the government's shared priorities. With respect to the Mayor's priorities, the Local Cultural Strategy sets out how the Council intends to address:
- the anticipated rise in demand for leisure goods and services;
  - support for the 2012 Olympic bid;
  - the need to help stimulate commercial creative industries;
  - to respond to the demands on services from the growth in households in London, particularly in barking and Dagenham;
  - the need to remove barriers to participation in cultural services; and
  - the need to raise educational attainment as a prime condition for success.

37 Contribution to the governments shared priorities include:

- a core priority for the Council is to improve educational attainment at all age groups;
- the regeneration of Barking and Dagenham town centres to include the development of creative industries, improving the image of the borough and developing civic pride;
- reducing crime and the fear of crime in parks and contributing to community cohesion;
- expanding cultural and leisure activities available to younger and older people and involving them in the development of these services; and
- promoting healthier lifestyles through their cultural services and addressing the significant health inequalities in the borough.

38 The Council's regeneration plans include the development of the two major town centres in the borough. The future infrastructural needs relating to cultural services are integrated into these plans and examples include the aim to build lifelong learning centres in prominent locations in prominent town locations, new indoor leisure facilities and a creative hub by the Barking waterfront.

### **Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?**

#### **Community focus**

- 39 The Council has a reasonable understanding of the local needs of the majority of the local population. Councillors and managers have a high level of awareness of the wider strategic issues effecting local people.
- 40 The broad understanding of local needs comes from the consultation from the Local Cultural Strategy, census data, consultation for the Community Strategy and the 2020 Vision for the borough, including other public sector providers from the Barking and Dagenham Partnership.
- 41 However, the Council does not have a systematic approach, across all cultural services, for planning and delivering services, incorporating regular user and non-user feedback and consultation. Individual services have implemented different types of consultation to inform their strategies. Some divisions within cultural services have carried out good consultation, although mostly preceding major investment decisions. Other attempts at consultation and monitoring have been made across cultural services but a coherent and successful approach is yet to be adopted. This impacts on the Council's ability to target services more effectively and meet their aim of increasing the take-up levels for their services.

- 42 The Council have made attempts to identify borough needs that have led to increase levels of participation. Examples include sports development that complete annual surveys which show increased participation year on year since 2002, for all the core communities. Similarly evidence shows increases in usage of the arts service, the heritage service, the Millennium Centre, the library service, the Broadway Theatre and events. However, numbers of visits to leisure centres have started to plateau.
- 43 Access to cultural services is generally good with 80.5 per cent of Council buildings being accessible to people with disabilities. Independent consultants recently completed a pitch audit which has shown that cultural services have a wide and appropriate range of provision given their population size. The geographic spread of facilities is good and 87.7 per cent of all outdoor sites in the borough have public access. This means that local people have good access to cultural facilities, with a relatively small proportion of facilities limited to private clubs or association members.
- 44 Cultural services have a good range of leaflets advertising the various services, with prices, opening hours, events and contact details. The borough newsletter, 'Citizen', promotes a wide range of cultural services, community organised events and services. The Big Green Map launched in September 2005, provides an extensive range of information on cultural services, with a directory and map of all the facilities and it is also available in a range of alternative formats. It is not clear on many other leaflets how users who need translated information, large print, audio or other formats would access these alternatives. However, the council has a translation service available to staff if they want materials translated. It is not clear what impact the range of leaflets and other information has had on increasing usage or access to services as the Council have not measured this impact.
- 45 Electronic access to cultural services is good and easy to navigate. There is good information on the various cultural services, with maps and contact numbers. However, only the new Broadway Theatre accepts internet bookings. In addition, libraries will accept renewals via the internet. This should help more users and potential users to access cultural services but given the relative low incomes and low educational attainment of adults, this may not necessarily be the case. The Council have not systematically monitored how users find out about their services so the impact of any initiative undertaken is not clear.
- 46 All services have published service standards but the standards were not developed in consultation with users and many are only available on the internet. These standards are not publicised prominently in the various cultural facilities. This limits users or potential users from understanding what quality of service they should receive and to measure whether this is being achieved. Equally, it is not clear how the Council monitor against these standards or what impact customer complaints or feedback have on day to day service delivery.

## Diversity

- 47 The Council has made good progress in the last two years, providing tailored cultural services to a broader range of people than they did previously. However, addressing and monitoring for diversity is at any early stage. The Council is not in a position to identify accurately the diversity of existing participation of their cultural services or whether diverse groups have significantly different demands on their services.
- 48 The Race Equality Scheme (RES) for the Council was published in 2002 and has now been updated by their generic Equality Scheme in May 2005. The original RES illustrated that the Council was at an early stage in addressing race equality issues. The priorities in the RES reflected the low level of engagement the Council had historically made with BME and other discrete communities, like older people, younger people, gay and lesbian people or people with disabilities. The Council has begun to make some progress in engaging various communities but still has some way to go to fully embed equalities issues into all areas of their work.
- 49 It is difficult for the Council to identify discrimination or whether inadvertent barriers exist to participation. Without systematic monitoring and the data on diversity of users and non-users, the Council cannot fully identify if there are any barriers to participation or what the range of targeted services that may be required.
- 50 The Council has made good progress in completing equalities impact assessments for each of their core cultural service areas. While these vary in quality, the Council has begun to address deficits in information. The outcomes of the assessments of cultural services are still in development but the action plans are due to be completed early in 2006.
- 51 A more diverse range of consultative methods has been developed by the Council in the last year. Various consultative forums have been set up to help the Council to understand the needs and desires of their diverse community. The Older Peoples Forum was launched this summer and a range of other forums and partners have now been consulted on a regular basis - eg Ethnic Minority Partnership Agency, Disability Equality Group, Race Equality Council, Youth Forum, Lesbian Gay Bi-Sexual and Trans-sexual (LGBT) Forum, a range of women's organisations and voluntary groups representing older people.
- 52 Targeted consultation with specific community groups has led to improved and more diverse services. Examples include the following.
- Consultation with youth and local residents about the need for, design and location of a skateboard park led to Sk8topia, which opened summer 2005. It is well used and seen as a useful diversion for teenagers, which has reduced some youth from hanging around in local parks.

- Consultation with BME community groups leading to development of the East London Mela, Molten Festival and a more diverse range of artists commissioned to take dance and music classes across the borough. These events and activities have attracted considerable support from BME communities and have contributed positively to the Council's community cohesion objectives.
  - Sports development's annual 'barriers to participation' surveys have led to a more diverse range of taster sessions with detailed evidence that increased participation has occurred among the core diverse groups.
- 53** The diversity of the range of cultural services has increased over many years and the Council now has a broad range of services targeted at the various groups of people. For example, services for older people include Elderberries (leisure activities for over 50s), green gyms, healthy walks, GP referral scheme and allotments. This has led to an increase in participation of older people in leisure activities, which could have a positive effect on their health. Similarly, a significant number of older people volunteer to conduct guided walks and tours of the heritage sites. All these activities encourage older people to get out of their homes and contribute to the shared priorities like quality of life, healthy communities and more diverse services for older people.
- 54** In the last two years, the Council have provided young people with access to a broader range of services, many free of charge. Examples include an expanded range of drama and dance classes, information and communication technology (ICT) learning suites for basic computer skills but also for music or other artistic work. School visits have been increasing across all these services, leading to a growth in learning opportunities.
- 55** The Council has a clear corporate charging policy that takes account of the need to consider subsidies where it will support social inclusion, equal opportunities and diversity. An example of this is the Leisure Card, which offers access to leisure facilities for 50 per cent less than the normal adult price at off peak times from Monday to Friday. This card is available to people who live in the borough and are either unemployed, over 60 years, 16 or over and in full-time education, people with a disability or people on welfare benefits. The card can be used in all council leisure centres and pools. The Council also offers a monthly direct debit scheme (including off-peak), which allows members unlimited access to most leisure facilities. The introduction of these schemes has led to an increase in users but figures have plateaued and remain low relative to capacity. The Council is now considering how best to attract further users.
- 56** The reduction in subsidy for community halls and move to delegated management could have a serious impact on the ability of some community and voluntary services to continue to provide complimentary services for cultural services. A number of users feel the increase in charges will make it much more difficult for community organisations to have access to meeting space in the borough. This could significantly reduce the capacity and diversity of community groups that can support the Local Cultural Strategy's aim to expand cultural, learning and leisure opportunities in the borough.

- 57 The staff working across cultural services are not reflective of the local community. It is not clear what plans cultural services has to address this deficit, although corporately the Council have developed a workforce development plan that has helped to ensure staff across the Council are more reflective of local communities. The Council have also ensured that most of their staff have been trained on the Council's duty to promote race equality and compulsory diversity training is being rolled out across the Council.

### **User experience and satisfaction with the quality of the services**

- 58 User experiences of cultural services are mixed. The Council provides a range of opportunities for participation in cultural activities. This is through leisure facilities, dual use schools, the ranger service, sports development, drama and dance and a wide range of sporting facilities in parks and open spaces. The Council also makes a strong contribution to local and national priorities.
- 59 A number of the facilities used for cultural services, such as Castle Green (new large library and leisure facility), the Millennium Centre and The Vibe, are aesthetically pleasing and modern venues. The Council believes they add to the civic pride of the borough and provide excellent venues for learning in particular and leisure activity in general. The number of visitors continues to grow at the Millennium Centre and the Vibe with promising initial figures at Castle Green. Another venue, the Broadway Theatre, has been completely refurbished and has already met targets for usage and occupation. The management of this site have developed attendance records and found that over 40 per cent of the current users are local residents. This meets the Council's desire to encourage local people to attend a wider variety of cultural activities. The Broadway Theatre has attracted a range of acts from diverse artists and groups. It has also become a venue for hosting corporate training or launches.
- 60 In contrast, other older facilities are in need of refurbishment or replacement to meet modern standards or the Council's current aspirations. This includes some of the leisure centres, Dagenham swimming pool and a number of libraries.
- 61 Cultural facilities are generally well placed across the borough and opening times have been expanded with the new facilities and refurbishments. However, the Council does not know whether these times are the most convenient to users or potential users, due to the lack of ongoing consultation.
- 62 Satisfaction levels are mixed across the services. The sports development team have been awarded Quest status and a Charter Mark for the quality of services. These nationally accredited awards demonstrate that they are providing a good quality service and the team's annual surveys also demonstrate they are increasing usage. The sports development survey 2004-05 found that 96 per cent (or 971 out of 1,007) of the customers were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service. However, satisfaction levels across cultural services declined in 2003-04 (conducted every three years) against national performance indicators. Most were bottom 25 per cent for that year; except sports and leisure facilities, at 50 per cent, which was above average nationally.

- 63 The Council has also conducted their own survey of satisfaction in 2004-05 against each of their core cultural services and these figures confirm the mixed quality of services as perceived by users and the general community. The summary of results were:
- parks, playgrounds and open spaces - 44 per cent (London average 48 per cent);
  - users 49 per cent (London average 56 per cent);
  - leisure and sports facilities - 41 per cent (London average 37 per cent);
  - users - 53 per cent (London average 50 per cent);
  - libraries - 57 per cent (London average 56 per cent); and
  - users - 76 per cent (London average 74 per cent).
- 64 The Council has not identified satisfaction levels for specific groups, like young and older people. This prevents the Council from understanding how specific users view their services and therefore which groups to target to increase satisfaction and participation.
- 65 Other indicators suggest that services are fair overall. In Libraries, a Children's PLUS (Public Library User Survey) was conducted in 2002 and an Adult PLUS was conducted in 2003 - 79.4 per cent of our adult users and 96 per cent of children users rated the Council as providing a very good/good service. Sixty-seven per cent of libraries and leisure indicators improved since 2002/03. Service performance against the public library standards is rated as good, with seven out of ten standards met. Visits to the libraries, museum and the heritage sites increased in 2004/05. Similarly, visits to leisure centres have grown but have slowed down in the last year. The Council has begun the improvements to parks (eg Dagenham, Parsloes and Goresbrook) as set out in the Park Strategy (15-year programme). They have also achieved Green Flag awards in two parks. These improvements have not just been cosmetic, eg grass areas and flora. The improvements have included refurbished tennis courts which are now free, teen shelters for youth to hangout, improvements to play equipment, new multi-use games areas and a new skateboard park. Unfortunately, the Council has not systematically assessed the usage, satisfaction or general impact of these investments.
- 66 Many of the parks and open spaces have facilities that are in need of refurbishment and attract complaints from sports clubs and other users. Many have poor and run down pavilions, poor quality changing rooms and disused toilets. Leisure services have started the process, 'Towards an Excellent Service' (Sport England standard). Senior managers believe this can be an effective driver for further improvement. The two heritage sites in the borough, Valence House Museum and Eastbury Manor House are a source of some pride to local people. Valence House Museum was awarded National Bronze Winner for the National Civic Pride Awards 2004 and the number of visits increased by 5000. Eastbury Manor House in Barking has reopened following refurbishment and both sites have contributed to learning objectives and increased the number of visitors in the last few years, including schools visiting programmes.

## Learning

- 67 The Council has effectively placed cultural services as key to expanding educational opportunities to local people. The take up of activities, particularly school visits is increasing and arts, heritage and libraries have been placed alongside education in the Council structure, to strengthen their contribution to learning. The Council has become one of the fastest improving boroughs nationally for educational attainment and Barking and Dagenham has moved from one of the worst performers to about average performance, with 52 per cent of pupils getting five GCSEs in the last year.
- 68 The libraries are making an adequate contribution to lifelong learning. Libraries are well distributed across the borough and all libraries have free internet access. There are now 120 free public internet computers and all libraries are UK-online centres. The internet access have attracted new users to libraries but the lack of data means it is unclear if these new users are also borrowing more books or accessing other learning opportunities. The Council also has a partnership with the local college and provides some adult learning facilities in libraries but only five of the 11 libraries have additional teaching provision. Most of the libraries are traditional and purpose built but not all are now appropriate for the expanded learning services the Council now want to offer. The libraries do have books in some minority ethnic languages with books for newer communities such as the Somalian community. The Council is also providing a range of services to other groups through its Library Service. Examples include work at Harmony House with asylum seekers and refugee groups, toy libraries working with local Mencap branch and the home library service.
- 69 The Council has also introduced initiatives to increase young peoples' links to libraries. Initiatives include family learning sessions, visiting story readers and links with the Sure Start programmes. The library service was recently praised by Ofsted for providing an exemplar service to schools. They have also achieved 95 per cent library membership among primary school children, although a coherent strategy for secondary schools is yet to be put in place.
- 70 It was not clear from the inspection how older people are targeted or how the Council has supported the employment needs of some adults, who need to be reskilled or require basic literacy and numeracy.
- 71 The Council continue to expand general learning opportunities through the library service, with larger purpose built buildings to house the wider range of services - expanded book range, space for adult education, childcare and computer suites. The two brand new libraries, The Sue Bramley Centre and Castle Green Centre are good quality facilities. The Castle Green site is a well designed facility, combining community facilities, the new library (with 20 study spaces and 22 internet computers) and a range of public sports facilities. This site has facilitated extended opening hours for the library (three evenings to 7pm). A shuttle bus has also been provided to help older people access the new library from the old library site, although only about half a mile away.

- 72 The library service had historically low usage but the Council has increased usage over the last three years. Usage has increased with the introduction of some new facilities. Unfortunately, limitations in revenue funding have restricted the opening hours of the library in the Sue Bramley Centre to two days per week and Saturday mornings. However, usage of the library has risen by 14 per cent above the old library and the rest of the building is open daily for health visits, a toy library, a crèche and nursery plus training rooms and computer suite. This is a positive trend and means local people are making greater use of the libraries.
- 73 Other services contribute to the Council's learning objectives. The Millennium Centre contributes to the borough's learning objectives with over 130 events in the last year and over 3,000 student visitors. It has a large classroom area and is situated next to a nature reserve. The centre also encourages guided walks around its grounds. The Community Music Service provides free tuition to young people across the borough, mainly funded by schools. The equipment and facilities are of high quality and the service has been expanded with new space in the Castle Green Centre. The Vibe is a newly (Easter 2005) refurbished youth centre. It provides facilities for youth to learn new skills. These include facilities for visual arts, new drama/dance studio, music technology suite and an ICT/multi-media room. The service provides a programme of drop in and planned sessions during the summer in the Vibe. These have attracted a good proportion of black and minority ethnic youth.

### **Safer and stronger communities**

- 74 The Council has improved its contribution to this shared priority through its cultural activity but the fear of crime remains a key priority for local people. Consultation for the Community Strategy has shown that local people see crime and the fear of crime as high priorities. This is particularly true in local perceptions of parks. However, local people consulted for the development of the Local Cultural Strategy put considerable emphasis on their desire for the Council to use cultural services to celebrate cultural diversity and to develop greater community cohesion in their borough.
- 75 The Council has developed effective partnerships that have kept reported crime levels in their parks low relative to crime in the borough as a whole. The borough crime figures reveal that the level of reported crime in parks is low. Out of 21,442 crimes reported in 2004/05, 230 crimes were reported in parks. The Council has funded a dedicated team of 13 park police officers to patrol the parks on a rotational basis. They are now managed in a more integrated structure under the Council's community safety team. They are now better linked to the 22 community wardens who patrol local streets. The police interviewed during the inspection were very positive about their relationship with the Council. They work closely with the Council, parks police and street wardens. Other partners were not so positive. Some felt that there is a lack of facilities for young people in the borough and the closure of some youth centres has contributed to this perception. However, there is a wide range and good access to outdoor sports facilities across the borough.

It is not so clear if pricing levels for youth to access paid services is at the right level to ensure greater participation. Some partners felt that some charges were still too high and remain a barrier to some participation.

- 76 The Council has demonstrated their ability to influence positive outcomes for young people by tracking all pupils in the last academic school year to determine if they got involved in 'meaningful' activities. They found that 90 per cent were at school, work related activity or in college. The Council also target 50 young people, most at risk of offending, in an attempt to actively engage them. This includes partnership with Leyton Orient FC and Dagenham Rugby Club. Other activities that contribute to this shared priority are as follows.
- The sports development team out reach to young people and organise summer schemes for young people.
  - The arts service has encouraged public art involving young people in an attempt to engage young people and divert energy away from graffiti.
  - The Youth Justice Plan 2004-05 reported a 15 per cent decrease in the number of offences committed by children and young people in the borough. The joint inspection of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) 2005, reported that a range of diversionary activities included sport, music, basic skills and separate groups for men and women. However, the lack of data tracking within cultural services prevents clear evidence that these interventions had a direct impact on the fall in offences.
- 77 Overall, staff in this service have found it difficult to demonstrate how cultural services directly contribute to safer and stronger communities across a wide range of cultural services. Whilst the Youth Offending Team (YOT) are tracking interventions against re-offending rates, this service has not fully developed the systems to effectively track the impact of engaging previous young offenders in cultural activities.

### **Is the service delivering value for money?**

- 78 This service does not have a systematic approach to evaluating value for money. The Council have not been able to demonstrate that they are providing value for money across cultural services. Some benchmarking has begun and corporately, a broader range of procurement activities are considered. Overall Value for money targets are not built into Service Scorecards and are not embedded at service level.
- 79 Some services like libraries and leisure centres have higher than average costs but are not out performing similarly costed services. For example, The Council has consciously provided extra resources to the library service due to the historical deficit in learning in the borough but until the service modernises the all sites, fully funds extended opening hours and to enable substantial increases in usage against national averages, it will not be able to demonstrate that it is providing value for money. Similarly, leisure centre and sports charges are above average for London according to the Council's benchmarking data.

The in-house leisure centres are not currently competitive when compared to other similar providers. The Council's own comparisons show their revenue costs are high and satisfaction levels are relatively low (53 per cent for users and 41 per cent generally). In this financial year 2005/06, leisure centres have taken less revenue but costs have risen. The Council is considering the development of a leisure trust by 2006/07, which should allow the service to seek external investment but until the trust is realised, costs are likely to remain high.

- 80** The Council has recognised that some charges are high and reviewed fees and charges for cultural services for 2005-06. The Council has decided to freeze charges at existing rates for all leisure centres and swimming pools. This includes the use of sports halls, fitness gyms and membership charges. A new charge for club football registration has been introduced for 2005-06 but it is too early to see what impact this may have on users.
- 81** Good structures are in place to ensure the capital programme is well managed. The Capital Programme Management Office (CPMO) was set up in 2003. This office ensures that all projects are subject to an appraisal process and are monitored by the management information reporting structure. With significant capital reserves, the Council can safely commit new spending but cannot always support the full revenue cost implications. This can be demonstrated in the context of new Sue Bramley Centre. This new centre houses a small new library but opening hours are significantly restricted by the limited revenue funding, which has not proportionally increased with the new sites.
- 82** The Council has a corporate procurement strategy that does not focus solely on the lowest tender. Some modern procurement methods have been used in cultural services, like the PFI (Private Finance Initiative) of the Castle Green Centre and the libraries consortium for bulk purchase of books.
- 83** There is some evidence of services that are providing better value for money when compared to previous years. Examples include sports development, which is an award winning service and has improved in the last year (QUEST re-accreditation) with a similar level of resources. The events team have significantly expanded the festivals and events in the borough without a substantial increase in council funding. The Council owned floral nursery produces all cultural services' flora but also sells to education and housing. This allows them to cross subsidise the entire flora in parks and open spaces.
- 84** The music service is providing good value for money for young users. The service is free to users (paid for by the schools), with a comprehensive range of instruments, computer equipment, practice space and tutorage. Without appropriate comparisons, the Council cannot judge whether they are providing value for money to the schools.
- 85** Some cultural services are engaged in benchmarking but are at an early stage in the process. There are limited comparisons with other providers and limited market testing for in-house services. Some services have been formally tendered and won by in-house services. Other services are provided by private contractors including 60 per cent of arboriculture, all health and safety checks and maintenance of play equipment.

- 86 The Council's recent investment in facilities has taken account of the anticipated growth in their population, by incorporating extra capacity in their new facilities. An increase in population should lead to an increase the council's revenues but will not be available for some years and may have an impact on the ability of the Council to show it is providing value for money in the short term.

### Summary

- 87 The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham provides a **'fair'** cultural services to their local population. The Council is attempting to address the fundamental issues identified in the Local Cultural Strategy, namely lack of infrastructure and the need to increase usage. However, the service has not improved satisfaction rates or identified what all users of the service require or non-users expect. This gap in analysis needs to be bridged with more effective consultation on existing services with users and non-users. Whilst access and the spread of services is good, the service needs to better justify the increased investment and demonstrate it is providing value for money services.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

### What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 88** The Council has a good track record of improving cultural services. Over the last five years, the Council has prioritised expenditure in cultural services resulting in significant improvements for users. This has centred on improvements to facilities but has also featured service enhancements. These have been in line with their Local Cultural Strategy and corporate priorities, particularly in learning and civic pride. Overall, the Council has invested £35 million (including £25 million from grants) in capital on cultural services infrastructure and facilities since 2000.
- 89** Many of the refurbishments were in response to criticisms of existing facilities from users and driven by the Council's strategy to improve and expand the cultural infrastructure in the borough. Some examples of improvements are as follows.
- The Castle Green PFI building, in conjunction with education. This site provides a brand new specialist music college, a dual sports hall and theatre seating for over 800, outdoor leisure facilities, ICT suite, a large library, café all with extended opening hours.
  - The total refurbishment Broadway theatre - the only theatre in the borough and is now a modern facility with theatre productions booked into 2006.
  - The A13 Artscape (visual art to improve image of the borough around the A13 dual carriage) has been a success story. Local people were consulted and invited to design workshops. £3.9 million was secured from partners with TfL, East Thameside Partnership, Arts Council and the council. The project included two pedestrian subway, landscaping, lighting, fencing and new play areas. These schemes improved the environment, contributed to the visual art in the borough but also helped to improve the image of the borough.
  - The refurbishment of Goresbrook leisure centre, with a new fitness suite, dance studio, cardio area, and a new health suite.
  - New and refurbished playgrounds in parks.
  - Expansion of the community music service, computer equipment, instruments and learning space.
- 90** The Council has developed effective partnerships, which have contributed to the investment programme. The new development of multi-use sites has been done in partnership with the police, the PCT, Sure Start, Barking College and the education department. These partnerships have helped the Council to address shared priorities in learning, health, safer and stronger communities, with enhanced services for young and older people. Further examples include:
- youth programmes run by the police with high risk youth and ex-offenders;

- development of a Parks Police service who help to reduce fear of crime in parks and have reduced the graffiti and vandalism in parks;
  - bookstart programme in libraries linked to the PCT - encouraging young mothers to join libraries with their children, linked to health visits; and
  - the library service has targeted primary school children and has signed up 95 per cent of primary aged children in the borough.
- 91 Overall usage of facilities has risen over the last three years, with the exception of leisure centres. However, satisfaction has declined in 2004-05, with respect to Best Value performance Indicators (BVPIs), despite investment in the core cultural services. Similarly, the Council's own, more recent user satisfaction survey showed that satisfaction is still down from 2003-04. The Council has not identified the reasons for the decline, although some of the newer facilities had not yet opened during the more recent surveys.
- 92 The long term investment decisions have not been fully evaluated against service impact. The Council strongly believe they need to improve these facilities as outlined in the Local Cultural Strategy but the failure to carryout more detailed and ongoing analysis of a wide range of users and non-users may have led to a gap in the Council's understanding of current needs.
- 93 Some of the planned expansion of the arts, with the involvement of the private sector, has not yet materialised. Negotiations into the Malthouse project have been ongoing for some years and have only just been resolved. The aim of the project is to inject private and public investment into the waterfront area in Barking, creating new jobs.
- 94 The Council has not yet rationalised the number of libraries given the good geographical spread on eleven sites. With all the libraries remaining open, this has put a strain on revenue funding and has led to restrictions in opening hours. Plans are in place to regenerate Dagenham Town Centre, which if achieved, would provide a new multi-use learning centre and library in the heart of the town. This would provide an opportunity to review the use of three smaller libraries in the area. The current strain on revenue within libraries is restricting opening hours on a new site, when nine of the old libraries remain open. Costs of the service remain high and usage is still relatively low in some sites.
- 95 The Council has been investing in the infrastructure but without the corresponding analysis and investment in the experience and satisfaction of users. The Council will need to consider whether all this investment is ultimately delivering the outcomes users and the community really want.

## How well does the service manage performance?

- 96** Leading Councillors and senior managers have translated their vision for cultural services into strategies. Councillors, managers and staff interviewed during the inspection were clear about the broad vision for cultural services. The key strategy across all cultural services is the Local Cultural Strategy and which was developed after consultation with a range of community organisations, external partners and the local community. Each division within cultural services has a service plan and scorecard, which sets out their vision, service strategy and action plan with timelines. Each divisional plan makes clear references to the Local Cultural Strategy and the Community Strategy. This demonstrates that each division has made the links to the corporate strategy and priorities of the Council as a whole. These plans have challenging targets that aim to improve overall service quality for users in the short and medium term.
- 97** The aims for cultural services are based on a basic understanding of the general needs of the borough based on the census data, future population growth and feedback from the Council's consultation. This is outlined in the Local Cultural Strategy. This strategy, published in 2003, further clarified the Council's two key cultural issues for the borough - to address the inadequate cultural infrastructure and the low levels of participation.
- 98** The various plans and strategies address local and national priorities but are not fully integrated across cultural services. Service planning is done within divisions and cross service planning is limited. While they all address the core issues of infrastructure and participation, they are less clear about how they collectively contribute to the government's shared priorities and the how particular users or non-users needs are to be met. Similarly, good practices in consultation are not always shared across all divisions. Consultation on library opening hours took place but with a limited response from the community. This exercise was not repeated so opening hours may not reflect users preferred times or offer what they want.
- 99** The Council has some good performance management systems and practices but it is not always clear how customer feedback, complaints or other factors are integrated into management decision making. Some of these systems are also undermined by the lack of detailed and measurable outcomes for users. Similarly, the impact of the actions listed are not always evidenced or reported back so managers do not always know the impact of their actions on particular users or non-users - ie older or younger people, people with disabilities or various ethnic groups.
- 100** The Council has made improvements to performance management within services. One example is the introduction of the Service Scorecards. This demonstrates how each service aims to address corporate priorities, identifies main projects, where they want to be in three to five years. The lead councillor and the head of service signed up to the scorecard. The limitations of these scorecards means that much can be achieved but managers and councillors may still not be able to identify the specific outcomes for users.

However, lead councillors meet monthly with the respective head of service to discuss current performance and options for changes where performance is not on target. Some service heads have commissioned surveys to help them identify gaps in their services. A good example of this was the Playing and Pitch and Audit. Service action plans then detail the response to the findings. The limitation of this work is that the findings are often broad so actions may still not reflect the detailed responses required to attract new users or raise satisfaction levels. Service standards are not well published, outside the internet. Some facilities do not display these standards and in a number of cases, there is limited monitoring of the standards. Some data is reported on complaints and monitored for diversity but again the focus is on volumes rather than a deeper analysis to drive service improvements.

- 101 Leadership from Councillors is good but the splitting of services between two divisions and seven heads of service reduces the impact of leadership across cultural services. Consultation and engagement with users and partners is largely done within divisions or under the management of service heads, which can and often does lead to a lack of integration in service planning. Good practices in consultation and local involvement are not always shared across all cultural services. This means that some services are more responsive to users and non-users comments and feedback, particularly around investment decisions but similar practices are used consistently for operational decisions that may enhance the quality of the service or encourage greater usage.
- 102 Operationally, management are not adequately monitoring against services standards and lack comprehensive data on their service users. Comprehensive data is not collected across the range of diverse users so managers are often unable to assess whether discrimination is taking place or whether the services are meeting these diverse needs. Not all frontline staff are aware of the service standards for their area of work so it is unclear how they can judge whether these standards are being met. The lack of information in frontline areas makes it more difficult for operational staff to identify and address service deficiencies.
- 103 Overall, the core performance management framework is in place but is not underpinned by comprehensive data and good customer intelligence.

### **Does the service have the capacity to improve?**

- 104 The Council has increased their capacity within cultural services both revenue and capital. However, the Council has focused too much on the investment and not enough on the analysis of clear outcomes. The Council need to develop the skills and tools to effectively identify what existing users want from the service. The Council has begun benchmarking and some good examples of consultation but this has not resulted in improved satisfaction levels or the desired levels of usage in leisure services.

- 105** Councillors and senior managers have a good grasp of the key challenges facing the Council but less of an understanding of what will improve current performance. The level of focus on the need to improve service quality, increase participation and meet the shared priorities is not always sustained. The fact that cultural services are not managed within a single structure does not make it easy for the service to address this.
- 106** The Council has a robust medium term financial strategy, is debt free and has the resources to complete their capital spending ambitions. However, it is not always clear where the revenue funding will come from to support this capital spending. Similarly, it is not clear where the revenue needed to meet the desired increase in opening times and usage of all these facilities will come from. The Council has effectively used partnerships and has attracted substantial external funding to extend their capacity. Most of the partners we spoke to during the inspection, spoke highly of the Council and their commitment to joint working and improving cultural services.
- 107** With respect to equality, diversity and human rights issues, the Council has developed their capacity recently in this area from a low base. The Council has developed partnerships with a wide range of voluntary and community organisations that specialise in supporting various disadvantaged groups. These groups include the Disability Association, Mental Health User Group, Parents Liaison Group, various African and Asian organisations and Age Concern.
- 108** The Council is also encouraging and facilitating partnership working between these various groups and communities. During the inspection we met representatives from some of these organisations and although many were positive about the general relationship with the Council, many had concerns about accessing community facilities. They were also concerned about the Council's strategy to reduce the subsidy to community halls as they felt this was reducing their ability to organise themselves. Similarly, the establishment of the new forums is an opportunity for the Council to improve consultation, identify more specific needs, expectations and also an opportunity to help increase the community capacity.
- 109** The Council has not really considered market testing some directly managed services or explored the private or voluntary sector for who may be able to provide the services more effectively. There is little evidence of longer term human resource planning, which seeks to maximise internal capacity. Staff we met were highly motivated and believed in the quality of in-house provision. The Council could benefit from the challenge and comparisons with other cultural service providers.

## Summary

- 110 Overall, the Council has **promising** prospects for improvement. This is based on the fact that the Council has delivered a range of service improvements over the last few years, although coming from a low base. It is addressing the two key issues identified in the Local Cultural Strategy - lack of cultural infrastructure and low usage. Finances are robust, further investment is planned and performance management systems have improved. However, the Council has some significant challenges to move from the broad aims to service specific targets and outcomes. The Council needs to address the low satisfaction levels and present a greater challenge to existing methods of delivery.