

Service Inspection Report

June 2008



Cultural Services

Coventry City Council

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Contents

Service Inspection	4
Summary	5
Scoring the service	6
Recommendations	8
Report	10
Context	10
The locality	10
The Council	10
The Council's cultural services	11
How good is the service?	12
What has the service aimed to achieve?	12
Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?	13
<i>Diversity</i>	15
Service Outcomes for users and the Community	16
Quality of Life	16
Economic Vitality	17
Is the service delivering value for money?	18
What are the prospects for improvement to the service?	20
What is the service track record in delivering improvement?	20
How well does the service manage performance?	23
Does the service have the capacity to improve?	26

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 (KLOE) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's web site 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.

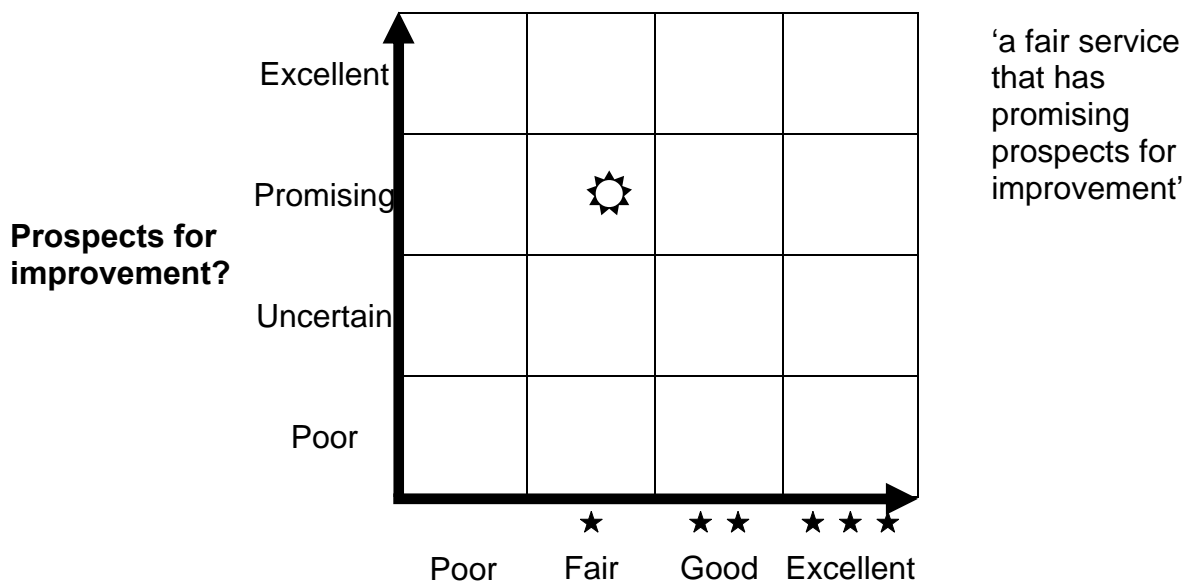
Summary

- 1 Coventry City Council provides 'fair' cultural services which have 'promising' prospects for improvement.
- 2 This report is based on an initial inspection undertaken in July 2007, however, as at that time there were a number of significant changes taking place, it was agreed that the prospects for improvements judgement should be reviewed again in March 2008 on a separate visit. The report therefore reflects the service at two different times.
- 3 Cultural services play an important role in achieving the Council's vision for the city, and senior political leaders and managers recognise this. The aims and objectives for cultural services link clearly to the Local Area Agreement and the Council's Corporate Plan 2006/09 to help achieve this vision.
- 4 Cultural services have good intelligence about the participation of the community in cultural activities and uses this to target services. It has a strong focus on diversity and targeting priority neighbourhoods and groups to address inequalities and gaps between these areas and the rest of the city.
- 5 The quality of facilities is varied, with some old and poor quality facilities. Some services have achieved nationally recognised quality standards to improve the users' experience. However, residents' satisfaction with cultural services is mixed.
- 6 The Council does not effectively demonstrate the impact that cultural services has on improving people's lives and so its role and importance are not fully recognised. Value for money is not consistently demonstrated across all services, and high spending does not consistently lead to good facilities, outcomes and high public satisfaction.
- 7 The Council and its cultural partners use the Cultural Strategy as the basis for their plans. This means that resources and efforts are beginning to be directed more effectively. Political leadership and the Council's commitment to culture is clearly demonstrated to all. However the Council has yet to fully develop the mechanisms that will ensure delivery of the cultural strategy and associated action plans.
- 8 New managers are leading change, and increased strategic, managerial and operational capacity has resulted in service delivery improvements. The Council has achieved quality accreditations for some facilities and plans to extend this further. However, services are not improving consistently across all areas and cannot consistently demonstrate outcomes and impact.
- 9 Operational plans do not always link clearly to partners' plans to maximise resources, improve value for money (VFM) and demonstrate improved outcomes for local people.
- 10 The Council has won substantial levels of external funding, and investment has led to new facilities and service improvements and increased use. However, not all capital projects are fully funded which impacts on service delivery and the ability to fund service improvements.

Scoring the service

- 11 We have assessed Coventry City Council 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 chart¹:



A good service?

Audit Commission

- 12 The service is a fair, one-star service because:
- the aims and objectives for cultural services link clearly to the Local Area Agreement and the Council's Corporate Plan 2006/09;
 - cultural services has good intelligence about the participation of the community and uses this to target services;
 - some services have achieved nationally recognised quality standards; and

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.

- it has a strong focus on diversity and targeting priority neighbourhoods and groups.

However:

- the quality of facilities is varied, with some old and poor quality facilities;
- residents' satisfaction with cultural services is mixed;
- the Council does not effectively demonstrate the impact that cultural services has on people's lives; and
- value for money is not consistently demonstrated across all services.

13 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- an overarching long term strategy with clear outcomes and plans has been agreed with the cultural partnership
- political leadership and commitment is developing and beginning to impact on key partners;
- new managers are leading change, and increased strategic, managerial and operational capacity has resulted in service delivery improvements;
- the Council has achieved quality accreditations for some facilities and improving on this is built into plans; and
- the Council has won substantial levels of external funding, and investment has resulted in new facilities, service improvements, and increased use.

However:

- the cultural partnership has yet to agree mechanisms for ensuring the strategy and action plans are delivered
- services are not improving consistently across all areas and cannot consistently demonstrate outcomes and impact; and
- there is no clear strategic approach to partnership working to maximise resources and improve value for money.

Recommendations

- 14 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 costs¹ 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 Provide clear leadership to ensure the cultural strategy is delivered through the cultural partnership. The cultural strategy needs to provide Coventry with a shared long term vision and framework with SMART^{II} outcomes which enables the City Council, partners and stakeholders to work together to improve the quality of life through improved cultural opportunities and services for local people and visitors by:

- ensuring engagement and ownership of the strategy by the City Council and all key stakeholders through the cultural partnership;*
- clearly integrating the strategy, objectives and outcomes into Council and partner plans;*
- linking and integrating Council and partner resources to maximise these and obtain maximum value for money (VFM);*
- clearly setting out, monitoring and managing performance so objectives are achieved;*
- reporting and demonstrating the outcomes and impacts that have been achieved.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved quality of life for local people in the longer term;
- ownership and commitment to the outcomes identified in the strategy by all stakeholders; and
- better use of resources and VFM.

¹ 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.

^{II} Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound

Recommendations

*R2 The implementation of this recommendation will have **high** impact with **low** costs. This should be implemented by October 2008.*

R3 Improve outcomes for local people through improved service quality and performance and align resources to priority areas of service delivery to ensure these are sustainable This includes:

- *consistently improving performance against outcome focussed targets. These should clearly link to LAAI, corporate and partners' strategies, plans and targets, and have a focus on outcomes to demonstrate achievements;*
- *aligning Council and partner resources to priority areas of service delivery to ensure these are sustainable;*
- *finalising appropriate arrangements for the Sports Trust contract; and*
- *carrying out robust options appraisal and feasibility studies for capital projects to ensure these are viable.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- *improved performance and alignment of resources with needs and priorities.*

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

Recommendation

R4 Improve value for money (VFM) by developing a more consistent approach to positioning cultural services in terms of value for money. This includes:

- *setting targets to improve value for money within the performance management framework and integrating them into plans;*
- *assessing the balance between costs and service outcomes;*
- *the use of benchmarking to improve service delivery and VFM; and*
- *demonstrate the added value and improved VFM of cultural services.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- *improved VFM*

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

¹ Local Area Agreement

Report

Context

The locality

- 15 Coventry is the second largest city in the West Midlands and the eleventh largest city in England. It has about 305,000 residents at present, and its population is growing. It is the centre of a sub region serving 550,000 people.
- 16 Coventry's population is younger than average, with 24 per cent of people under 18 years of age and 35 per cent under 24. The high proportion of 18 to 24 year olds reflects the fact that two universities are located in the city. 16 per cent of residents are over 65, which is a little below the national average. The over 85 population, currently numbering about 5,200 people, is expected to grow by 17 per cent by 2010.
- 17 According to the Census 2001, the White British population is lower than the average for the West Midlands. Coventry has a BME population of 16 per cent, higher than the average for the region and all England (13.86 per cent and 13 per cent respectively). The city is home to an estimated 6,500 refugees and 1,500 asylum seekers.
- 18 There are high levels of deprivation. Coventry is ranked 64 out of 354 when compared with all other local authorities (where a rank of 1 is the most deprived). Thirty three per cent of the population in Coventry live in areas that are currently designated as being in the 20 per cent most deprived areas in England.
- 19 The Community Health Profile for Coventry points out that life expectancy is increasing overall for both males and females. However both remain significantly lower than the national average. Deaths from heart disease and stroke and cancers remain significantly higher than the national average. However, both show a decreasing trend and the inequalities gap between national and local rates has narrowed for heart disease and stroke.

The Council

- 20 In July 2007 the Conservative Party had control within Coventry City Council, with 28 councillors. The political management structure is that of a Leader with a Cabinet administration. There are 54 elected Members in 18 wards, 76 per cent of whom are male and 24 per cent female. Six elected members come from minority ethnic communities. The Chief Executive manages the day-to-day running of the Council with a Management Board of nine senior officers.
- 21 The CPA inspection of 2006 rated Coventry as a 3 star authority that was improving well. In terms of culture, the service received a score of 2 out of 4.

The Council's cultural services

- 22** Culture, Leisure, Libraries and Adult Education Services were amalgamated as a service area within the Community Services Directorate in April 2006.
- 23** The scope of the service covers direct delivery of:
- strategic development;
 - marketing;
 - community events;
 - 17 public libraries; one mobile library and adult education services;
 - one premier park; four area parks; numerous neighbourhood parks (managed as open space giving approximately 1,000 hectares of parks, open spaces and woodlands over 400 sites);
 - an art gallery and museum (The Herbert);
 - two historic visitor sites (the Priory and the Lunt);
 - archives;
 - sports and arts development (including an open application range of grant support);
 - intervention programmes; and
 - voluntary sector support.
- 24** Tourism is delivered through CVOne – the city centre company and the contract is monitored through the City Development Directorate. CVOne also organise city-wide major events with Cultural Services.
- 25** Major grant support is provided to a number of Trusts:
- the Coventry Sports Trust for the management of Coventry Sport and Leisure Centre, Foleshill Sport and Leisure Centre and Brandon Wood Golf Course;
 - the Sports Foundation for Development plan for programmes of sport and physical activity at Centre AT7, Midland Sport Centre and links to development and operation of the Alan Higgs Centre;
 - the Belgrade Theatre Arts Trust; and
 - the Coventry Transport Museum Heritage Trust, a free access public museum.
- 26** The Service in July 2007 had 312 full time equivalent staff. The total revenue budget is £19,983,122 for 2007/8 with a total capital budget of £4,049,825 for 2007/8.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 27 The overall vision of the Council is for Coventry to be a “growing accessible city where people choose to live, work and be educated and businesses choose to invest”.
- 28 Culture is one of the eight strategic themes of the Community Plan. It has two strategic priorities. These are:
- to ensure that Coventry’s cultural life including libraries, sport, physical activity, parks and open spaces, heritage and arts enhance the needs of communities; and
 - to enrich individual lives, strengthen communities, improve places where people live, promote health and build the local economy through the city’s cultural life.

This theme is led by the city's Cultural Partnership, which has a wide range of partners and stakeholders. It has commissioned a revised cultural strategy for the city, but a long term strategy with agreed outcomes and actions is still to be agreed.

- 29 The recent refresh of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) recognised the cross-cutting contribution to targets made by Culture, Leisure and Libraries. Two cultural indicators now feature, one under the Health and well-being block and the other listed as Culture. These are:
- the number of children and adults taking 30 minutes moderate intensity exercise at least 3 days a week (health); and
 - reducing the gap in participation between the priority neighbourhood and the rest of the city for sports, arts and heritage.
- 30 The Council's strategic objectives of the service fit within this overall vision, and are set out in Cabinet Member Plans. The strategic objectives of the service are to:
- Support people from all communities to reach their potential through learning support, study for life, and other culture, leisure and library initiatives.
 - Continuously improve and develop the quality of and access to culture, leisure and libraries and adult education services and facilities.
 - Improve and build the profile of Culture, Leisure, Libraries and Adult Education services and facilities both internally and externally.
 - Attract capital and revenue funding into all service areas and improve the efficiency of services.

- 31 The key challenges facing the service outlined in the Council's plans are:
- broadening participation;
 - challenging social exclusion;
 - reaching into poorer neighbourhoods;
 - improving and maintaining quality; and
 - meeting the requirements of the corporate medium term financial strategy.
- 32 The prime opportunities the Council identifies are:
- broadening participation through improved facilities, such as The Herbert, Belgrade Theatre, NDC Leisure Centre, Transport Museum, three new libraries (Caludon Castle, Tile Hill and Whoberley);
 - increasing and mainstreaming successful interventions such as Positive futures; and
 - improving quality focussing on low satisfaction areas.

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

- 33 There is a broad range of cultural opportunities available to local residents and visitors. The planning and delivery of services is based on some information but user data is not used consistently across all services. The majority of facilities are accessible to people with disabilities but the use of technology and pricing to increase participation is underdeveloped. Quality standards are being achieved to ensure quality within some facilities but customer standards have yet to be introduced. Whilst there has been investment in some major facilities such as The Herbert and libraries, quality is varied and as a result satisfaction and participation levels are mixed. Diversity is a strength for the Council and cultural services have a positive approach to understanding their priority communities.
- 34 Cultural Services is making good use of comprehensive general data about residents' involvement in culture and leisure as the basis of its plans. The council-wide annual Household Survey included questions on participation in cultural services for the first time in 2005. This established a baseline of participation levels in cultural and leisure activities across the city, in priority areas, by ethnicity and age. This is the basis of plans to increase participation and narrow the gap in priority areas.
- 35 However, information about service users is not consistently gathered across all cultural services. For example, parks have had limited engagement with users, although projects such as the funding bid for the War Memorial Park have engaged local residents and users. The Coventry Sports Trust has not been able to provide a detailed analysis of users. The Council is aware of this and is addressing this. Areas such as events have gathered user information and used this to improve marketing and increase participation. The lack of a consistent and systematic approach across all services means that they cannot plan effectively as they do not know who is using the services or who non-users are.

- 36** Cultural services has a limited approach to service consultation and does not maximise resources. Most service-based consultation is reactive focussing on satisfaction levels, rather than identifying needs. So except for the household survey, the service has no way of assessing any form of impact. There is not a coordinated strategic approach across the service to maximise the benefits of consultation both across Council services, cultural services and with partners such as the police or health survey work. This means that the service is not maximising its resources and cannot show its impact or determine needs as the basis of plans.
- 37** A broad range of cultural services are available to local communities. Outreach programmes such as Fusion and One Body One Life are targeting both geographic areas and communities of need. Other facilities such as The Herbert have developed outreach activities to engage local people while the museum was undergoing re-development.
- 38** The quality of facilities is mixed. A modernisation programme for Libraries such as the Arena Park Library which opened in January 2005 has led to good quality facilities and extended library opening hours resulting in increased use. The Coventry Sports Trust Leisure centres are old and run down. As a result usage is mixed with participation figures for Coventry and Foleshill sports centres declining. Less than half of all play areas are in good condition, and access, equality and inclusiveness are poor at one third of them. The Sports Facility Strategy 2006 identified some shortfall in the provision of sports halls, all weather pitches, and fitness gym stations.
- 39** The majority of cultural facilities are accessible for people with a disability. A capital programme of £200,000 in 2006/07 included improvements to the Central Library, The Herbert, Foleshill Leisure Centre, Coombe Abbey visitor centre, Brandon Wood Golf Course; and 10 community libraries. A disabled people's advisory panel was engaged in the process of site visits to recommend where facilities could be improved and many of the changes were above the requirements for meeting the Disability Discrimination Act, such as a tactile mat in the entrance of the new Ricoh arena library.
- 40** Technology is not being used to full effect to increase access and promote cultural services and activities. The website is not user friendly. The design is not user focussed, and it is very difficult to find information or access services such as renewing library books. It also has limited interactivity. For example it is not possible to book sports facilities on line. User data cannot be easily gathered across all facilities for analysis and planning. However Coventry Active provides an electronic easily searchable web database of sport and cultural activities across the city though. This has only recently been established and it is too early to assess what impact this is having on increased awareness, access and participation. Good use of technology can effectively to promote access and increase participation.

- 41 The Council has a clear charging strategy. This is to charge market rates, maximise recovery rates and use the Passport to Leisure and Learning (PTLL) scheme to target disadvantaged groups and individuals. Take up of PTLL is high compared with its Council family group, and user satisfaction with the scheme is also high.
- 42 However, benchmarking is not embedded into the service to inform setting of fees and charges and recovery rates are not monitored across services. It does not research the reasons why non-users do not choose to participate. Marketing of services and special offers is not yet widely used across these services. As a result it does not maximise resources and effectively target schemes with partners to increase the overall numbers of users. They also miss opportunities to learn from others to improve participation and service delivery.
- 43 Cultural Services are beginning to use external quality accreditation to drive improvements in their services. Coventry Leisure Centre has been registered with QUEST, the UK quality scheme for sport and leisure. The Priory Visitor Centre received full accreditation under the Museum accreditation scheme administered on behalf of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and Coombe Country Park has achieved Green Flag status. This means that some of the services are meeting nationally recognised service standards ensuring that customers experience quality services.
- 44 Service standards are underdeveloped with only libraries setting out their customer standards based on national public libraries service standards. This means that across cultural services customers do not know what level and standard of service they can expect and have not been involved in setting such standards, and the Council cannot demonstrate how well it is achieving these and improving performance.
- 45 Satisfaction is mixed. When compared to other similar Councils, Coventry is:
 - in the top 25 per cent for satisfaction with museums;
 - below the median for satisfaction with libraries and with arts activities and venues; and
 - in the bottom 25 per cent for parks and open spaces and for sports and leisure activities.

Diversity

- 46 Diversity is an area of strength for the Council. Cultural services in particular have achieved level 4 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and there is a strong commitment to embed equality into service planning and delivery. For example equality impact assessments have resulted in an improvement in access to cultural and learning opportunities provided by the Libraries and Information Services for under-represented groups, including Asian women and the African-Caribbean community. This assessment approach improves understanding of local needs and helps improve access to services and the quality of life for local communities.

- 47 Addressing the needs of disadvantaged and BME groups is integral to service planning and delivery. Libraries stock materials in community languages, including newer community groups and a range of adult education classes are held, including English language courses for speakers of other languages. Efforts to address diverse needs include making all printed material available in a variety of formats and languages and using "Browsealoud" facilities on the authority's website. It is engaging with Eastern European communities to engage them in festivals and events to promote social cohesion.

Service Outcomes for users and the Community

- 48 Services are delivering on the corporate national and local priorities and objectives. For example they are increasing participation in some areas such as attendance at events and initiatives such as Bookstart. This project is meeting the needs of the younger population and against a national benchmark of 26 per cent take up for 18 month olds has achieved 67.2 per cent. For 3 year olds Coventry has achieved 100 per cent take up against a national benchmark of 40 per cent. Cultural Services have good information on participation levels. However, overall there is a lack of consistent evidence of impact and outcomes which means they cannot be certain that they are achieving their objectives effectively
- 49 The focus of this inspection agreed with the Council was to examine the contribution cultural services make to the national priorities of Quality of Life for Local People and Economic Vitality.

Quality of Life

- 50 There is a strong focus on meeting the needs of priority neighbourhoods and high levels of awareness of the inequalities and the need to close the gap through targeting. The annual household survey provides a detailed analysis of resident views within the city, the priority areas and also for BME groups including participation levels in culture and leisure activities. The difference between participation in priority neighbourhoods and the rest of the city has improved in the following areas:
- reduction in the gap between the overall city and priority neighbourhoods from 9.9 per cent in 2005 to 1.5 per cent in 2006 attending arts events twice a year;
 - reduction in the gap between the overall city and priority neighbourhoods from 5.9 per cent in 2005 to 1.6 per cent in 2006, participation in arts activities at least twice a year; and
 - reduction in the gap between the overall city and priority neighbourhoods from 5.3 per cent in 2005 to 4.7 per cent in 2006 visiting of historic environment sites at least twice a year.

This shows an improvement the quality of life for disadvantaged residents, and a closing of the gap between these and the rest of the city in line with priorities.

- 51 The Council is using culture well to support social cohesion. A social inclusion team was formed in May 2006 to co-ordinate the key community based sport and leisure programmes within the service. The team contributes to local and national agendas for example, through promoting community events and broadening participation in these and the delivery of programmes such as Positive Futures and Fusion. These programmes successfully engage a wide variety of target groups through the medium of sport and leisure currently delivering over 40 sessions per week, with over 450 regular service users. They are engaging and sustaining provision through local development models - for example the staff profile includes eight previous service users. These programmes are helping improve the quality of life for local people and disadvantaged groups.
- 52 Partnership working is developing. The Council has taken some steps to support and work with others to provide services that are appropriate to the local context. The Active Intelligence Mapping System (AIMS) project identifies anti-social behaviour hot spots and uses interventions such as sport to engage young people in diversionary activity. This is having an impact on the quality of life for young people and local communities. However this work tends to be reactive rather than proactive and the impact is not reported through Cultural Services. This means that the contribution culture is making to other agendas such as community safety may not be valued, and built into future plans.

Economic Vitality

- 53 Cultural services play an integral part in improving the economic vitality of the area. The contribution they can make is recognised and valued by partners and key stakeholders. For example an assessment on impact of the Ricoh development shows it created 2727 jobs with many going to local people in the priority neighbourhoods. It also resulted in the development of 1000m² of community space and boosted the image of the city locally and nationally.
- 54 The council clearly recognises the importance of cultural heritage, and this features strongly in promoting the area as a good place to live and work. For example the Priory Undercroft has been developed as a tourist attraction, investment in the Transport Museum has led to increased participation and visitors, and the Godiva Festival continues to increase attendances and gain recognition for the city.
- 55 The creative industries are not well developed in Coventry. This is recognised by the Cultural Partnership. A recent Coventry University report shows that enterprise generation in the creative arts is extremely low, with the majority of graduates leaving for the south east. Significantly lower numbers of graduates starting a business than nationally. One of the aims in the draft cultural strategy is to address this issue. With an effective partnership approach to the development of creative industries, the city can maximise the contribution these can make to the future economic vitality of the City.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 56** Value for Money (VFM) is mixed. High spend does not consistently lead to high public satisfaction. The Sports Trust has needed significant additional resources to balance its budgets. Comparative benchmarking to assess and improve VFM is underdeveloped. Economic impact studies of major projects show benefits and positive returns on investment. Use of resources and maximising VFM are not consistently demonstrated across all services.
- 57** Cultural services cannot consistently demonstrate good VFM across all services. In 2006 the Audit Commission's value for money profiles showed that Coventry spent slightly below the median overall on all cultural services compared with similar councils. This includes a wide variation in spend on the different services. It is in the lowest 25 per cent for spend per head on sport and recreation, and parks and open spaces. Spend per head is in the top 25 per cent for culture and heritage, tourism and libraries, which is in line with Council priorities.
- 58** High spend does not consistently lead to high resident satisfaction with these services. The Council has maintained high satisfaction with museums and is in the top 25 per cent of similar councils. However, satisfaction with libraries fell to below the median in the national residents' satisfaction survey in 2006, although data from the Council's own user surveys showed good levels of satisfaction. Satisfaction with theatres also fell to below the median, but this may be because the Belgrade Theatre is closed for major refurbishment. Satisfaction with Sports and parks is in the bottom 25 per cent of similar councils. Overall this means that cultural services are not consistently offering good value for money for residents.
- 59** The Council generally performs well in terms of the numbers using facilities. It is in the best 25 per cent for residents who have visited libraries and museums and galleries in the previous six months, and above average for those using sports and leisure facilities. It is below average for users of parks and open spaces. In the last resident survey theatres and concert halls fell to below average, but this is because the Belgrade Theatre has been closed for refurbishment. High numbers using facilities reduces unit costs and improves VFM.
- 60** The effectiveness of partnership working to deliver VFM is mixed. The Sports Foundation provides good VFM. The Coventry Sports Trust is less effective. The Council established this as a sports trust for its leisure facilities to improve VFM. This has led to significant savings on national non-domestic rates. However, ineffective management arrangements led to the Council having to give a large subsidy to cover a significant budget overspend on the Sports Trust budgets. It has appointed interim managers to manage the trust and they have stabilised this situation. The Council is now seeking to market test the contract for leisure facilities to improve service delivery, financial management and VFM.

- 61** Benchmarking to assess value for money and improve service delivery is underdeveloped. Comparisons of costs and service delivery methods with similar and high performing organisations are not routinely being made to assess and improve VFM. The Council has carried out comparisons of fees and charges as part of its charging strategy review. This showed a mixed picture. It is expensive for some services such as the hire of halls and swimming instruction, and cheap for hire of most facilities. Its charging strategy is to charge market rates where possible, implement targeted subsidies through the passport to leisure scheme, and maximise recovery levels. Unit cost calculations are being developed for all programmes of activity, and the Council plans to have these in place during 2008/09. This will enable comparisons to be made to improve VFM.
- 62** Economic impact studies of major projects show that a good return on investment can be expected or has been achieved. The Belgrade Theatre study shows that it will lead to increased employment and other economic benefits. The Ricoh Arena has led to increased employment of local people in a priority area. It has also led to further developments in the north of the city, and the image of the city has been raised with residents, investors and nationally. This has a positive impact on all sectors of the community and is in line with Council priorities.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 63** New managers are leading change. The Council has achieved quality accreditations for some facilities. Investment has led to service improvements, but resident satisfaction is static. Services are improving in line with priorities, but improvement and meeting targets is not consistent across all services. The service cannot consistently demonstrate outcomes and impact.
- 64** New senior managers are clearly driving change and this is leading to improvement in service planning, delivery and quality. The Culture, Leisure and Libraries service was created in April 2006, by joining the service areas together in the new Community Services Directorate that was launched at the same time. Joining these services enables greater impact on social inclusion, community vitality, enjoyment and learning for those who live, work, and visit the city.
- 65** The Council is improving quality through external accreditation. It has achieved Quest recognition for Coventry Sports and Leisure Centre, the first in the city. Coombe Country Park has won a Green Flag award, and other parks are working towards accreditation. The Lunt Roman Fort and the Priory Visitor Centre were accredited by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in May 2006. Educational initiatives such as 'Coventry Kids in the Blitz' and 'Roots and Wings' have also won external awards. This means that services are delivered in line with national quality standards.
- 66** Investment has led to improvements in service delivery.
- The Council has opened new libraries in community facilities to improve access to services. For example, the library in the Ricoh Arena shopping complex has increased the number and geographical spread of people using the service. New technology such as self service is also being used to improve service delivery and improve VFM. Libraries in 2006/7 met 9 out of 10 library standards, and 75 per cent of users judged the service to have improved. User satisfaction is high at 92.4 per cent in 2006/07, although satisfaction of under-16s is lower at 88.5 per cent. Sunday opening, new collections of DVDs and improved book stock have also resulted in increased use of the service by people who live, work and study in Coventry.
 - The Transport Museum has more than doubled the number of visitors to the museum and its website from 2003/04 levels after major refurbishment.

- 67 The Council is increasing attendance and participation of residents in priority neighbourhoods and BME groups in culture and leisure activities and events. It is using data from its annual household survey to target priority neighbourhoods. This shows that in 2006: - attendance at arts events by disability groups has improved from 13.2 per cent in 2005 to 19.5 per cent; access to arts galleries by BME groups at least twice a year has increased from 11.8 per cent in 2005 to 14.8 per cent in 2006 and participation by BME groups in moderate intensity physical activity at least 3 times a week has increased from 22.4 per cent in 2005 to 41.5 per cent in 2006. This improves the quality of life for disadvantaged residents, and is closing the gap between these and the rest of the city in line with priorities.
- 68 The Herbert focus on inclusion has demonstrated success. It has increased the number of black and minority ethnic users from 5 per cent in 2003 to 11 per cent in 2006, and performance in attracting disabled people has improved from 8 per cent in 2003 to 11 per cent in 2006. It is now joint top performer across the West Midlands in these areas. This improves social inclusion and cohesion and is in line with Council priorities.
- 69 The Council is improving attendance at events and is using these to improve social inclusion and community cohesion. Participation at the Godiva Festival has increased from 50,000 in 2004/5 to 70,000 in 2006/07, the Vaisakhi Sports Mela attracts over 7,000, an additional Mela is also offered in the winter through the Belgrade events programme, attracting over 2,500 participants. Libraries also support events promoting inclusion such as Celebrating Diwali, Vaisakhi, Eid, and Black History Month. A report of October 2006 analysing trends from household surveys shows that a greater proportion of residents felt that their priority neighbourhood is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together and respect differences between each other.
- 70 The Council has developed and improved services in line with its priorities.
- It has introduced programmes to improve the health of local people. These include the One Body One Life project which has been developed with the primary care trust and public health. This aims to reduce infant mortality, cancer, coronary heart disease, strokes and related diseases. Walking programmes open to all take place weekly, and a GP Referral Scheme has been launched. These address significant health problems and can benefit local people.
 - The Bookstart programme is performing well. Council data shows it successful in delivering Bookstart baby packs to 90 per cent of children, which is higher than the national median, 67 per cent of Bookstart+ packs for older children, and 100 per cent of Bookstart Treasure Chest packs. The latter two are above the median compared to others.
 - It has reviewed the Passport to Leisure and Learning (PTLL) scheme. This has led to improved access to the scheme for carers and young carers.

22 Cultural Services | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- It has launched Coventry Active, a one-stop database of the sport and leisure activities available to Coventry residents. This is free for clubs and community and voluntary groups to promote their activities on. It aims to make people aware of what is on offer and reinforce the health benefits of people being active. It is developing its use to stimulate interest and participation in events and activities through targeted mailshots. As it is new, it is too early to assess its impact.

- 71 The Council has a clear focus on VFM and understands the need to improve this. VFM is one of the sections of service plans. Cultural services have achieved efficiency savings through increasing access such as in new libraries as outlined above, and has also undertaken a review of charging in line with the pricing strategy. Senior managers from across the Council meet regularly to agree how Section 106 monies from developments might best be used to support community activities and meet community needs. The revenue implications of all capital schemes are identified and built into revenue budgets.
- 72 The Council is effectively collating data to measure levels of participation and to assess achievement of their objectives. Recent investment in ICT means that 'Standpoints';(posts that can be placed in public places) and hand held devices that are used by staff such as park rangers are being used to interact with the public to capture comments, feedback and for surveys that are being used to collect customer data and feedback. As a result the council has been able to gather information on services and facilities and use the data to improve services for example by challenging contractors to improve cleanliness at the leisure centres.
- 73 The 2006/07 BV survey shows a mixed picture of resident satisfaction. When compared with other councils, satisfaction with services is poor or below average. However, residents feel that services are improving, showing that residents recognise the investment being made in local cultural facilities.
- 74 Progress against plans is mixed. There has been some success in terms of participation in events, visits to libraries, visits to the Transport museum, the Green flag award for Coombe Park and the transfer to an Arts and Heritage Trust. However other areas are not progressing as planned for example the delivery of the Physical Activity Strategy has been delayed, only one Green Flag has been achieved where two were planned and only one leisure centre achieved Quest accreditation despite target of two for 07/08. This means that cultural services are not maximising its resources and improving VFM.

- 75 Cultural Services cannot consistently demonstrate improved outcomes from services provision to show the impact it is having. The Positive Futures programme report gives a detailed breakdown of activity and participation levels by ethnic groups. It is also working with partners with AIMS database information to provide provision in the area for identified crime hotspots. However, it has little evidence of the impact, both qualitative and quantitative of its work, although it is clearly having a positive impact in priority areas and improving the quality of life of the community. Without evidence of positive outcomes, the service cannot effectively demonstrate its impact, its value-added and its full achievements in meeting Council priority objectives and improving the quality of life for local people.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 76 The Cultural Partnership has agreed a Cultural Strategy for Coventry. Council plans and strategies now include some outcome focussed measures. VFM improvement targets are not always clearly specified although benchmarking is developing. Political leadership and commitment is increasing and as a result partners are becoming more engaged. There is a clear focus on performance and a systematic performance management framework is in place.
- 77 There is a clear cultural vision for Coventry. The Council and its partners on the Cultural Partnership have produced an overarching strategy for culture which outlines a clear vision of what they want to achieve and what they want culture in the city to be like in the long term. The agreed strategy uses case studies to illustrate the outcomes that they aim to achieve. An action plan has been developed illustrating how the initiatives will be delivered, who will be responsible and what the impact measures will be used to demonstrate success. However the arrangements for performance management of partners delivering the action plan has yet to be agreed. This means that the Council and its partners are clear about the impact culture will make on the future of Coventry and have committed to delivering actions and projects that will achieve the desired outputs and outcomes but have yet to put mechanisms in place to ensure that the action plan is delivered.
- 78 The Council has a clear vision and aims for cultural services in its Corporate Plan which address national and local issues and priorities. There is a strong focus at senior levels on community cohesion and clear understanding of the contribution that culture makes in achieving this. Its corporate, strategic and operational plans for Cultural Services link clearly to the Community Plan and the Local Area Agreement.
- 79 There is strong officer leadership, and new senior managers are bringing about change and improvement. There is a clear focus on improvement to achieve corporate objectives, diversity and equalities to improve the quality of life for local people. This is recognised and welcomed by staff, partners and stakeholders.

- 80 Political understanding and leadership is developing well and is promoting culture and the role it can play in the future of the city. Senior political leaders have a broad understanding of the importance and role of culture in achieving corporate priorities, and have approved significant capital and revenue spending on major projects. The Council's aims and ambitions for culture and its commitment to supporting and achieving the Cultural Strategy aims and objectives are clear to partners. For example the Council is leading and supporting a high profile cultural conference in the city which is seen as an opportunity to promote and enhance culture in Coventry. Scrutiny of culture has taken place within the last six months and is beginning to ensure that decisions relating to cultural services are challenged. Clear understanding and leadership is essential so the Council can ensure partners are engaged and everyone is and is seen to be fully committed to achieving shared objectives.
- 81 The new senior managers also have a clear focus on performance, both within the service and with partners. Performance targets have recently been set with partners, in line with corporate priorities. While this is a more rigorous and systematic approach than before, the focus is on reporting numbers rather than impact, so the same limitations to the value of this apply, as outlined above.
- 82 The Council has a systematic corporate performance management framework in place and performance is monitored on a regular basis. Performance is monitored through quarterly service management meetings, and performance summaries are produced for the corporate Management Board. These summaries performance across all service areas and actions to be taken to address performance issues are identified. Half-yearly performance seminars take place where strategic information is fed into the planning process and development of the service. A performance management database is in place and accessible to all staff through the intranet. Individual targets, performance, work plans and learning needs are discussed in the Council's appraisal meetings. The focus on performance ensures everyone's efforts and resources are maximised to achieve the Council's objectives.
- 83 The Council's cultural service related strategies and strategic plans lack outcome focussed targets. Objectives in most of the strategies are generally not SMART¹ and lack challenging targets. For example, the heritage strategy has no targets or action plan linked to it and so it is unclear what will be achieved. The sport and physical activity facility strategy maps provision and highlights gaps. This gives a clear strategic context for future facility developments, and can be used to identify potential planning gains and support future funding bids. The Council has used it to influence provision in new facilities such as the Foleshill development. But it does not have an action plan linked to this, to specify how the issues and the gaps identified will be addressed, so it is not clear what impact this will have.

¹ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound

- 84** The planning framework within cultural services is not well integrated to maximise resources. At the time of the inspection, the Cabinet Member's Plan 2007 - 2010 was in an early draft stage, in line with corporate timelines. Operational plans for 2007/08 were already in place. The high level Culture, Libraries and Leisure Cabinet Members Plan has a 3 year focus, with improvement targets for each of the 3 years. Service operational plans have a short term one year focus, and so as there are no milestones for larger projects, and planning and monitoring of performance and achievement is more limited. Operational plans may not link in fully with the updated Cabinet Member's plan and resources may not be fully aligned to meet the objectives.
- 85** Targets in operational plans are not consistently outcome focussed. There are some good examples of challenging outcome focussed targets, particularly in health related projects. Operational plans now set out the overall purpose for objectives, for example 'Increasing participation in access to culture and leisure activities has been proven to enhance educational achievement'. But this is not consistently linked with outcome measures, and most targets are based on input and output measures, such as the number of people by ethnic group or priority area participating in events or programmes. The lack of outcome targets means that the Council cannot clearly demonstrate the impact they have on improving the quality of life for local people.
- 86** Value for money improvement targets are not consistently and clearly defined in service operational plans. Operational plans have a VFM self assessment section, but do not evaluate the efficiency, economy or effectiveness of the service in a detailed or robust way. Service Plans include actions, but not targets, for improving value for money. The libraries plan states that staffing levels will be reviewed and changes to children's books ordering will save £1000. The sports and physical activity plan 'hope(s) the tendering process of the new contract will result in lower grant aid provided to Contractors'. There are no VFM improvement targets in the parks improvement plan of 2006/07. Benchmarking is underdeveloped, and focuses mainly on charges and spend, rather than how services are delivered and what is achieved to improve both VFM and service delivery. Without clear and challenging VFM improvement targets at all levels, the Council cannot be sure it is making best use of resources.
- 87** Cultural services lacks service standards, except for corporate standards. There are no plans to develop customer service standards with users, so users and residents do not know what levels of service they can expect. However cultural services have started to monitor customer data to measure performance against corporate standards and so can begin to demonstrate how well it is performing against these.
- 88** There is no risk assessment in any of the cultural services plans. This means that the Council cannot be sure that risks are identified, and appropriate measures put in place to mitigate or control the risks to ensure that objectives are achieved.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 89** Increased strategic and operational capacity has resulted in change and service delivery improvements. The Council has won substantial levels of external funding; Priority projects have been successfully mainstreamed or commissioned and so as appropriate, will continue when funding ends. However, not all capital projects are fully funded, and there is a risk that the contract for the Coventry Sports Centre may not lead to savings. There is no clear strategic approach to partnership working to maximise resources and improve VFM.
- 90** Increased strategic capacity has resulted in change and service delivery improvements. The Council recognised that it needed to improve the strategic management of the combined culture, leisure and libraries services within a new Community Services directorate. It has appointed a new Head of Culture, Leisure and Libraries, to integrate, develop and improve these services. She is driving change. This has resulted in the Cultural Partnership work to develop a new Cultural Strategy, better links with health and new health projects, improved marketing and a focus on performance management.
- 91** The Council has also enhanced managerial and operational capacity to develop services in priority areas. It has carried out a restructure and appointed Development Officers to co-ordinate and develop work in health, inclusion and with the voluntary sector. These staff are working in a way that increases capacity to deliver across the city through externally funded initiatives and working to build capacity within communities and through voluntary sector groups. Investment at a senior level means that there is a strong lead on performance management, benchmarking and analysis of data. The development of an arts trust is also enhancing capacity with a Shadow Board and new Chief Executive in place.
- 92** The Council has highly committed staff at all levels of the organisation. Staff are enthusiastic and engaged. A Personal Development Review process is in place, and all were completed in 2006/07. Individual targets and personal development and training needs are discussed in this review. There is also a corporate management development programme for all managers to ensure they are effective in their roles.
- 93** All priority projects are not clearly fully resourced.
- Some capital programmes such as the new Foleshill leisure centre are not fully funded. The Council also has a very strong aspiration to replace the 50 metre pool in Coventry Sports Centre with a new city centre facility. This is not built into the capital programme and no feasibility study or options appraisal is planned to test the viability of this.

- 94** The Council is developing its approach to partnership working to address cross cutting issues such as health and crime, children, older people and community groups. The cultural strategy links to partner plans, and how the services will contribute to achieving cross cutting agendas and objectives in service plans. However, cultural service plans do not always have cross cutting outcome targets for example there are none related to crime and anti-social behaviour. As a result it cannot demonstrate achievements, improvements and how it is adding value and improving VFM on wider cross cutting agendas.
- 95** The Council has been very successful at winning external funding. This has improved capacity and enhanced the Council's own resources for the development of services and facilities. For example it has won £2.8 million of lottery funding as phase one funding to re-instate the War Memorial Park. Its funding process for agreeing projects means that they are now not agreed unless funding is committed and available. Revenue implications and value for money are included in the business cases that are produced for cabinet.