

Service Inspection Report

September 2006



Cultural Services

Newark and Sherwood District Council

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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

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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 coordination 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 (KLOEs) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

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

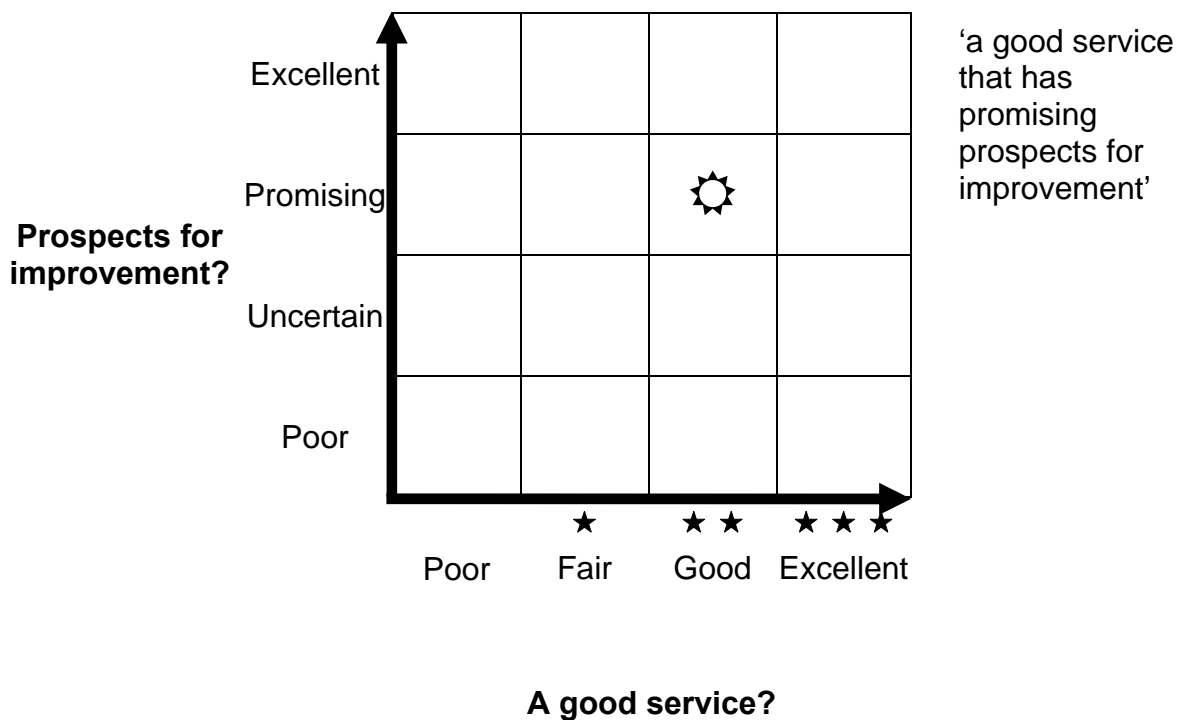
Summary

- 1 Newark and Sherwood District Council provides 'good' cultural services and has 'promising' prospects for improvement.
- 2 The Council provides leisure centres, community centres and community development, sports development, arts development, museums, the Palace Theatre, events, marketing and promotions. The built and natural environments with 1,604 hectares of conservation areas and 1,383 listed buildings, parks and open spaces, as well as tourism and creative industry support, also form a large part of the cultural life of the area.
- 3 The Council has invested in making its cultural heritage and cultural vitality an important part of its work. It is very aware of the district's importance historically and the beauty of its surroundings. Important buildings and natural open spaces are equally regarded.
- 4 The Council's work makes important contributions to the achievement of national, regional and local priorities aimed at improving the well being of local people. Culture is used effectively to enhance quality of life and to improve health. Cultural services are enthusiastic about adapting schemes and programmes developed elsewhere and putting them to good effect locally.
- 5 Partnership working is a strength. The Council has a well established practice of working with health partners to address health inequalities. It has worked with the PCT since 2002 on promoting healthy lifestyles, community nutrition, tackling obesity and coronary heart care. Partners acknowledge the Council's ability and enthusiasm for taking on new initiatives and are keen to work together.
- 6 The Council is proud of its achievements. External accreditation such as Green Flags for parks, and Quest for leisure centres and the sports development team are sought and maintained. These awards help to assure customers that standards are being met and provide a basis for continual improvement.
- 7 Access to services such as museum collections is enhanced by outreach work. Activities for children, young people and older people in schools and villages successfully bring artefacts and people together for learning and enjoyment.
- 8 Information about who does and does not use cultural services is developing. Customers and non-users do not always have a chance to be fully involved in improving services. Service standards, in place since 2003, are due for review. The Council does not consistently advertise that information is available in different formats such as large print, braille, or other languages.
- 9 The Council's use of business systems like performance information, consultation and purchasing is developing into an effective improvement tool. Overview and scrutiny by councillors of the work of cultural services and the use of councillor working groups is developing but varies.

Scoring the service

- 10 We have assessed Newark and Sherwood District Council as providing a ‘good’, two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

¹ 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.

11 The service is a good, two-star service because:

- aims and objectives are clearly linked to local need and regional and national priorities;
- the work of cultural services strongly supports the Council's aim of achieving excellence;
- cultural services have a strong sense of place, an awareness of civic pride, a well defined care for local heritage, a clear picture of the district's historical position; and
- cultural services are making a difference by their positive contribution to changing people's lives and enhancing community capacity.

12 However:

- users and non-users have not been consistently involved in developing services or service standards; and
- awareness and understanding of diversity varies.

13 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- the Council has a clear vision for cultural services based on the county-wide cultural strategy;
- partnership working is a strength and valued;
- the Council has demonstrated the importance of culture by its investments in service review and development;
- performance management is an effective management tool; and
- its ability to attract appropriate external funding is a strength.

14 However:

- corporate systems such as consultation, performance management, use of ICT and planning are all developing into more appropriate tools of which cultural services is beginning to make full use;
- corporate procurement is developing; and
- the effectiveness of scrutiny work for culture varies.

Recommendations

- 15 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 costs² 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 Within the work of the communications and consultation working party the Council should consider:

- enhancing user focus by ensuring that users are at the centre of the design and development of marketing and communications material, particularly in the website and service standards; and*
- the need for regular communications planning meetings with the corporate communications team, to identify the major communications priorities arising from service plans.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- users will be involved in and clearer about what services are available and the standards that can be expected;
- a more co-ordinated approach to communications planning;
- improved communications capacity; and
- development of the corporate brand across all aspects of the Council's web presence.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by March 2007.

² 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.

Recommendation

R2 The Council should enhance its understanding of diversity by:

- *sharing learning across services;*
- *embedding its understanding of diversity; and*
- *building on existing strengths.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- consistency for customers; and
- better use of resources.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by March 2008.

Recommendation

R3 The Council should use the improvement tool 'Fit for the future':

- *the web-tool is based on the findings from the national study, 'Public Sports and Recreation Services', undertaken by the Audit Commission in association with Sport England;*
- *it is designed for local authorities in England to help to secure improved access and deliver value for money in managing public sport and recreation facilities; and*
- *the study identified three key stages to the planning and commissioning of public leisure and recreation services and the web-tool provides a step-by-step guide to achieving improvement.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a fresh look at the Council's current position with procurement of leisure;
- a wider view of existing leisure provision;
- enhanced use of procurement skills;
- low cost use of external expertise.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2007.

Report

Context

The locality

- 16 Newark and Sherwood is in the East Midlands of England. Covering an area of 65,000 hectares, it is the largest of the seven Nottinghamshire district councils. A population of 108,600 lives in the district (2001 census), an increase of 3.2 per cent over 1991.
- 17 The district has contrasting areas of agriculture, market towns, commuter and rural 'coalfield' villages. It includes the former borough of Newark, the small cathedral town of Southwell, the small former mining town of Ollerton, 72 parishes and 82 villages and hamlets, of which nearly half are conservation areas. About one third of the population live within the Newark conurbation.
- 18 The economy of the district has changed, moving away from manufacturing towards services. Unemployment is 1.8 per cent (February 2006) which is below both the regional and national figures (2.4 and 2.6 per cent), although the average wage, at £388.80, is lower than the regional average of £394.80. In contrast, average earnings for employees who are residents are £420.
- 19 On the indices of multiple deprivation (IMD 2004), the district ranks as 143rd (out of 354), where one is the most deprived.

The Council

- 20 The Council has 46 councillors. The Conservative party is the largest single party, with 23 seats, but no party has overall control. Labour has 12 councillors and there are 7 Independent and 4 Liberal Democrat councillors.
- 21 The Council is controlled by the Leader and Cabinet model of governance. The Cabinet is made up of the Leader of the Council and six other councillors, and comprises six Conservative and one Liberal Democrat. Three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, each chaired by either a Labour, Liberal Democrat, or Conservative councillor, review the decisions of Cabinet and assist in policy development.
- 22 The Council employs 827 full and part-time staff (515.31 FTE). The anticipated budget outturn for 2005/06 (net of Parish precept) is £13,894,000 and the budget requirement for 2006/07 (net of Parish precept) is £15,246,000.

The Council's cultural services

- 23** The delivery of cultural services is split across the Council, with the majority of the services contained within leisure and cultural services. The leisure and cultural services section includes leisure centres, community centres, community development, sports development, arts development, museums, Palace Theatre, events, marketing and promotions. Parks and open spaces are managed through environmental services; the economic regeneration unit manages tourism and creative industry support. Three councillors have culture-related portfolios: environment; sustainable development and regeneration; and leisure and culture, with a fourth portfolio holder having responsibility for value for money through finance, procurement and e-government. The total revenue spend on sport and leisure, parks and open spaces, culture and heritage for 2005/06 was £3,862,000 plus £250,000 for tourism. The capital programme for 2005/06 is approximately £1.6 million for leisure centres and parks and open spaces.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 24 The shared ambitions for cultural life in the county are set out in the cultural strategy for Nottinghamshire, *'Building on success'*, which was developed as a national pilot in 2001 by a consortium of nine local councils: Nottinghamshire County Council, the city of Nottingham and the seven district councils of Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Broxtowe, Gedling, Mansfield, Newark and Sherwood, and Rushcliffe. This was one of fourteen national pilots for the preparation of local cultural strategies chosen by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to contribute to its guidance for the preparation of such strategies across the country. A wide consultation was carried out locally which resulted in the five-year strategy for the development of the cultural life of the county, together with an action plan.

- 25 The Council fully subscribes to the long-term vision expressed in the cultural strategy:

'to establish Nottinghamshire at the forefront of cultural provision in the country, where everyone living, working and visiting the county is positively encouraged to, and has the opportunity to, participate in and enjoy all forms of cultural activity, at all levels, irrespective of their race, gender, level of ability or geographical location'.

A report was jointly commissioned by the nine local authorities in 2005 to assess the impact of the strategy. A second strategy is planned with cultural sector planning guidance and advocacy to promote the integration of culture in the development plans of a range of partners.

- 26 Newark and Sherwood Local Strategic Partnership's long-term vision is outlined in the revised Community Plan 2006/16.

'We aim that by 2015, residents in Newark and Sherwood will consider their area to offer them the best quality of life in the East Midlands – being one of the top ten rural districts in the region by 2010, and top five by 2015, with sustainable communities that are –

- *safe and strong;*
- *healthy;*
- *learning and earning;*
- *clean and green;*
- *culturally connected; and*
- *accessible.'*

- 27** Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Issue Groups, or partnerships made up of officers from the Council and other partner organisations, worked with councillors, local community groups, and volunteers to agree a set of outcomes for each strategic priority. The Culture Issue Group (CIG) held an action planning event in September 2005 to ensure local people's needs and priorities were articulated in their plan. Since then, CIG membership has grown to represent local community arts, heritage, environment groups and leisure and culture agencies. Three categories of priorities emerged under the given headings of access and diversity, developing infrastructure, local talent:
- connect people so they know what is going on, and where;
 - raise civic pride and aspirations by developing, promoting and supporting local historical and living heritage; and
 - improve accessibility to cultural opportunities across the district.
- 28** The Local Area Agreement for the county, '*All together better*', corresponds with five of the community strategy themes, excluding the 'culturally connected' theme. It uses culture for a number of outcomes and targets such as 'to increase the overall quality of life for older people' by 'increasing older people's participation in and satisfaction with sport, leisure, culture and physical activity'.
- 29** In April 2005, following public consultation during 2004, the Council formally adopted a new aim:
- 'to make Newark and Sherwood an excellent performing council',*
- and five new priorities to support the excellence agenda:
- to encourage economic prosperity for all;
 - to provide leisure and health opportunities for all;
 - to protect and improve the environment;
 - to ensure affordable homes built to modern standards are available for all; and
 - to maintain safer communities.
- 30** The Cultural Services Heritage plan 2003 recognised the importance and influence of culture and cultural services in achieving corporate, local, and national objectives. Cultural heritage, or the management of objects and buildings which have historical or cultural significance, was felt to be important in a district with a particularly high level of conservation areas (1,604 hectares) and more listed buildings (1,383) than Oxford or York.

- 31 During 2004/05, with a new strategic director of operations and a new head of leisure and culture, the service went through a self-assessment. This resulted in the Leisure and Cultural Services strategy 2005/10, *'Inspiration, Aspiration and Engagement'*. The strategy draws together all the existing statements, strategies, policies and plans to show the contribution which culture makes towards achieving corporate objectives. The Green Spaces and Economic Regeneration strategies support the Leisure and Cultural Services strategy, as do the sports and physical activity, cultural heritage, museums improvement, arts, and leisure plans.

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

- 32 Culture covers a wide scope including arts, museums, archives and heritage; sport, play and recreation, and tourism. Cultural service inspections cover the whole service (including elements which the Council may not directly provide) and its contribution to cross-cutting issues such as social inclusion, sustainable communities, economic regeneration, positive impact on quality of life, impact and outcomes for local people.
- 33 Inspections focus on cultural opportunities for children, young people and older people and cover the breadth of services in the areas of sport and physical activity, library and information, arts, museums and heritage, and so on, in building and developing sustainable and successful communities. A key issue is the role of the Council in relation to its partnership work, its relations with other sectors, and its cultural planning role. Its community leadership role involves securing a balance between direct provision, procurement and working in partnership with others to identify and respond to community needs.

Access, customer care and user and/or community focus

- 34 The Council is making progress to ensure access for all. The district is largely rural with variable public transport and pockets of deprivation contrasting with affluent areas. Initiatives such as the leisure card, outreach services, participatory art programmes, village ventures, healthy lifestyle programmes, green gym, and inclusive pricing policy are increasing access and participation.
- 35 The service understands the context within which it works and the Council values the heritage of the area. It is developing its in depth understanding of the needs and aspirations of local people. For example, the area is rich in history, particularly in relation to the Civil War and the Council plans to establish a new museum by 2020.
- 36 Service standards and customer charters are clearly available for users at facilities, through the website and on request. The Quest logo is prominently displayed assuring customers of the standards necessary to achieve and maintain the accreditation. However, customers have not been directly involved with formulating the standards which were last reviewed in 2003.

- 37 Customer surveys and user consultation are regularly used to inform service improvement. Both formal and informal methods are employed. For example, the Newark and Sherwood Cricket Club forum provides an opportunity for the Council to gather the views of the cricketing community about the need to provide more coaching courses, and the museums service has consulted with users to shape future provision. Each method results in effective improvements that users recognise.
- 38 Customer views are used constructively in service development. Both community arts and sports provision in Newark and Sherwood offer trial sessions which enable potential users to try something new and also enable the services to test the demand for new provision. This market testing also assists the Council in providing value for money.
- 39 Customer contact and feedback is important to the Council. Regular customer focus meetings are held as well as leisure centre managers' drop in clinics on the first Tuesday of every month. Feedback is given to show how comments are used to improve and develop services.

Diversity

- 40 Cultural services have a good understanding of diversity locally. Pockets of good practice and local initiatives demonstrate positive working to understand and meet local need. For example, tactile displays for the visually impaired in museums, arts activities for vulnerable young people, exercise classes for the disabled user. A notable example, using volunteers as 'buddies' to enable disabled users to access mainstream provision in one leisure centre, is currently funded through the Inclusive Fitness Initiative Scheme pilot. The Council's understanding of equalities and diversity is developing. It has a generic equalities scheme in place and has undertaken impact assessments for all services. Community centres supported by the Council comply with the DDA and, being responsive to their local communities, provide for the diverse needs of those communities. The Council also works with partners, including the voluntary sector, to meet the needs of a range of people.
- 41 The Council is developing its in depth understanding of local need. It has a centralised database available to all staff giving statistical information about social need and demographic information. Service development involves citizen panel views, friends groups, parish councils, customer focus groups, managers drop ins and community groups. Project work targets hard-to-reach groups and non-users in rural areas.
- 42 Some barriers to access exist. For example, the equalities scheme stresses that Council material can be provided in alternative languages and formats yet this information is not routinely advertised, in an appropriate format, on standard leaflets produced by the Council. As a result, potential users will not necessarily be able to access information, as they will not know it is available in other formats.

- 43 The services do not discriminate directly or intentionally against any group. But the Council acknowledges that it does not have sufficient information to be confident it meets the needs of all groups. As a consequence the Council is at risk of unintentional discrimination. It has recently installed IT which will help identify the users of leisure centres and the theatre and once the Council has this information, and targets non-users to identify their needs, it will be able to plan services for all residents.

Service outcomes for users and the community

- 44 In assessing service outcomes and to make the inspection process manageable, we focused on two agreed themes based on the shared priorities:
- healthier communities; and
 - quality of life for local people.

Healthier communities

- 45 The Council is working well in partnership to improve the health of its communities and address health inequalities across the district. As a result of the North Nottinghamshire health improvement programme in 2002, it worked in partnership with the Primary Care Trust to develop work into the promotion of healthy lifestyles. This was developed into a three-year funding agreement with the PCT for a community nutritionist programme and healthy lifestyles officer whose work concentrates on reduction of obesity and coronary heart care. A further three-year funding agreement has recently been agreed to address obesity in children, expanding the GP referral scheme and community nutrition programme. Both the community nutritionist and healthy lifestyles officer have worked with low income and disadvantaged groups to help to reduce inequality in health related issues. Results for this sort of work is long-term but initial results are being measured in terms of higher self-esteem and better eating habits.
- 46 The Council is achieving results through its sport and physical activity plan. This aims to raise activity levels across the community, work in partnership with schools and the voluntary and community sector and to target work to specific sectors in the community such as children and people with disabilities. Much of the work is delivered in partnership and through external funding. The programme works across the community, taking body MOTs and demonstrations into community settings and events, as well as activities for staff and councillors to raise the profile of a range of health issues such as smoking cessation, cancer care, and diabetes awareness. In 2003/05 the team worked with the arts team to promote healthy eating and gardening through the Newark Harvest project. Work at the four leisure centres and council headquarters from January 2004 to January 2005 has seen reductions across all age ranges in body mass index (BMI), waist/hip ratio and body fat.

- 47 The Council's partnership working is a strength. For example, in 2001/04 the Council gained Arts Council funding to deliver a project in partnership with Dance4 for a programme of dance-based sessions and seated exercise specifically aimed at improving postural stability, confidence and mobility in older people. As the initial funding ended the Council absorbed these into the GP referral work and worked with the PCT to develop the project into an integrated falls prevention programme across the district. This included training of health and leisure professionals in providing appropriate classes, prevention awareness sessions, looking at standardised impact monitoring, and is currently developing a joint falls prevention strategy.

Quality of life for local people

- 48 Cultural services contribute effectively enhancing the quality of life of many local people. Each element of the services involved links to the overall aims and vision for the county wide cultural strategy. The Council has worked with its partners and neighbours in the development of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). This has included work with regional agencies and Government Office to ensure that the potential contribution of cultural services to making things better for local people is recognised within LAA.
- 49 The Council works well with partners to enhance the quality of life for local people. In partnership with the County Council and the Arts Council, it funds community arts which work in communities to enhance quality of life. Notable examples funded by the Council and other funders are the Festival of the Beck and Village Vestiges. As a result of these initiatives, rural communities are able to use the museum collections more effectively and several parts of the district which had little arts activity are now highly motivated, experience unique arts work and have enhanced performing and organising skills.
- 50 Children and young people are high on the Council's agenda. For example, the Head of Leisure and Culture leads corporately on children and young people's issues. The Leisure Card scheme gives discounted access to leisure facilities for looked after children and their carers. Work to develop the Old Magnus Buildings as a culture quarter includes a partnership with the local Child Bereavement Counselling Service (Sue's Place) to encourage involvement in cultural activities as part of the bereavement recovery and support network.
- 51 Cultural services work is strongly targeted to achieve enhanced quality of life for specific groups. Target projects have recently included sports development activities in deprived areas, a project to celebrate the history of traveller communities within Newark, and work with the community safety partnership to provide diversionary activities in areas experiencing anti-social behaviour. Both community cohesion and well being are enhanced as a result of this work.
- 52 The Council is working effectively to improve open spaces. The provision of parks and community facilities by the Council encourages access to open space and informal recreational activities. Community centres are managed locally but maintained by the Council. Community use and involvement with friends and volunteer groups enhance community pride and cohesion.

- 53 The Council values its cultural heritage. The preservation of the built environment is a key feature of the Local Plan and the developing Local Development Framework. The Council has a grants scheme for historic buildings repairs and provides guidance to owners and occupiers of listed buildings and people living in conservation areas. As a result, people are clear about what they need to do to ensure that conservation areas and historic sites are maintained appropriately.
- 54 The district has the lowest overall crime rate in Nottinghamshire. Cultural services work is routinely aimed at target groups and within geographic areas, with projects developed in partnership with community safety colleagues. CCTV has also been installed at many sites. The Council recognises that the sustained low levels of crime and continuing work in this field is a major contributor to the quality of life and overall satisfaction of its residents.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 55 The Council is achieving value for money through its cultural services. Service costs are high compared with others. The total cultural spend is in the highest quartile across its family group and third highest compared to neighbouring Nottinghamshire authorities, reflecting the corporate decision to prioritise culture and make investments in services. The Council has taken difficult decisions, for example to close unpopular and ineffective leisure sites and the Appletongate Museum in Newark, and has redirected resources into other aspects of the service. Investment in outreach services for rural residents, leisure centres, the Palace Theatre and a new Museum Resource Centre have increased usage and participation.
- 56 The Council has the scope to enhance further the value for money it currently achieves. Any service development proposals must satisfy corporate and service priorities before new money is invested and the achievement of future efficiencies is managed through budget and performance indicator achievement against target. The Council has considered a number of options for its new leisure centre, for example public private partnerships (PPP), and plans to look in further detail at options for trust management systems. The three Council leisure centre operations are run in-house with financial assistance provided by the Council to Southwell Leisure Centre Trust for the operation of Southwell Leisure Centre. By 2007 the Council should have fuller information about, and be able to analyse, the full impact of developments such as the leisure card scheme, the Building Schools programme, and any changes to the status of individual schools and build this into their options appraisals.
- 57 The Council regularly considers whole life costs of decisions, particularly capital decisions. Capital projects need to meet corporate priorities before being approved. The Council also aims to enhance provision through capital development. For example, the planned new leisure centre in Newark is not proposed as a joint use site, a council facility to which schools will have access. This will increase its availability to residents, for example for early morning swimming thus offering better value for money for residents.

- 58 Procurement is developing. Major items are subject to an options appraisal and tendering process but smaller items are not systematically treated to a corporate procurement process. Examples of successful procured contracts across the leisure centres include supply of alcohol, supply of sports retail items, three-year partnership with the Swimming Teachers Association for the supply of badges, certificates, pool equipment, defibrillator training, pool plant and Swimming Tutors Courses. The Council is investigating vendor snacks across all leisure centres, to determine whether a 'self fill' or a 'contracted out service' is the best way forward.
- 59 Since the appointment of a procurement manager in January 2005, the Council's approach has begun to reflect the value for money opportunities offered by good procurement practices such as joint procurement. Actions include the pilot introduction of purchasing cards, and internal cross-service area and external cross-border purchasing to improve efficiencies through joint procurement. The Council met all the national procurement strategy milestones for 2004/05 and 2005/06. The Council is about to introduce an e-procurement system following a rigorous cost benefit analysis to ensure that this will deliver further efficiencies.
- 60 The 2003/04 best value satisfaction indicators survey results were relatively low compared with other local authorities, and the Council was in the worst quartile for satisfaction with sport and leisure facilities. More recently, the interim results from the citizens panel survey undertaken in early 2006 show increasing levels of overall usage and satisfaction in all areas of cultural and leisure provision. Further analysis of the results is planned during summer 2006. The next national best value satisfaction indicators survey is planned for autumn 2006.
- 61 Value for money offered by the Palace Theatre has increased following a review of provision. Marketing of the venue has improved and numbers have increased. The subsidy to the theatre, per head of population, has decreased. More imaginative programming such as a season of foreign language films, afternoon performances for older people, Saturday morning drama workshops for young people, and a loyalty card have proved popular, leading to further value for money.
- 62 The sports development service delivers value for money. Three of the ten posts are externally funded. Activities delivered and supported by the service are targeted at improving quality of life for a range of groups including older people, people with a disability, young people and people living in rural communities. The service works with schools and the community, initially as a provider but then as a facilitator, to ensure that the activity continues once the sports development team withdraws. For example coaching is delivered in schools and through workshops for coaches on multi-skills of agility, balance and co-ordination rather than multi-sports. This is aimed at ensuring that all levels of ability are included and that skills can transfer to other areas of life not just team sport. Sustainability is assured through for example the development of a sports club run by volunteers in the community. The Council also offers small amounts of grant aid which encourage further development of local clubs and contribute to the cost of equipment or floodlighting for example. The sports development team operates on an outreach basis in community venues in its rural communities, enhancing its availability to residents.

- 63 Partnership working is achieving value for money. The appointments of the two posts of community nutrition assistant and healthy lifestyles officer are a joint collaboration between the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the Council, for a period of three years terminating on 31 March 2006. However, a further three years have been agreed until 31 March 2009. The objectives of the two posts are to increase the levels of physical activity in the population and to increase the opportunities for more people, particularly from low income and vulnerable groups to access a healthy diet. Approximately 10,000 new participants have accessed the services to date. In partnership with other councils within Nottinghamshire, the Council is developing its working arrangements with *'Experience Nottinghamshire'* (the single county-wide destination management organisation for Nottinghamshire) in order to maximise tourism potential within the county. The Council has yet to decide what its long-term commitment will be to the organisation.
- 64 The Council is in a transition period with its leisure centres. Some of the leisure centres are joint use facilities with schools. Whilst this sometimes limits the time facilities are available, it also increases the range of facilities which the residents of Newark can use. However, one centre is sited in a school now consulting about foundation status and this has the potential to change its relationship with the Council. A new leisure centre is planned for Newark to replace an ageing facility. The Council is also exploring the options available to it for operating leisure centres: in-house, or trust status to continue to secure value for money.
- 65 The Council makes good use of its museum resources. Following the closure of a museum, funding was re-directed to develop outreach activities to more rural areas of the district. This ensures that more people have access to the museum service's collection and is particularly valuable in the rural context of the district. Some of the museum's collection is made available to schools, both inside and outside the district, through discovery boxes, education sessions, and outreach events such as 'Village Vestiges' tailored to each village. No charge is made for the boxes but users must arrange delivery and collection and a charge is made for overdue returns. The majority of outreach events are free.
- 66 Outreach services are cost effective. The Council has reduced the cost per participant head and achieved targets which form part of the Council's annual efficiency statement. To have delivered outreach services in 2005/06 at the same cost per head as in 2003/04 would have cost the Council an additional £315,310.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 67 The Council can implement change effectively and achieve better outcomes for users. In the last three years, following a best value inspection of leisure facilities and the sports development service in 2003, the Council resolved a number of issues highlighted by the inspection. The joint use and tenure arrangements with the County Council for leisure centres have been finalised, an 'inclusivity' policy for pricing and entry to leisure services has been introduced, with future development of new IT systems to provide information about usage. The Council has closed poorly performing sites, and challenged the way services are delivered. A review of museum services and the subsequent improvement plan resulted in the closure of one museum and the development of education and outreach services as a more effective alternative for rural users, and young and older people.
- 68 The Council has a good track record in seeking constructive ways to analyse and improve cultural services. During 2004/05 it used the Sport England '*Towards an Excellent Service*' (TAES) self-assessment model to identify areas for improvement. For example this identified a need to improve consultation processes, especially around non-user and under-18s consultation. Corporate and service specific improvements in consultation and information gathering are being implemented to identify and reach non-users.
- 69 The direction of travel for the Council's own performance indicators is improving. For example for the year-end 2006, it exceeded the number of Activo sales at leisure centres (target 2127) by 13. The target for 2006/07 is 5,000 across all four facilities with membership renewal targets planned. The target of 960,000 for the number of usages at leisure centres was exceeded at the four facilities by 17,508. The target of 7,500 users of the outreach programme (taking the museums collection and workshops into the community) was 12,913 above target. Participants annually in the sports development sessions exceeded the target of 23,040 by 7,290.
- 70 The 2003/04 best value satisfaction indicators survey results were relatively low compared with other local authorities, and the Council was in the worst quartile for satisfaction with sport and leisure facilities. More recently, the interim results from the Council's citizens panel survey undertaken in early 2006 show increasing levels of overall usage and satisfaction in all areas of cultural and leisure provision. Further analysis of the results is planned during summer 2006.

- 71 The Council uses its resources effectively to achieve better outcomes for local people. For example, working in partnership with the PCT, the community nutrition officer worked with 45 different groups within the community to deliver 347 sessions with 5,972 participants. Outcomes include better nutrition in low income families, increased social inclusion for traveller families, weight reduction in children. The healthy lifestyles officer worked with 27 different community groups of all ages and abilities, to deliver 300 sessions with 3,828 participants accessing new activity. These included the five-hour active club course giving the participants a qualification to deliver out of school clubs which encourage more participation in sport and physical activity in deprived wards.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 72 The Council has clear aims and priorities for the future. The Council's vision for cultural services is the long-term vision expressed in the county-wide cultural strategy April 2001:

'to establish Nottinghamshire at the forefront of cultural provision in the country, where everyone living, working and visiting the county is positively encouraged to, and has the opportunity to, participate in and enjoy all forms of cultural activity, at all levels, irrespective of their race, gender, level of ability or geographical location'.

Culture is described by staff and councillors as an important link, or the 'glue', between all the Council's priorities.

- 73 Council staff and partners clearly understand the cultural vision. Each express a slightly different interpretation of that vision, depending on what part of the organisation they relate to. They do not repeat a 'mantra', rather a personal version for their own circumstances. For example, in health, sport, arts, people could show the relevance of culture to a better quality of life through increased participation, and the value of arts activity in working with young and older people.
- 74 Improvement priorities are clearly linked to desired outcomes. For example 'Work with partners to contribute to the economic regeneration and vitality of the district' is linked to outcomes such as 'Increase in visitors to events within district' and 'Increase in associated day spend per visitor at major events'. Key objectives include:
- significantly improving the quality of life for residents of the district;
 - providing excellent facilities and services; and
 - developing and encouraging access and participation.

- 75 Individual services within cultural services have clear aims and priorities for development. Each of the Council's services develop service plans which set out how the Council's aims and priorities will be delivered. The plans include the resourcing requirements and performance indicators, approaches to procurement, and ways in which requirements such as equalities, risk management, access to information legislation, information technology, workforce development and consultation will be addressed. Staff each have individual targets which reflect the service's aims. This enables each service to develop in a focused way and to improve.
- 76 Service aims tend to be short to medium-term with long-term sustainability not assured in all cases. This is often because external funding and grant aid are fixed term. Some services, particularly sports development and community arts, are able to deliver sustainable provision through developing appropriate community skills.
- 77 Cultural services use performance management information well to improve. For example, leisure services benchmarks with leisure services provided by other councils, including comparing prices. The Palace Theatre belongs to a benchmarking club for similar sized venues; the Museums Service is part of the Group of Small Local Authority Museums (GoSLAM). The Council has recently joined the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) network in order to inform the development of the next strategies for leisure and for sport and physical activity in 2006. The countywide facility management group is also looking at developing common approaches to usage data. Weekly management team meetings analyse current positions for each relevant performance indicator and take appropriate action to correct and improve performance. Corporate management information is reported every six months, strategic quarterly, operational to each committee meeting, and individual objectives annually. This ensures that the service is in a good position to improve and offer value for money.
- 78 The Council achieves efficiency targets. Achieving efficiencies is managed through the budget process and by performance indicator achievement against target. The Leisure service plan 2002 and the review of the Museums and Heritage service undertaken in 2004 both led to the closure of facilities (Bilthorpe and Clipstone squash and fitness centres and Newark Appletongate Museum) which were poorly used. Resources were re-directed into improving remaining facilities and outreach services. This included leisure centre facility improvements, the 'Castle and Conflict' exhibition which opened in 2005 at the Gilstrap Library and the new Museums Resource Centre which opened in 2005. This has resulted in a significant increase in service users.
- Number of leisure centre usages has increased from 932,891 in 2001/02 to 977,508 in 2005/06.
 - Total museums visits in 2000/01 of 32,860 to 86,176 in 2005/06.

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- Museums outreach participant numbers improved from 3,271 in 2003/04 to 20,413 in 2005/06.
- Sports development participant numbers improved from 3,780 in 2000/01 to 30,330 in 2005/06.

- 79 The Council's knowledge of its customers is developing. Local managers have local knowledge and service-wide information is now being systematically acquired. The Council recently installed new ticketing software in its leisure centres and the Palace Theatre which aims to provide more detail on users, including where they live. This will enable the Council to target users and non-users, ensure equitable access to provision and to set improvement targets.
- 80 The Council works well with partners. For example, the Council is part of the Nottinghamshire Arts Partnership which works with the Arts Council of England. This partnership facilitates benchmarking, the identification of good practice and access to national guidance. By involving itself in this partnership, it ensures that it is provided with tools to improve performance.
- 81 The Council demonstrates good leadership by empowering staff to act on their own initiative. For example, staff at the Palace Theatre recognised that the Council's website was not an effective marketing tool as it did not take on-line bookings. Staff discovered a no cost option to develop a website which met its needs and would link to the Council's website. They implemented this option to provide a better service to customers.
- 82 The Council learns from external accreditation. For example it has achieved and retained Quest and Green Flag status for leisure centres, sports development and parks. The processes the services go through to achieve these accreditations enable them to identify strengths on which they can build and areas for further development. Seeking external accreditation is used as a way of managing and improving performance.
- 83 The Council learns from external assessment. For example, it used the Sport England '*Towards an Excellent Service*' (TAES) model to self-assess the leisure and cultural service areas during 2004/05. As a result, it developed the Leisure and Cultural Services strategy which outlines the whole service contribution towards local, regional and national priorities, draws together existing key strategic plans and addresses areas for improvement identified through the TAES process. The Council plans to repeat the TAES process at the end of 2006.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 84** The Council is systematically developing its people, skills and capability to ensure that it can deliver its priorities. The Council incorporated its CPA improvement and change management plans into one organisational improvement plan. The workforce development plan element includes actions such as secondments, training for councillors, cross-service teams and staff road show briefings. Two staff secondments in 2005/06 to regional agencies, Arts Council England and East Midlands Museums Libraries and Archives Council (ACE and EMMLAC), to share best practice and to understand how the agencies are administered, resulted in joint benefits for each partner.
- 85** Culture is being used effectively to address the corporate excellence agenda. Sickness absence rates and absenteeism were identified as key issues. The Healthy Lifestyles Officer advises the sickness absence working party to ensure that a proactive approach is taken corporately with health promotion events and employee exercise classes during work hours. Figures for each are now decreasing across the Council.
- 86** Staff appraisals are beginning to be used effectively. The Council reviewed the effectiveness of its staff development interview system in 2004 and replaced it with a performance appraisal system in 2005. This includes the setting of personal targets for the year along with a review of the previous twelve months. Service priorities are discussed at the annual appraisals and training needs identified. These are co-ordinated centrally to look at corporate/shared training needs alongside individual service area requirements.
- 87** Staff within Leisure and Cultural Services feel well supported. They feel they have access to appropriate training which enables them to perform their role more effectively. This provides the capacity for further service improvement. Services are enthusiastically delivered and well managed.
- 88** The Council has worked effectively with partners to enhance capacity. For example, the Sports Development unit work to support the development of coaching skills and awareness of issues such as child protection within local clubs. The arts and events officers develop the capacity of local communities through training and support for voluntary agencies in areas such as licensing, health and safety, fundraising, and marketing. As a result, community groups are able to sustain and expand their work effectively. The contribution of the Council's scrutiny process to service improvement varies. The working party approach used is being developed but is not yet consistent. The Palace Theatre review by Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2006 led to more effective use of provision, and learning from this continues. The Council uses external expertise effectively where it has recognised resources are not available in-house or where it feels another viewpoint may be beneficial. For example, it used consultants to undertake the PFI application, site appraisals, and operational specification development to inform decisions over the new leisure centre and for external management options, and it is working with local conservation architects to develop the Old Magnus buildings plans for a cultural quarter.

- 89 The Council is successful in securing external funding. During 2003/06 approximately £1.7 million of external funding enabled the Council to initiate and develop diverse projects and posts. For example, participatory arts projects supporting local communities to deliver and commission a theatre and heritage project; Gallery 37 Plus: a national project across five authorities engaging young people through arts; artist in residence at Millgate Museum working with young people to explore and promote the collection as 'museum makers'; new sports hall and community centre for Coddington; multi-skills inclusion officer: two-year revenue support for part-time post working with young people at risk of exclusion; and training for deliverers of chair-based exercise for the Live at Home scheme.

Appendix 1 – Judgement scores

- 1 The descriptors for Judgement 1 scores have been agreed by the Local Services Inspectorate Forum (LSIF). Members are The Commission for Social Care Inspection, the Audit Commission, The Office for Standards in Education, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Fire Services Inspectorate, Department for Education and Skills, and the Healthcare Commission.

Table 1 Judgement 1 – How good is the service?

Score	AC labels and stars	LSIF descriptors
4	Excellent ☆☆☆	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users, is highly cost-effective and fully contributes to the achievement of wider outcomes for the community.
3	Good ☆☆	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users, is cost-effective and makes contributions to wider outcomes for the community.
2	Fair ☆	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users and is not especially cost-effective, nor contributes significantly to wider outcomes for the community.
1	Poor (0 stars)	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users, is not cost-effective and makes little or no contribution to wider outcomes for the community.

Table 2 Judgement 2 – Prospects for Improvement

Score	AC labels	Descriptors
4	Excellent prospects	A service with improvement arrangements and capacity well above the minimum requirements needed to deliver continuous improvements in outcomes for users and/or the wider community and in value for money. Few, if any barriers to improvement exist.
3	Promising prospects	A service with improvement arrangements and capacity consistently above the minimum requirements needed to deliver continuous improvements in outcomes for users and/or the wider community and in value for money. Enablers of improvement strongly outweigh barriers to improvement.
2	Uncertain prospects	A service with improvement arrangements and capacity such that delivery of continuous improvements in outcomes for users and/or the wider community and in value for money is uncertain. Enablers of, and barriers to, improvement are finely balanced.
1	Poor prospects	A service with improvement arrangements and capacity that do not meet the minimum requirements needed to deliver continuous improvements in outcomes for users and/or the wider community and in value for money. Either barriers to improvement strongly outweigh enablers of improvement, or few, if any, enablers of improvement are in place.