

# The Cultural Improvement Pilots Evaluation Report

## Working together to improve cultural services

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## Summary

This report is an evaluation of eight short term pilot projects which considered local government improvement within the cultural sector. The pilot projects were funded by the Department for Communities & Local Government (CLG) and Sport England (SE) in 2007.

The eight projects were evaluated using a self assessment questionnaire followed by a site visit. A report was compiled for each project and these can be found in the appendixes. The aim is not to compare projects, or set out how regions can replicate efforts – but establish learning from these pilots to inform future regional and sub-regional work.

The pilot projects have demonstrated some real successes in achievement of their objectives. In addition a number of intangible benefits have been highlighted resulting from cross-agency working.

The report identifies the factors which contributed to the success of the projects and the challenges faced by the pilot projects. It also summarises the key learning points which are:

**Build relationships within and beyond the team** – identifies the need for team building, strong leadership and the use of different approaches.

**Involve key stakeholders appropriately** – ensure stakeholders are identified and asked to contribute early, ensure they have the right skills, and ensure stakeholders have the right level of seniority.

**Learn, share and be flexible** – use expert support and practical toolkits, learn from others and share your own learning in return.

**Sector-led improvement is valuable but challenging** – identifies the effort required to build partnerships.

**Understand your customer and purpose** – understand their needs and encourage realistic expectations.

**Use project and programme management techniques for the best chance of success** – use established processes to manage the integration of culture and sport into service delivery.

**There are challenges still to come** – the need to develop better national support for culture, quality of data and the challenges of cross-agency working.

## 1 Introduction

The projects were intended to pilot and develop ideas and techniques to support improvement in the cultural sector, and were a result of successful applications by eight of the nine English regions to CLG and SE for core funding. All the pilots were designed, planned, and delivered by a cooperative group of regional agencies, with some involvement of third party contractors and/or consultants. The subjects of the pilots were broad and ranged from elected member briefings and workshops to peer led challenge.

This report provides an evaluation of the pilots and seeks to capture the learning in a way that can be transferred to other regions and settings. Dissemination events to accompany the report may be organised in each region for 2008 and a pack of case study material will be made available in hard copy and web formats.

The detail of the pilots is outlined in the following table; for further information on each of the pilots contact the named person in Appendix D.

<b>REGION: NORTH WEST</b>	
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North West Improvement Network (Culture North West, Lancashire Sport, Rossendale BC, Blackburn with Darwen BC, Blackpool BC, Wigan MBC)</li> <li>• Sport England NW</li> <li>• Manchester Business School</li> </ul>
<b>Topic(s)</b>	To improve the delivery of sports, leisure and cultural services through the creation and demonstration of the concept of 'public value'

<b>REGION: YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER</b>	
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Government Improvement and Innovation Partnership</li> <li>• Arts Council</li> <li>• Museums, Libraries and Archives Council</li> <li>• Improvement and Development Agency</li> <li>• Yorkshire Culture</li> <li>• Local Government Yorkshire and Humber</li> </ul>
<b>Topic(s)</b>	To support elected members holding cultural portfolios to improve leadership skills and knowledge in order to help them to position culture more centrally within the activities of local government

<b>REGION: EAST MIDLANDS</b>	
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• East Midlands Improvement Partnership</li> <li>• East Midlands Regional Cultural Improvement Partnership: Arts Council England, Culture East Midlands, Museums, Libraries and Archives East Midlands, Sport England, Government Office East Midlands</li> <li>• Sport England East Midlands</li> <li>• Local Government East Midlands</li> <li>• Improvement and Development Agency</li> </ul>
<b>Topic(s)</b>	Member Development for Portfolio Holders in Sport and Culture

<b>REGION:WEST MIDLANDS</b>	
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership</li> <li>• Sport England West Midlands</li> <li>• The Digbeth Trust</li> </ul>
<b>Topic(s)</b>	Encouraging voluntary sector groups to embrace best practice procurement methods for buildings that can be used for sport and community activities

<b>REGION: SOUTH EAST</b>	
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Regional Improvement Group: Arts Council England South East, Culture South East, Museums, Libraries and Archives South East and Sport England South East</li> <li>• Regional Improvement Partnership</li> <li>• Progress through Partnerships</li> </ul>
<b>Topic(s)</b>	Capacity building amongst cultural champions and the encouragement of a strategic approach to improvement using culture as a tool

<b>REGION: LONDON</b>	
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• London Regional Cultural Improvement Group: London Boroughs, London Councils, Government Office for London, Sport England, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, London Councils, Arts Council England</li> <li>• Capital Ambition</li> </ul>
<b>Topic(s)</b>	Improving information on cultural performance and measuring impact, and capacity building activities

<b>REGION: SOUTH WEST</b>	
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South West Cultural Improvement Partnership: Sport England, Arts Council, Museums, Libraries and Archives, Government Office South West and Culture South West</li> </ul>
<b>Topic(s)</b>	Building awareness and understanding of cultural services through communications and promotional work, and developing a network of councillor champions across the region.

<b>REGION: EAST of ENGLAND</b>	
<b>Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport England</li> <li>• Tendring DC</li> <li>• Improvement and Development Agency</li> <li>• Steve Wood – consultancy support</li> <li>• 10 local authorities</li> </ul>
<b>Topic(s)</b>	Testing techniques and training and development interventions to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of <i>Towards an Excellent Service</i> (TAES) self assessment and improvement planning in local authority sport and recreation services.

## **2 Evaluation Process**

The evaluation was conducted using the following process:

### Stage 1

A self assessment questionnaire was developed by IDeA and distributed to the key contacts in each of the pilot groups. The responses to the questionnaires were then evaluated by IDeA.

### Stage 2

Site visits were made to each pilot project to clarify and expand the responses to the self assessments including discussions with partners and others involved in the pilots

### Stage 3

A brief report for each project was produced and a final overview report written to publish the overall learning and key messages from the process.

### **3 Findings**

#### **3.1 Approach and achievements**

The pilot projects have demonstrated some real successes. Ambition, partnership working and resourcing have helped to drive development within the cultural services sector – and pilots are starting to build awareness of the sector across local government.

Elected member development sessions and master-classes organised by South West, Yorkshire and Humber and East Midlands regions were well received by delegates and enhanced elected members' awareness and understanding of the value of culture. London organised a short programme building capacity amongst junior and middle managers, addressing an issue already identified by the steering group. In the South East the role of cultural champions was examined and a practical guide for champions on how to develop a voice for culture and sport in local strategic debates and planning has been developed

Written resources and case studies have been produced by these regions and are available electronically (for details on how to obtain these resources see appendixes). Networks for cultural portfolio holders have been formed and continue to thrive especially in Yorkshire and Humber and the East Midlands.

The North West demonstrated that 'public value' is a concept that can be applied very well to cultural services – helping establish the real benefit of these services and are producing user-friendly material online as well and in printed form.

The East of England applied the Towards an Excellent Service (TAES) tool creatively, setting up a peer-to-peer group for challenge and support between local authorities. An improvement network of ten authorities and the County Sports Partnership were involved in the pilot that involved building skills and relationships, helping authorities challenge and developing performance together.

The pilot project in London centred upon improving information on the performance and impact of cultural services across London alongside some capacity-building work. Mapping performance indicators and current data helped build a set of recommendations for the future development of a full performance framework for the sector and led to the development of a Cultural Improvement Programme for London.

The West Midlands took a different approach, they wanted to look at how they could encourage voluntary sector groups to embrace best practice procurement methods when buying or upgrading community facilities. In partnership with The Digbeth Trust they have been commissioned to help with this and the project is generating interest, particularly since being featured as a workshop at a joint LGA/Sport England Facilities Conference on 06 February 2008.

### 3.2 Intangible achievements and sustainability

Other less tangible outcomes were also achieved. Most of the partnerships were newly formed or in their infancy at the start of the pilots and several regions reflected on the improved relationships between the partners over the period of the project.

Communication and team building was key for the South West. They reported that the pilot project has opened doors and offered a beginning to the development of new relationships and mutual understanding between agencies and authorities.

London used the development and delivery of the master-classes to test out the team and relationship building they had undertaken over the previous year. The pilot helped the agencies reassess how they offer support to local government.

The pilots are contributing to longer term improvement in their regions and the sector generally. All were designed with sustainable outcomes in mind, several as part of longer term programmes for the region. Further detail is included in the individual project reports.

### 3.3 Factors influencing success

The nature of the pilot projects was to 'do things differently' – to innovate or try out new techniques or ideas. This would be challenging enough, but delivering multi-agency projects driving improvement across entire regions, with limited resources, was often the real result of sheer effort and hard work.

Engaging and **involving stakeholders** as part of the programme and focussing on their needs was crucial to success in all regions. In addition **stakeholders involvement from the outset** in the design and delivery of sessions helped ensure appropriate content, timing and accessibility. In addition, **ongoing** involvement of stakeholders ensured programmes remained appropriate and focussed.

The project team in the East of England used existing networks to reach and communicate with potential participants and, like other regions, focussed on **stakeholders** in the sector **acting as champions** for the pilot.

Early engagement, open communications and real involvement in the process helped pilots **secure the commitment of participants** which was particularly important to ensure a healthy attendance at briefing and development sessions. For training programmes the most crucial time for involvement is the first session – it is important that this session is properly planned and facilitated.

At one authority in the South West, cultural agencies took the opportunity to 'piggyback' on an existing discussion of the local economy, illustrating the contribution of culture, leisure and tourism in the area.

In both Yorkshire and Humber and East Midlands an **explicit focus on quality** contributed greatly to their respective successes. For these regions, quality delivery meant finding the most expert, able and inspirational speakers for workshops and seminars. In other regions, quality was delivered by tightly specifying objectives, building on previous improvement work, finding and sharing good practice and by using the right external support.

The East of England team applied TAES imaginatively, by successfully **drawing on expert support**; bringing in different skills, behaviours and knowledge as well as external challenge to ways of working. The application of models and techniques from other sectors helped them reconsider their approach to link services, processes and improvement.

All regions demonstrated the strengths, and challenges, of taking a **partnership approach**. Multi-agency and cross sector working is an effective way to address complex issues and drive broad scale improvement as well as enabling projects to be able to share findings, data and information. However, working in partnership requires effort, resource and trust.

Pilots in Yorkshire and Humber and North West highlighted that working together with a lead contractor helped them to design a more appropriate solution for their project, to access skills they didn't have themselves and to take advantage of the learning opportunities that were presented.

Challenging existing ways of working requires **commitment, determination and tenacity**, beyond 'doing the day job'. The pilot projects have demonstrated that changing mindsets and behaviours needs extra effort, new ideas, and an element of faith.

**Confident and committed leaders** with the right skills and understanding, and who are active and vocal was a critical success factor in five of the pilot projects. In London a well established project team moved into delivery mode, allocating responsibility for tasks to individuals, and meeting regularly as a group to check progress.

In the North West and the East of England having a **clear focus** from the outset, with well understood, clear, shared objectives contributed greatly to the success of the projects. The benefits of **using programme/project management techniques** were recognised by four of the regions. Having clarity of the aims, who-does-what and a clear specification, all standard techniques, greatly aided the success of the projects. These skills should be considered when constructing a project team.

Finally, three of the pilots illustrated the effectiveness of **sector-led improvement**. Having an elected member network chaired by an elected

member worked well for Yorkshire and Humber and East Midlands took a similar approach with elected member peers developing elected member colleagues. In the East of England, officers provided peer-to-peer mutual challenge and support. In the South East masterclasses are being run by cultural champions and supported by representatives drawn from local authorities or local strategic partnerships where there has been some success in raising the profile of culture and sport at a strategic level.

### 3.4 Barriers

The pilot projects were established to experiment and innovate – to try out new ideas and to establish the environment for change. Some of the most valuable learning is thus not what has gone well, but what has been challenging. Of fundamental importance is the sheer **complexity of the landscape**, the projects, objectives, agencies and agendas, audiences and stakeholder groups involved, and situations.

In the South East the project highlighted a problem with the concept of ‘cultural champions’ (also used on the East Midlands project) in that whilst this is a useful umbrella term it is a somewhat vague concept for potential champions who are, naturally, more interested in specific areas of ‘culture’ (for example libraries or public art).

The predominant barrier to the success of the pilots has been the **level of input and effort** required for multi-agency working. This is particularly true of newly formed partnerships. A major challenge for several regions has been missing the time and resource to build the team. Project teams have struggled to establish themselves internally and deliver externally at the same time.

Organisations can bring varying levels of **readiness and willingness** to engage. Delivering together will expose these differences. Failure to allow sufficient time and resources for team building – following Bruce Tuckman’s ‘forming, storming, norming, performing’ model, for example – is a barrier to effective partnership working.

Bringing together agencies and authorities can expose **competing agendas**. This makes a more challenging environment for building trust and confidence between partners. In addition, competing priorities within local strategic partnerships meant added frustration to projects.

Beyond time commitments, working in partnership raises practical issues – not least of **added or duplicated bureaucracy**. It needs to be clear who administers the funding; who provides administrative support, who can sign-off decisions, which procurement rules the partnership is subject to, and so on. While these issues are true of all partnership working, they are hardest to overcome for projects with limited time and innovative or challenging objectives.

Three regions suffered for having **objectives too broad or ambitious**. One region agreed that their original brief was too complex; this was overcome by

the collective efforts of steering group and participants working with the delivery partner but meant that reporting on the success of the project was difficult. In addition, the iterative process they used hindered clear reporting on the project.

**Matching delivery to participant needs** was also a challenge. A lack of senior engagement, irregular involvement and a lower than anticipated number of attendees at workshops meant that the action learning set approach they originally outlined simply did not work for one of the regions. The steering group worked hard to alter the style of the events in order to resolve this.

**Tight delivery timescales** were a major challenge to the pilots, exacerbated by other events. Local elections and public holidays affected planning, forcing delivery in several regions to be postponed. However these challenges informed a robust planning process for the subsequent year. Time pressures also affected the quality of delivery; with not enough time to cover all topics, content had to be pared down.

One pilot took another approach, setting a deliberately tight timescale for delivery to maintain focus and urgency. This was met but **needed extensive planning and preparation**. They noted that it was also essential that such tight plans are risk-assessed and contingencies planned.

Pilots also found that running people-focussed projects which involve a wide range of stakeholders exacerbated time pressures. For example, the time it takes to recruit focus groups shouldn't be underestimated. Both the North West and London reported that **completing** the project is often the **most challenging phase** – the last 20% of their projects was really tough.

With more time and with the benefit of hindsight several regions would have liked to go through a formal tendering process, or at least consulted with the market prior to subcontracting support. They may well have retained the same contractors but felt that there was a **missed opportunity** to bring in different ideas and approaches.

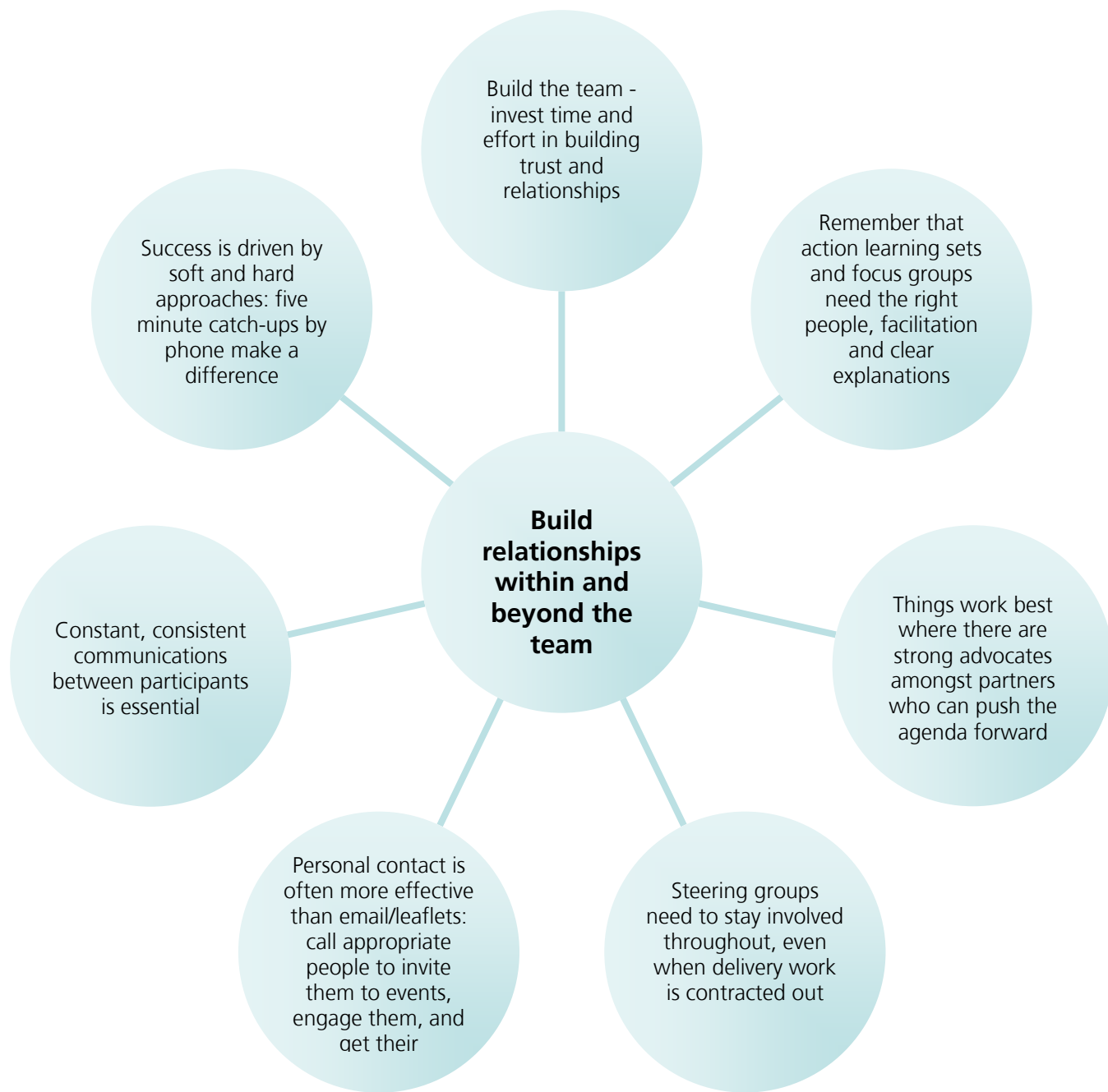
The difficulty in identifying and accessing potential delegates is a barrier. One pilot found management **buy-in** from all the authorities involved **difficult to achieve**, as service structures varied widely. The result of this was that participants in their project varied in number per authority, seniority and capacity to respond to the demands of the pilot. Another pilot had a similar issue and felt that given more time, alternative methods would be used to **seek out more senior participants**, or those in greater need (i.e. those who do not yet fully understand the importance of improvement in cultural services).

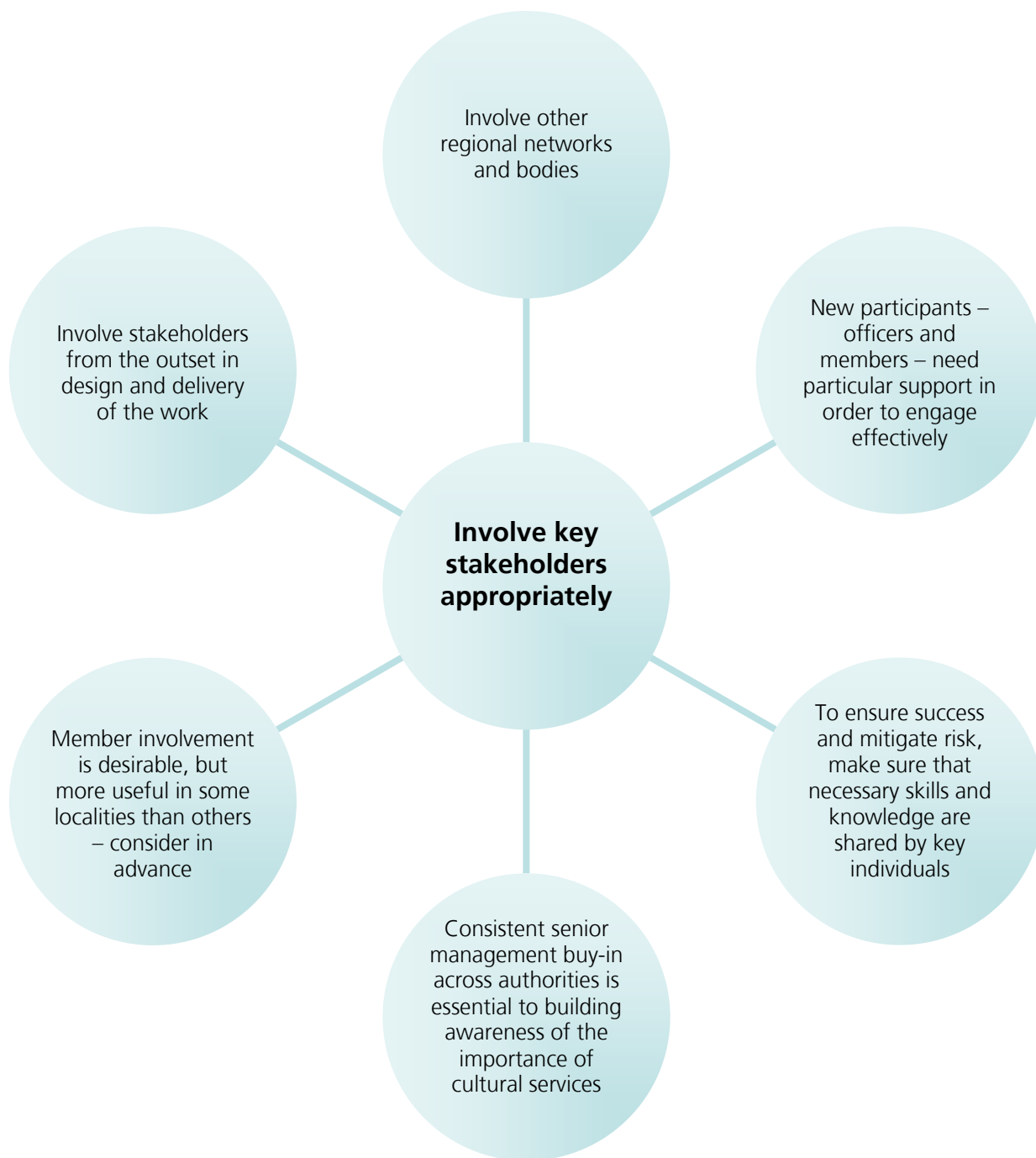
London's project was dependent upon gathering performance information from all organisations which proved highly challenging. Often comparable **data is expensive and laborious to gather and map** or simply does not exist. Difficulties reflect that the sector is still maturing and that greater confidence and trust is necessary for authorities to happily share data and information.

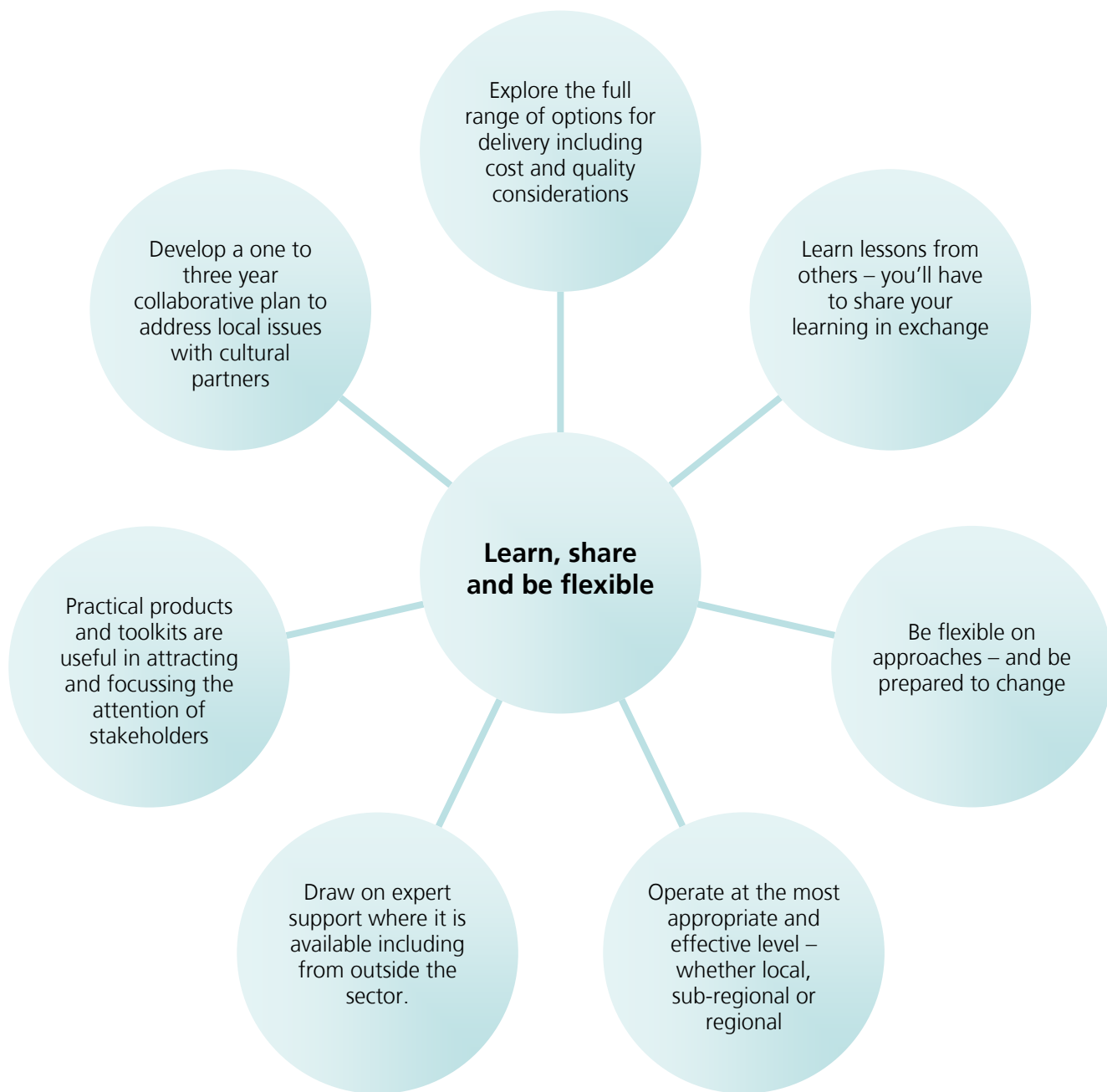
## **4 Learning Points**

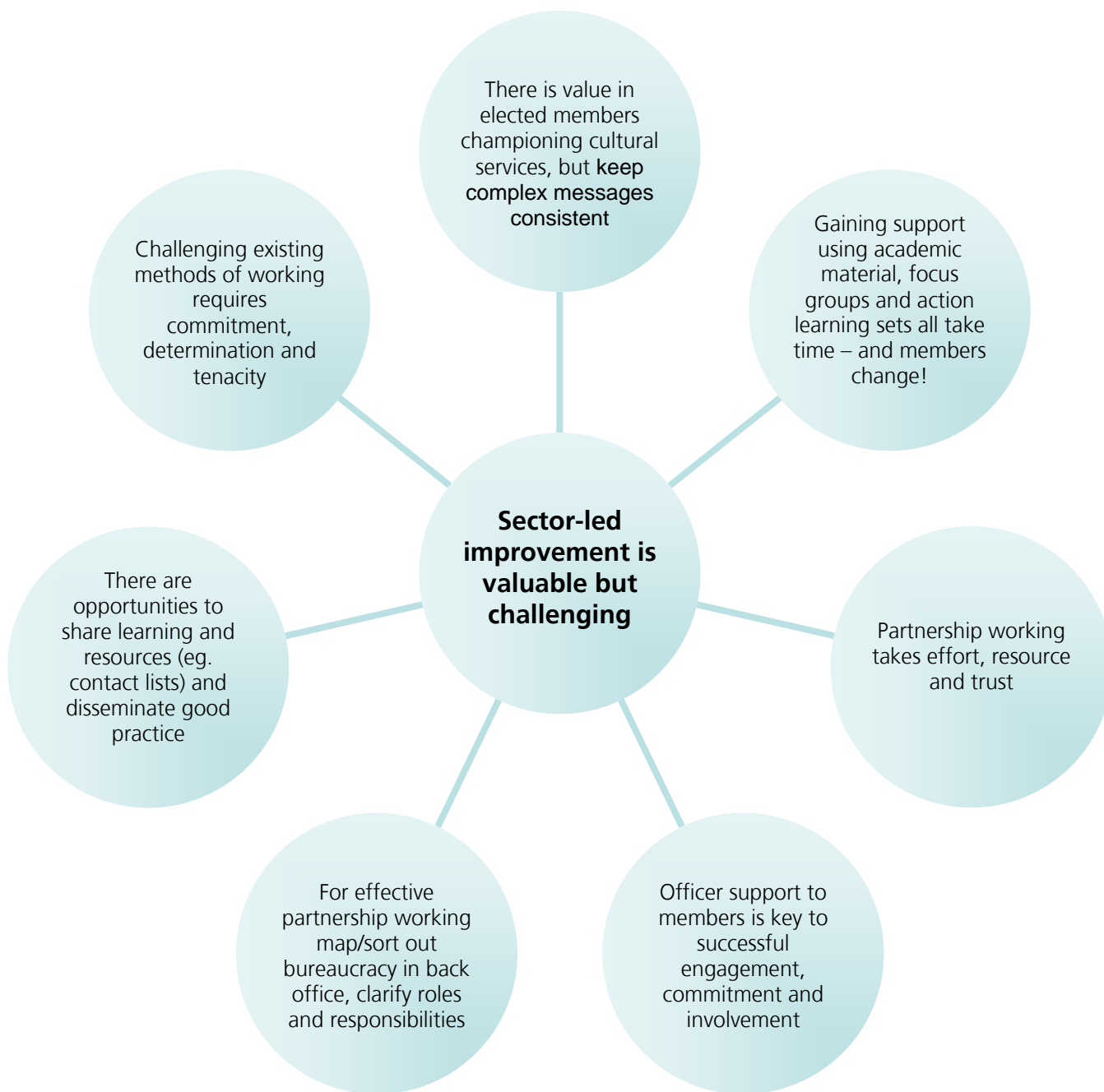
The high level lessons learned from the pilot projects have been set out below and are based around seven themes:

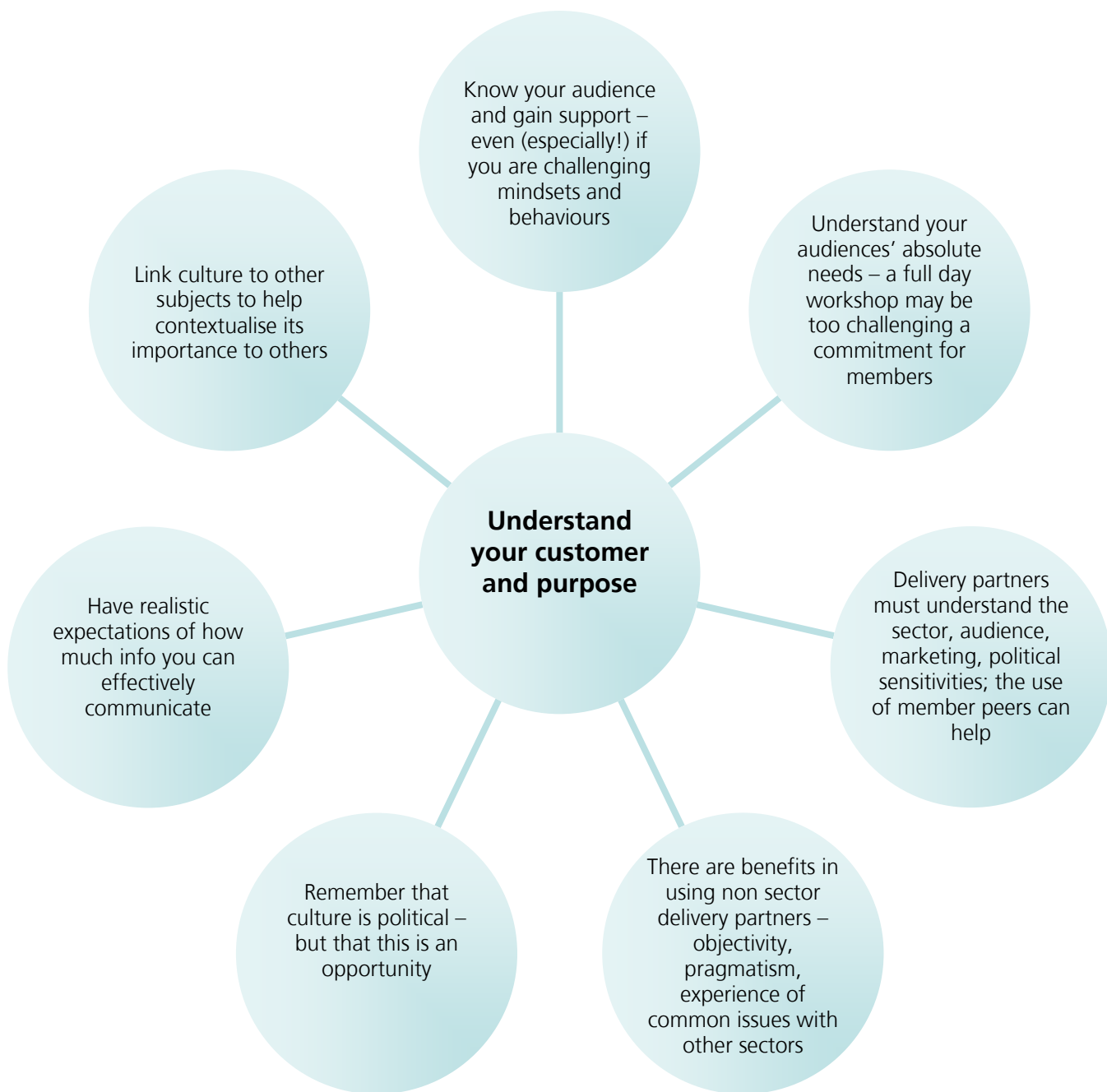
- Build relationships within and beyond the team
- Involve key stakeholders appropriately
- Learn, share and be flexible
- Sector-led improvement is valuable but challenging
- Understand your customer and purpose
- Use project and programme management techniques for the best chance of success
- Challenges still to come.

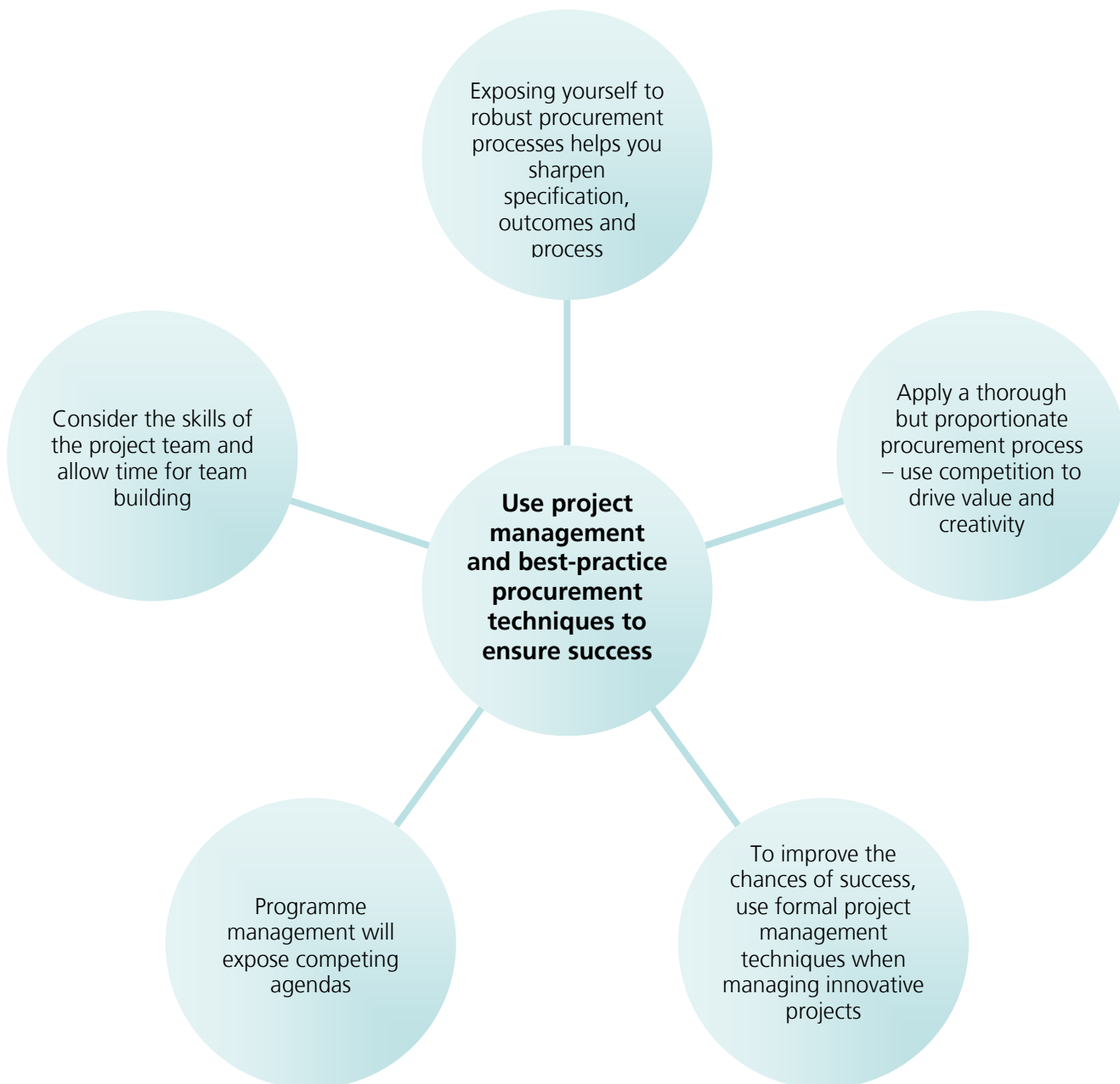


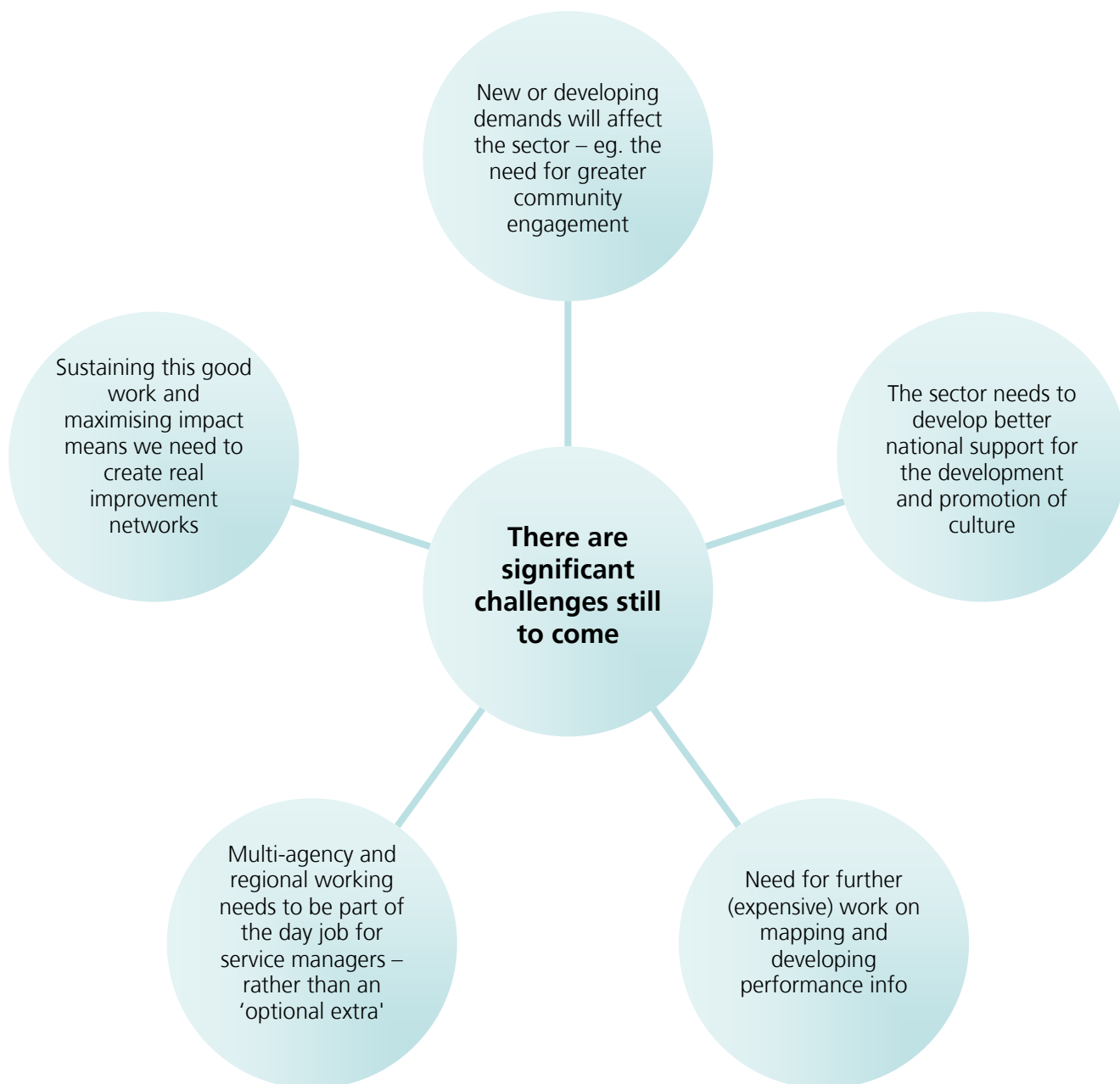












## Appendix A: Context

### Central Government

The Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* recognises that “sporting and cultural activity and events can generate significant economic, commercial and social benefits, both locally and nationally”. Local authorities spend £3.8 billion<sup>1</sup> annually on the provision of open spaces, sport and cultural services. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and its sponsored bodies (Sport England, Arts Council England, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, and English Heritage) provide regional and national support for their relevant sector.

CLG works with Government departments to strengthen the relationship between its Capacity Building Programme and existing/proposed programmes supporting local government improvement.

DCMS and the Local Government Association (LGA) have now published ‘A Passion for Excellence’, an improvement strategy for culture and sport. This sets a framework for improvement in the culture and sport sector, includes the mechanisms and tools to support self-improvement, and clarifies roles and responsibilities in delivering the strategy. The strategy draws on some of the findings of the pilot projects, and sets improvement in line with the National Performance Framework and the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy. The strategy is available at <http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/CBDCC1D5-8984-41A1-AFD8-C6ECD15C21BF/0/apassionforexcellence.pdf>.

### Cultural Pathfinders and Beacons

Prior to the pilots DCMS and the LGA launched a two-year Cultural Pathfinders programme which involved 13 local authorities in 12 projects to explore ways in which cultural services can impact on the priority needs of local communities, delivering shared outcomes and driving service improvements. The pathfinder projects were based around local authorities and were topic focussed. A copy of the report for this programme can be found at [http://www.culture.gov.uk/Reference\\_library/Publications/archive\\_2007/lessons\\_culturalpathfinders.htm](http://www.culture.gov.uk/Reference_library/Publications/archive_2007/lessons_culturalpathfinders.htm)

In 2006/07 eight authorities were awarded Beacon status for culture and sport for hard-to-reach groups. Over the year the eight Beacons demonstrated and shared their strategic improvements in service delivery and partnership working, while also developing a robust evidence base to measure the contribution of Culture and Sport. For more information on the Beacons see [www.beacons.idea.gov.uk](http://www.beacons.idea.gov.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> CLG Local Government Financial Statistics 2007 – Revenue Outturn 2005-06.

## **The Cultural Services Improvement Unit (CSIU)**

The CSIU, established in May 2005, is hosted by the Improvement and Development Agency and funded by DCMS, Sport England, MLA, Arts Council England, and English Heritage. The unit with its partner agencies seeks to:

- Build the capacity of local government and its partners to achieve excellence in cultural services
- Create and maintain tools which help the sector manage performance and drive improvement
- Work with others to ensure that authorities with poor or weak cultural services improve
- Identify and share good practice

Further information and updates on the work of CSIU are available at <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=7921050>.

## Appendix B: Individual project reports

### North West

The concept of 'public value' is a measure that can be equated to shareholder value in the private sector and may be defined as *'equity and fairness in the delivery of public services'*. This includes the idea that the public wants to see *trust and legitimacy, efficiency, and organisation capability when public services are administered*.

The BBC Charter refresh used Public Value as a theme in 2005.

In October 2006 Manchester Business School held a seminar on this concept and subsequently the North West Improvement Network agreed that it could help to inform planning and measurement of delivery of cultural services in the region. Rather than develop a set of measures and a toolkit, the network decided that they would prefer a more practical approach, helping the public sector to understand their own priorities to help them to come up with their own measures as well as helping members to advocate for culture in their councils.

#### 1 Project Original Aims and Objectives

Aim: To improve the delivery of sports, leisure and cultural services through the creation and demonstration of 'public value'.

Objectives:

1. Apply the concept of 'public value' to the provision of sport and cultural services by local authorities and others, and identify what the effective measures of public value are in the delivery of sport and cultural services;
2. Build the capacity of elected members and senior managers to enable them to champion sport and recreation services in a way which creates and demonstrates public value improvement, including the development of 'action learning sets' which set out the vision and build support and legitimacy and lead to real improvements;
3. Create a model of public value which enables stakeholders to identify, own and deliver their priorities that lead to real improvements;
4. Identify a process for helping organisations to adapt to create and demonstrate public value in the evaluation of performance that lead to the delivery of real improvements in service delivery;
5. Demonstrate a public value Improvement pilot which can be deployed across the cultural sector.

## 2 Project objectives achieved

The objectives were achieved with the exception of the second half of objective 1 which was to identify what the effective measures of public value are in the delivery of sport and cultural services. There was a difference of opinion as to whether objective 5 had been achieved.

## 3 Commentary on the achieved objectives

The project had not yet reached its final conclusion but there was a confidence that the project would meet all the overall objectives. The delivery partner (Manchester Business School) prepared papers and questionnaires and held two Focus Groups (with elected members and senior leisure managers) to establish a set of measures for Public Value. Well managed focus groups were facilitated with balanced representation. This resulted in the creation of a model using a 'balanced scorecard' with 'trust and legitimacy' at its core (two key characteristics of Public Value).

An action learning set approach was used to develop an understanding of how a public value focus can improve services for the public in the context of developing Local Area Agreements (LAA's). Participants from Economy, Environment and Culture discussed 'what is culture, and why it is important?' and 'short term funding issues'. The action learning set had limited success. Whilst the participants did indeed have a robust discussion of the subjects, they were not discussed in the context of public value. In hindsight it was felt that the time available to brief participants on the academic model was not sufficient enough to get its full benefits.

At the time of the evaluation a second working session was being planned which would allow for more focused discussion on how public value measures could be implemented.

## 4 Factors leading to the objectives being achieved

- **Strong leadership** of the project. The steering group is small but very vocal, and comprises the right combination of representatives to contribute actively to streamlining and refining the project outputs. Very much a 'working' steering group whose outcomes were clear from the outset;
- The project has a strong theoretical basis, and is being conducted by a **reliable and active lead contractor** who has **experience** in using theory in the development of models and frameworks to apply to, in particular, public sector service delivery;
- **Selection and engagement of participants** in the focus groups and workshop ensured that, although the development of the model and process took place in the context of sports, they are applicable across sector and have been tested on senior officers and elected members involved in broader cultural service delivery.

## 5 Objectives not yet achieved

The project has not conclusively identified the effective measures for public value are for sports and cultural service delivery. The results of the project have not yet been disseminated, as it has not yet been completed. Therefore it remains to be seen whether it will be capable of deployment across the sector.

## 6 Factors leading to the objectives not being achieved

The original intention was that the pilot should develop measures which better reflect what the public values in culture and leisure services. In its subsequent development, the project focused on a process for working out what these measures are, rather than the stipulating the measures themselves, although sample measures were given as guidance. To provide definitive measures would have (a) been against the spirit of consultation which is required to define public value in a given area, and (b) required different methodologies to carry the project to fruition, including more extensive review of outcomes measures and performance management frameworks for the cultural sector as a whole. In addition it would have duplicated existing and current work (for example the development of the Cultural Impacts Toolkit for Manchester City Council).

So, rather than imposing measures for public value *per se*, a key output of the project has been to develop the process by which measures can be developed and adopted *by the stakeholders* involved, and guidelines for what they should include in relation to trust, legitimacy and the concept of a 'balanced scorecard'.

The project has also produced a set of illustrative measures based on the findings from the focus groups, as part of a guide for those who wish to undertake the process developed in the pilot.

In terms of timing, the project should have been completed by July but both the focus group and action Learning Set took longer to set up than expected and this was compounded by a change of elected members in May. A formal project plan and methodology could have been set up an earlier stage; the lack of this made the project difficult to assess and report on.

## 7 Key barriers to the success of the pilot project

The brief was developed from a broad range of intentions, but eventually written by the Improvement Partnership bid writer with input from the consultant, which meant that its overall aims and objectives were at risk of being too broad and complex for the scale of the project. Since the contractor contributed to the brief and was the preferred bidder the lack of competition meant that different approaches to the brief were not fully considered.

There was some lack of clarity about appropriate methodologies to achieve the objectives – the delivery of the pilot has come across as iterative rather than methodical and this has meant that reporting and assessing its success by each stage has been difficult.

Recruiting focus groups always takes more time than allowed, and this led to some delays in the project timetable.

A tension existed between the academic aspects of the project and its practical application; this led to some difficulties which wouldn't necessarily be resolved until the end of the project. This tension has been resolved via the proposed format for disseminating the outputs of the project – a 'guide to' which will be edited by external contractor and presented as a user-friendly hypertext document online as well and in printed form, which is to include in the appendix full reporting and bibliographic references to the academic context of the work. Also, the centrality of running ALS has been down-played as part of range of suitable methods for taking public value measures and approach to strategic planning forward into action.

## 8 Key Learning points

### From the pilot project

The application of public value as **a theoretical framework**, and the process of debating localized issues using this model and action learning sets, is of benefit to the **engagement of senior officers and elected members** to cultural service delivery and will result in improved sense of ownership, prioritization and delivery.

Given the right circumstances and platform for debate and articulation **elected members** can provide excellent **championing of cultural services** – responses during the focus groups from this project were articulate, confident and passionate about the issues and priorities for local cultural service on behalf of their constituents.

**Considering the authorizing regimes** of sports delivery in the local, sub-regional context through performance management frameworks has **allowed the testing and development of the model**, which can be applied to broader cultural services.

When public value is **established** it will provide organisations such as Leisure Trusts with **a recognized measure** of trust and legitimacy for public services rather than the more traditional quantitative measures of accountancy. It can also be used as an advocacy tool.

The original **brief** for this project was **too complex**; this was overcome by the collective efforts of steering group and participants working with the delivery

partner but meant that reporting on the success of the project was difficult. A simplified brief with a clearer **project plan** would have improved the 'flow' of the project.

#### For gaining support for the project

:

The application of academic research to the provision of cultural services is difficult and takes time. The focus groups and action learning sets **took longer to set up** than expected. The **change of elected members** compounded the issue.

**Know your audience**, for example the region may sometimes be seen as 'paternalistic' about the delivery of services and the academic focus sometimes lost the practical focus. This project may help councils to understand things from public value angle.

There needs to be a **strong relationship** and input into the project from the regional improvement and efficiency partnership. At the time of the project the connections were not really developed and this could have helped the success of the project.

To ensure success and embed the project with local authorities it is necessary to ensure that the delivery partner understands the **political sensitivities** that may surround the project. This is particularly true when the delivery partner is from outside the sector.

## **9 Sustainability of the project in the future**

The action learning sets will be tracked and reported on and the key learning points from this, along with materials from the pilot, will be disseminated through events and online resources, including the Observatory online facilities ([www.northwestcultureobservatory.co.uk](http://www.northwestcultureobservatory.co.uk)). There will also be sharing of project outputs in relation to other similar projects in the region (e.g. impacts studies, local area agreement outcomes, frameworks, Manchester Cultural Impacts Toolkit) through seminars and electronic resources.

## Yorkshire and Humber

Using the messages in the local government white paper which identify cultural activity and events as generating “significant economic, commercial and social benefits” and linking through the Local Government Improvement and Innovation Partnership’s (LGIIIP) regional capacity building capacity, culture and sport was identified as a key area for support, particularly in the area of leadership.

The project aimed to support councils in the region to enable them to provide cultural leadership to achieve sustainable improvements in the quality and delivery of cultural services.

It was proposed to develop an Accelerated Improvement Consortium for culture through two phases, the first being diagnostic and the second being centred on delivery, the group meeting for a series of four workshops focussing on improvement.

### 1 Project Original Aims and Objectives

1. To support members holding cultural portfolios to improve leadership skills and knowledge, and develop a sustainable network to further continuous improvement in cultural services in the region
2. To help members holding the cultural portfolio to position culture more centrally within the activities of local government particularly through cabinet and scrutiny functions (or equivalent)
3. To enable the region to gain maximum benefit (in terms of quality of life, economic development and social cohesion) from its rich cultural assets and heritage
4. To enhance the understanding of the value and importance of culture by all elected members
5. To act as a working example of exemplary practice in partnership working between local authorities, non-departmental public bodies and National Government as a response to the improvement agenda in relation to culture.

### 2 Project objectives achieved

1. To support Members holding Cultural portfolios to improve leadership skills and knowledge, and develop a sustainable network to further continuous improvement in Cultural services in the region
2. To help members holding the Cultural portfolio to position Culture more centrally within the activities of local government particularly through cabinet and scrutiny functions (or equivalent) achieved to an extent
4. To enhance the understanding of the value and importance of Culture by all elected members.

### 3 Commentary on the achieved objectives

The objectives have been achieved only in the context of maintaining an ongoing programme of support. A portfolio holders group has been established and this provides the opportunity for more effective communications across the region. Proposals for a 'virtual' network are being developed.

Although attendance at the four events was lower than expected, a significant number of authorities have been involved in either the programme or the network and are now better able to make use of others' experiences.

Enhancing the understanding of the value and importance of Culture by members – there was clearly a high level of understanding of the value and importance of culture already, but the project has helped by giving more evidence across a wider range of activities and sectors.

### 4 Factors leading to the objectives being achieved

- **Adequate programme management** despite the challenges detailed below
- having an **elected member** as chair added to the credibility of the programme and emphasised that programme ownership lay with elected members
- A **partnership approach** including MLA, Sport England, Local Government Yorkshire and Humber, Arts Council and local authorities
- **engagement** across a significant number of authorities
- good **external input** from other regions
- **linking** the programme to the **ongoing network** for portfolio holders
- The **quality of the speakers** at the four workshops has been particularly effective in engaging participants and sharing knowledge. The ability to bring inspirational presenters from across the country, who have shown what it is possible to do and how culture has been an integral part of local regeneration, has been key
- The positive engagement with the cultural agenda by LGYH has been vital to the success of the project
- Developing the programme **in conjunction with the participants** so that it is relevant to them rather than what the lead agencies think they should want to hear about.

### 5 Objectives not yet achieved

3. To enable the region to gain maximum benefit (in terms of quality of life, economic development and social cohesion) from its rich Cultural assets and heritage;

5. To act as a working example of exemplary practice in partnership working between local authorities, non-departmental public bodies and National Government as a response to the improvement agenda in relation to Culture.

## 6 Factors leading to the objectives not being achieved

These objectives relate to longer term benefits that accrue from improved cultural leadership within the region, and will require a longer time frame to evidence than that allowed for by this pilot. For this reason it is difficult to quantify a direct causal relationship between the project and improved cultural performance. However, the potential for developing coordinated local government leadership on culture is positive.

Engagement at, and support from senior director level in some authorities, particularly the larger metropolitan authorities, has been mixed. Limited regular involvement from members in the workshops means the original projected outcomes were skewed. An action learning set approach requires regular involvement.

## 7 Key barriers to the success of the pilot project

The main barriers to achievement on this project were around the four workshops. Listed below are the lessons learned from this part of the project:

- The **telescoped project timescale** compromised a proper approach to programme design, recruitment and delivery – a number of the following comments flow from this.
- **The importance of timing.** Local government elections took place between the first and second workshops. A change in elected members meant that the first workshop had to be postponed until new members were in place. Consequently the recruitment of elected members to the project was rushed and challenging.
- Linked to the above, where there is a potentially volatile political climate, for example where there is a hung council, it is difficult to get continuity of either representation or policy;
- **Gaining commitment from participants.** Many elected members have several responsibilities and so were not able to commit to engaging with the whole programme. This has meant some disruptions in continuity.
- **A full day** workshop for members is **too long**. In addition consideration to should be given to ensuring the **pace** is right for members
- Understand the **political needs** of members. The workshops focused heavily on live policy issues. However these issues need to be discussed more in a political context. There needs to be an understanding that **'good policy' does not necessarily make for 'good politics'**.
- The steering group should be **involved in the planning** of all of the workshops

- The **full range of options** for delivery (including the delivery partner) should be explored at the outset to ensure that value for money will be achieved. **Cost and quality** should be considered.
- Be aware that provision of quality speakers may **raise expectations** of the members of the group.
- Recognise the benefits of **sharing your lessons** with others who have undertaken similar tasks, make connections between other projects and your own, seek to learn lessons from others from the outset.

## 8 Key Learning points

### From the project

Cultural, cross-cutting approaches can be more successful than a sector-based approach, but this type of approach is sometimes unfamiliar. It helps if the project leaders can collect evidence (eg. case studies) of where such an approach has worked elsewhere. A useful way of presenting the evidence is to look at the cases that are geographically based with those closest presented first. This helps elected members recognize the relevance.

The strength of local government networks that are committed to culture and sport within regions is key. Working in partnership with, and making use of, the expertise of other authorities in the region contributed to the success of this project.

Project leaders and funding bodies need to consider the timing of pilot project work very carefully and be flexible if necessary to allow for elections etc. This should also be considered at project scoping stage and where tight timescales are unavoidable the project objectives should be adjusted in order that they are achievable.

The project concluded that there is already a great deal of knowledge and experience and some high performing authorities and organisations in the region and acknowledged the need to harness the arguments and evidence.

### From the workshops

Be flexible about the style of workshops, action learning sets require a long term commitment but this is not the only way of learning. Recognise that the potential audience may prefer to learn in different ways.

In terms of content, a key message for stakeholders has been the need to adopt a partnership approach on culture and culture outcomes, for example LAA's, working with health, regeneration people, etc. and to understand that partnerships take time and effort to develop.

## **Sustainability of the project in the future**

The work will carry on through the Y&H Culture Portfolio Holders' Network which will be open to officers as well as members in future. Funding has been provided by the Arts Council and MLA Yorkshire to support the subsequent development of the network. The network reports to the Executive Board of LGYH and so is connected to the wider Leaders' Group and Improvement Partnership. The project team has already started to build a work programme for this group following the programme; this will be taken to the Executive Board in December.

A key issue will be sustaining this level of input (to the standard of the programme) from within LGYH. LGYH is considering whether culture could be a strand of the next Improvement Strategy 2008/11.

The steering group will be looking to the RIEP for additional funding to ensure a consistently high quality of activity to make it 'unmissable' for members. Their action plan outlines development needs relating to, amongst other things, community leadership, ways of measuring the value of culture and understanding what skills are required to be 'all inclusive' in the culture industries.

It is intended that there will be joint working between all the partners around the leadership and improvement agenda using LGYH and their networks to ensure that the work is relevant and connected to the local authority agenda.

## East Midlands

This project will be delivered by the Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands (CIPEM) as part of an overall three year programme to provide support and raise awareness and share best practice within the region and nationally of the impact of cultural services and effectiveness at delivering shared priorities and programmes.

### 1 Project Original Aims and Objectives

1. Active member engagement in ensuring that sport and cultural services are good or excellent (for upper tier authorities, demonstrated by a CPA score), and their contribution to corporate priorities and quality of life are better understood
2. Commitment to secure continuous improvement and efficiency gains, including shared service provision where appropriate
3. Understanding of Towards an Excellent Service (TAES) and other cultural performance improvement regimes, sufficient to enable members to make a positive contribution to their authority's improvement journey
4. Improved capacity to integrate sport and culture into corporate and partnership priority-setting, and to deliver tangible benefits (through, for instance, the LAA and Community Strategy)
5. Members addressing findings of regional cultural commentaries with support from relevant regional agencies
6. Evaluation of options for future development of peer-to-peer member development between authorities, for development needs assessment of cultural and sport portfolio holders, and for an accreditation scheme for the member development programme
7. Better understanding of the implications of the Local Government white paper for culture.

The intended project outputs were:

1. Written materials to brief relevant members on current issues relating to the delivery of sport and culture in the region
2. Web-based resource centre to be developed as a repository for the above materials to be available to culture portfolio holders
3. Delivery of two pilot sub-regional member development sessions
4. Report evaluating options for peer support among members, development needs assessment and accreditation.

### 2 Project objectives achieved

1. Active member engagement in ensuring that sport and cultural services are good or excellent (for upper tier authorities, demonstrated by a CPA score), and their contribution to corporate priorities and quality of life are better understood – at least in respect of *some* members.

3. Understanding of Towards an Excellent Service (TAES) and other cultural performance improvement regimes, sufficient to enable members to make a positive contribution to their authority's improvement journey
7. Better understanding of the implications of the Local Government White paper for culture.

### 3 Commentary on the achieved objectives

It was felt that the objectives had generally been achieved, although at the time of the evaluation some work was still in progress. The overall programme is still ongoing and is on target to deliver its overall objectives, with plans for LAA workshops to support local authorities in positioning sport and cultural services into the LAA process.

In terms of the project outputs, a new website has been developed which sets out the aims and objectives of the partnership and is a portal for all cultural resources within the region ([www.cipem.org.uk](http://www.cipem.org.uk)). The partnership promoted this website at a series of workshop events which were well attended.

Information relating to culture is available on the 'Councillor Briefings' section of the website. This includes several well-written guidance notes on all subjects relating to culture, its relation to strategy, its relationship with efficiency, its impact etc. Demand for these briefing notes has been high.

The two initial pilots were successful and have now been rolled out to the other three county areas in the region. Member champions have been established from the pilots.

### 4 Factors leading to the objectives being achieved

- **Clear leadership** from the project team and engagement from the regional cultural agencies,
  - CIPEM owned the task and shared the responsibility to develop the resources.
  - CIPEM had the flexibility to bring in an individual to support the development of the web.
  - LGEM took responsibility for the logistics of event co-ordination and publicity.
- A **reasonable turnout** for member development sessions. Members **inputted into the design and content** of the training. The original idea was to run whole day events but this was reduced to half day events at the request of members to secure attendance.
- The two workshops were run by a member peer engaged through IDeA's Peer Clearing House who had cultural portfolio responsibilities. She was an **inspirational speaker**, who focused on the importance of the relationship between officers and members

- There was unexpected, but welcome, **interest amongst officers in supporting** members attending the sessions.
- A decision was made to organize workshops on a sub-regional rather than regional basis to **secure maximum coverage and buy-in** from elected members across the region and to take the opportunity to connect with **local issues and challenges**.
- County champions took the lead by ensuring the message about the programme aims and objectives as well as the seminars was spread to potential delegates.

## 5 Objectives not yet achieved

2. Commitment to secure continuous improvement and efficiency gains, including shared service provision where appropriate
4. Improved capacity to integrate sport and culture into corporate and partnership priority-setting, and to deliver tangible benefits (through, for instance, the LAA and Community Strategy)
5. Members addressing findings of regional cultural commentaries with support from relevant regional agencies
6. Evaluation of the options for future development of peer-to-peer member development between authorities has not yet been started

## 6 Factors leading to the objectives not being achieved

- This project was linked to, and ran as part of, a much larger three year programme and it was difficult to separate out the objectives for the main project from the stated objectives for this pilot. It was agreed that the stated **objectives** for this part of the project were **too broad**, particularly given the timescales. That said the first three of the intended outputs were delivered.
- It was felt by some participants that while the work of the county champions in advertising the events had been worthwhile and helpful, it was a much harder task to **gain buy-in from members who wouldn't necessarily recognise or support the impact of culture and sport**, it was felt that whilst the objectives had been achieved that inclusion of some of these members at the event would have enhanced the outcomes.
- Originally it was decided to run whole day events for members but this quickly proved to be **overambitious and unpopular** with the potential delegates and so a decision was made to utilize half-day sessions instead.
- The workshop timetables did not allow for inclusion of efficiency, shared service opportunities and cultural commentaries – the workshops were judged too long as it was. They had to be ruthless in focusing on what they judged to be **key** messages for members.
- Experience says that you can learn from every experience. Their existing information networks **did not channel information** through those

members who were not already 'on the radar' of improvement in cultural services.

## 7 Key barriers to the success of the pilot project

The events attracted a mix of members ranging from leaders and deputy leaders; cultural portfolio holders and backbench members. Interestingly though, many felt they **lacked influence over Local Area Agreements**.

## 8 Key Learning points

### From the pilot project

More personalised and continuing **support is needed** for culture portfolio holders, this is partly about increasing skills and providing opportunities for peer support and learning but it is also about providing more opportunities for members to **meet and talk** to one another about key topics and issues.

Linked to this, the project found that there was a need for **supporting new members** to develop their knowledge beyond their immediate interest in the sector or a part thereof.

In addition a need was identified for **continuing support for senior officers** and key regional cultural agencies.

### For gaining support for the project:

To get greater input and a greater likelihood that elected members from within and beyond culture and sport will choose to interact with the programme, **strong national support** is necessary from bodies such as LGA and SOLACE.

In order to grow the reach of the programme, the most effective way to get the right individuals to attend the workshops is to take a collective responsibility to pick-up the phone and **secure their input**. Capacity to do so was an issue on this project.

Gaining **high level support** really helps, so communicate with leaders, portfolio holders and chief executives.

### For finding funding

Identify where you will have the most impact given limited resources, and worry about the **priorities** as this helps funding partners

It may be easier to achieve funding for culture if it is viewed from a 'sustainability' angle; the chances of it getting embedded are increased. When

linking with other funding streams ensure there is flexibility about how resources are allocated.

#### For the workshops themselves

The use of **member peers** to deliver training to other members was invaluable, the briefing notes were better received if they were structured and focused and broken down into bite-sized chunks.

## **9 Sustainability of the project in the future**

The pilot was built into the wider work programme of the Culture Improvement Partnership East Midlands. This project has funds which enabled workshops to be delivered in the remaining sub-regions. The Member Briefings, which are published on the website, will be rolled out into a three year programme with funding from key stakeholders. The website also may be used as the portal for a regional network or community of practice.

Individual partners within CIPEM may also pick-up discrete tasks resulting from this pilot study.

Further information on the ongoing programme is available as [www.cipem.org.uk](http://www.cipem.org.uk).

## West Midlands

In line with the Local Government White Paper the project sought to encourage voluntary sector groups to embrace best practice methods when procuring either the upgrade of existing sports and community facilities or on new builds.

Sport England already provided on-line guidance documents to assist the planning and procurement of facilities. These documents were being used, the focus of the project however was the voluntary sector and how they could progress beyond the procurement and commissioning aspects of facilities onto operational management and sustainability of assets.

Subsequent to the application for funding came the publication of the Quirk Review<sup>2</sup> which identified that community management of assets could be beneficial. The project advisory board quickly agreed that the project should include community management and ownership of assets.

The project was viewed as having a core connection in encouraging the development of the emerging sustainable community strategies.

### 1 Project Original Aims and Objectives

To identify good practice and learning, in transfers to community management and or ownership of existing community sports facilities to provide guidance for the sector setting out a model methodology for the process.

To identify good practice and learning, in planning community management of new community sports facilities to provide guidance for the sector setting out a model methodology for the process.

To examine and report on the various potential forms of governance and management, e.g. trust, charity, cooperative, social enterprise, and legal arrangements that are best for the various situations that might apply e.g. full transfer, leasing, management contract.

To develop case studies covering different settings and scenarios.

To develop a plain English, easy to use, web-based (CD rom) working resource that can be used by voluntary sector groups and local authorities to assess risks and benefits, on a case by case basis, that has a range of tools and guidance documents that can support asset management or management and ownership transfer.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/makingassetswork>

## **2 Project objectives achieved**

At the time of writing this report, and due to a delay in commencing the work the West Midlands project is not yet fully completed and so the information available is relatively limited.

The Digbeth Trust were commissioned to develop the interactive resource for voluntary and community groups. The resource will also help groups to assess the feasibility of taking over the management and/or ownership of community sports facilities

At present objectives for the project are being met in line with the revised project plan. The project is generating interest and featured as a workshop at a joint LGA/Sport England Facilities Conference on 06 February 2008, where it became apparent that interest in this subject matter (from current asset holders) is increasing against a relatively low knowledge base (legal, financial and operations), hence suggesting that further developmental and technical work can be supplied to the sector.

Another key item of feedback from the workshop was the need for any work to be conducted to a joint audience namely, the asset holder and the potential asset operator, as the management and responsibility of the asset can be provided in a multiple of ways.

## South East

This project tackled the identified need for capacity building amongst cultural champions in local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and the encouragement of a strategic approach to improvement using culture as a powerful tool. Cultural agencies in the South East (Arts Council South East, Culture South East, Museums, Libraries and Archives South East and Sport England South East), under the banner of the Cultural Regional Improvement Group (CRIG) and the Regional Improvement Partnership, jointly managed this project. The delivery contract was awarded to Progress through Partnership (PtP), the South East capacity building initiative for LSPs.

### 1 Project Original Aims and Objectives

To raise capacity within the cultural sector to support improvement within local government. To equip champions with an understanding of local policy drivers and to provide them with tools for influencing local debates, primarily working at LSP level, recognising their key role in identifying and setting strategies to deliver local services in support of community outcomes.

### 2 Project objectives achieved

The project focused specifically on the contribution that sport and culture can make to delivering those outcomes against national priorities such as building stronger and safer communities, strengthening the economy, meeting the needs of children and young people, and health and older people. It targeted existing and potential cultural champions (a number of whom were local authority councillors) represented on LSPs as key influencers and decision-makers in this chain of local government – linking the local authority with the local community.

The project successfully established the complexity of the environment within which any cultural champions have to work, and the range of success factors required. In addition it showed that a single 'champion' is too simplistic a model, and that a range of champions and environmental factors are required.

### 3 Factors leading to the objectives being achieved

- Working sub-regionally;
- **Working in partnership** with an established cultural network (the Thames Valley Cultural Forum);
- **Linking to other relevant projects** allowed the project to benefit from information and data already gathered;
- **Established contacts** by agencies with existing local authority officer champions in the region helped in the provision of case experience.

#### 4 Objectives not yet achieved

The project did not deliver a group of well-developed and networked champions. However it highlighted the problem of using the word 'culture' – a useful umbrella for collaborative working but at the same time a vague concept that does not inspire potential champions who are, by their nature, enthusiastic about specific areas within 'culture' for example libraries or public art. Cultural champions are thus as a concept different in kind to, for example, English Heritage's Historic Environment champions, who are focused on a clear single issue.

#### 5 Factors leading to the objectives not being achieved

- The original timescale for the development and delivery of the pilot was very compressed which resulted in a hurried approach to the development of relationships that regional agencies recognise as taking a considerable investment of time and effort to bear full fruit
- The subsequent relaxation of this timetable was of little help since it was not at that stage possible to go back and plan a totally different and less hurried approach
- Clarity as to whether in fact budgets need to be spent within a compressed timetable must be available at the outset
- With some exceptions, and because it is a discretionary service, culture is generally not seen as being important when LAAs are being developed and this was a source of frustration to the champions.

#### 6 Key barriers to the success of the pilot project

The timing of turnover in agency and steering group local authority staff over the development and life of the project (plus other emerging and continuing demands within the Local Government agenda) has not been ideal in terms of available human resources. Similarly the required absence of the lead project consultant for personal reasons, although covered by his colleagues, was also unfortunate.

The protracted question of the transfer of the LA budget lead from one authority to another, and prior to that, negotiations on procurement regulations have also been issues requiring attention.

#### 7 Key Learning points

Things work best where there are **strong advocates** and champions among partners who can **push the agenda** and good **strong networks** that enable people with drive to cut through the bureaucracy and get things done.

The necessity of a more **sophisticated approach** over the longer term to the development of cultural champions, perhaps by using a **group of advocates**, or by implementing a structure which supports policy development and influences sustainable community strategy and LAA processes.

The importance of **complementary practical products such as the LAA Toolkit** (also developed by the partners in this period) in attracting and focusing the attention of hard-pressed stakeholders.

Building a **strategic alliance** with partner agencies is an important step in developing influence.

The need for **collaborative planning** over a one to three year period to address local issues by the agencies, authorities and Government Office through the Local Government Task Group. This agency/local authority grouping, now chaired by the Government Office, acts as the operational vehicle for collaborative working on culture in the improvement agenda, and has in effect absorbed the CRIG.

## 8 Sustainability of the project in the future

A web based community of practice (CoP) was implemented for culture within the region, as a sub-community of the Progress through Partnership CoP <http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/comm/communities.do?page=21&showSubCommunities=true&pageSize=8>.

The project team would like to see the development of LSP Culture module (see below) and the opportunities presented by the wider PtP link, since it has a clear place in the new draft South East Regional Improvement and Efficiency Strategy. In addition, perhaps, an evaluation of English Heritage's Historic Environment Local Management initiative, which provides information, training & guidance to decision makers in local authorities, regional agencies & national organisations.

A practical guide for advocates on how to develop a voice for culture in local strategic debates and planning has been developed as a supplement to the LAA toolkit and will be available from <http://www.seco.org.uk/laatoolkit/thecultureandsporttoolkitforlocalareaagreements.html> and <http://www.progressthroughpartnership.org.uk/ptpprog/cultchamps.htm>.

Seminars are being developed on *Realising Culture's Potential*, involving participants in a focussed discussion of how to develop a local cultural voice and 'influencing' agenda. It is hoped that they will form and refine a model for similar workshops that could be made available in the other sub-regions of the South East.

## London

This pilot project has been developed and delivered by the London Regional Cultural Improvement Group (LRCIG). Having been established a year before the project started, working within Capital Ambition, the group already had a clear view of issues for London. The Cultural Agencies Strategic Planning Group meant the network of cultural and government agencies had established relationships at several levels.

For the pilot project, established relationships meant clear objectives, planning and delivery. Practical work gave agencies a chance to test and develop their improvement plans for the sector, sharing resources and confirming shared interests and strengths.

### 1 Project Original Aims and Objectives

The project had two major strands – aiming to improve information on the performance and impact of cultural services across London, and undertaking capacity building with the sector.

To improve performance information on cultural services, the group defined several key tasks:

1. Identifying key performance indicators that exist across the cultural services, to lead the development of a cultural services performance framework – baselining how the cultural services are performing across London and benchmarking against national data where possible. The research was intended to explore the usefulness of the current indicator sets with regards to developing a more 'outcomes based' measurement framework.
2. Analysing performance management frameworks or improvement tools being used by London Boroughs – to measure how they are managing change to improve performance. Improvement activity often involved the application of the self-assessment and validation tool 'Towards An Excellent Service'

Capacity building was targeted to an area of agreed skills shortage in London, junior and middle management of cultural services. The group agreed improvement would be delivered through a pilot programme of masterclasses, with evaluation to capture and ensure learning.

### 2 Have the Project objectives been achieved overall?

All objectives have been achieved. In January 2007 LRCIG commissioned ECOTEC to provide to identify and analyse performance information. Their report, published August and launched at a dedicated conference September 2007, provided a detailed summary of existing data, highlighting areas where London performs well and where improvements are needed – compared to other city and national data. The report is available at <http://capitalambition.gov.uk/documents/AgreedFinalreportforCRIG.pdf>.

The report is comprehensive, providing an excellent guide to the array of performance measures. It highlights weaknesses and areas of uncoordinated work – providing a way forward for LRCIG. As the first stage of an evidence base vital to future improvement at local and regional level, this work was a vital precursor to the wider programme planned – and will drive the development of further performance information and knowledge.

The series of masterclasses planned was delivered on time and to budget. Evaluation (also carried out by ECOTEC) was positive, and the findings will inform future learning and development activities. The masterclasses gave LRCIG a chance ‘to explore whether skills gaps were where we thought’, as well as giving the project some really visible, practical activity, and facilitate networking and learning between attendees.

The pilot project has benefited LRCIG and the region – giving members some practical work with which to engage partners and stakeholders. Closer working relationships have been established between agencies – and agencies have had the chance to test out theories and plans for improvement. Developing each masterclass was allocated to separate agencies – sharing responsibility and ensuring all partners engage in delivery.

### **3 Factors leading to the objectives being achieved**

- A clear and well formed bid for funding, and research specification, through input at each stage from the project steering group, including boroughs and the main NDPBs in London (Sport England London, MLA London and Arts Council England London) – providing good links to national bodies
- Effective management by the project steering group – meeting regularly to ensure project was on time and on budget and individuals took on responsibility for particular tasks
- Project management handled by a small central team, with clearly defined roles
- Consulting boroughs on the series of masterclasses ensured topics were appropriate and targeted to need
- Ensuring development took account of constraints – for example, managing the rate of charging for masterclasses (subsidised to £30 + VAT) ensured the sessions were accessible to most boroughs
- Good practice commissioning ensured quality consultancy support – despite the challenging brief of identifying and extracting performance data across London, ECOTEC were described by one stakeholder as ‘tenacious’

### **4 Objectives not yet achieved**

- Performance data and information was gathered and analysed as far as possible. This analysis highlighted that a full performance framework, although vital, will be expensive and laborious to develop – data and

knowledge is still too messy, with major gaps, inconsistent information, and inadequate performance indicators. In response proposals were drawn up for further development of a framework

- It also proved impossible to adequately define a baseline for improvement activity using the TAES tool – with too few, and inconsistent, applications of the tool. Further work is planned with authorities, revisiting the use of TAES (and/or Single Improvement Tool)
- The pilot established that developing social outcome measures, although critical to the future of the sector, will be expensive and laborious. The National Cultural Improvement Strategy will address this issue
- Not all boroughs could fund and release staff to attend masterclasses – typically these may have been the boroughs in most need of developmental support

## **5 Factors leading to the objectives not being achieved**

- Data collection proved the most challenging issue. Despite extensive work by ECOTEC, often data could not be accessed – often authorities' performance officers were not clear on what data they hold about cultural services
- The analysis of improvement activity was compromised by gaps in sharing data, and inconsistent approaches in the past. From eleven authorities approached, only six provided data and these were mainly from higher culture scoring boroughs. There was a huge diversity in the approaches taken to self-assessment – TAES was not designed to baseline authorities' performance – but with results from more of the relevant authorities, findings would have been more robust and conclusive
- Often comparable data simply does not exist – for example, the only real indicator of the quality of a park is the Green Flag awards. However, this data is simple and statistics skewed easily (the Corporation of London have many awards). Note that the Parks Benchmarking Group are working to address this issue

## **6 Key barriers to the success of the pilot project**

- The data is challenging, complex and/or lacking!
- Data sharing by local authorities was imperfect – initially slow and sometimes incomplete
- Cost pressures had an impact – data gathering and analysis on this scale is expensive
- Comparisons based on TAES not very effective as the scope and nature of self-assessments and validations vary widely. It was also perceived that boroughs applying the TAES tool were generally high performing relatively – skewing the findings of the analysis
- Timetabling was challenging – delivering the last 20% of the project was really tough
- Partnership working brings complications – for example, on funding arrangements. Even administering masterclasses for staff from all London boroughs becomes difficult!

## 7 Key Learning points

### Collaborative development

Masterclass subjects were carefully developed by LCIG – but a broad audience will always have a wide range of needs/requirements. Effective consultation helps tailor developmental activities like this. Customising training could prove expensive – are there options to deliver this in-house?

### Performance data and information

Cultural data still needs to be developed, to ensure high performance across the sector. There are still major gaps; often data is lacking or intangible, not shared openly or applied to drive improvement. A positive step (being considered by DCMS) would be to establish participation rates for arts, museums etc. There are gaps in the data available – some data is still intangible. Until this is addressed, cultural services will not be able to demonstrate how they support their authority's key priorities.

An outcomes framework for culture, providing the basis for performance management and demonstrating the true value of the sector, is vital – but will require significant investment. The majority of the data that exists is inward looking. Some indicators need to be revised; some need to be abolished. To ensure the success of further collaborative work, boroughs will need to confidently share performance information.

## 8 Sustainability of the project in the future

The achievements of this pilot project will be taken forward in several ways. The results were disseminated at an event on 25 September 2007, with discussions focused on priorities for further action.

- Through the useful links developed, funding has been agreed for a year-long secondment position of London Cultural Improvement manager
- The final project report has been used to develop a future bid to support the work that has already taken place and to sustain 'culture' in LAAs – worked up by the London Cultural Improvement Manager in association with boroughs through the London Cultural Improvement Group, the NDPBs in London and London Councils.
- Improvement tools are being developed following the findings of the report. MLA is developing a tool to be used by the sector as a generic outcome measure. The development of a Single Improvement Tool for the cultural sector will allow results to be directly comparable
- Learning from the pilot project in the East Midlands and the East of England Region has been built into further activity

## South West

The South West pilot project set out to build understanding and awareness of cultural services across local government in the region. A wide range of agencies have worked collaboratively to develop communications and tailored briefings. This project has brought out useful learning on the benefits and challenges of working collaboratively across the region, and of working between local and regional levels.

### 1 Project Original Aims and Objectives

1. Contribute to developing and improving working relationships between local authorities and regional agencies
2. Contribute to a better understanding of the work of local authorities and regional agencies
3. Provide a focus to discuss how national, regional and local objectives are aligned and can be developed, to ensure that Culture contributes to shared priorities and is incorporated in partnerships, LAA's, regional strategies (including regional economic, spatial and cultural strategies) and corporate plans
4. Provide a basis to discuss service planning, delivery, and improvement in local authorities and explore the capacity and potential of regional agencies to support improvement

The project has focused on the region's nine unitary authorities, with the aim that lessons learned would be transferable to other local authorities. Work has been built on actions identified during the productive but challenging process of Regional Commentaries.

### 2 Have the Project objectives been achieved overall?

Work on the pilot project has opened doors and offered a beginning to the development of new relationships and mutual understanding.

Communications and marketing material has been developed – particularly a brochure building awareness of the role and importance of cultural services. By advocating cultural services, and building on the regional commentaries, the project has provided a basis upon which to develop a more structured approach to discussing service planning.

Agencies have carried out briefings and workshops with several authorities, providing opportunities to discuss how culture contributes to shared priorities and the importance of LAA's.

### 3 Factors leading to the objectives being achieved

- Willingness and commitment of stakeholders to participate – and a desire from cultural leaders within local authorities to receive external support in

order to raise awareness and understanding across their authorities of the contribution and value of cultural services

- Positive existing relationships between agencies, and with cultural leads in authorities
- Establishing space for discussion has been useful – councillors and cultural agencies have been able to begin to discuss opportunities such as LAAs
- Tailoring briefings and workshops to authority need and circumstance – for example, in Torbay cultural agencies built on a discussion of the local economy, illustrating the contribution of culture, leisure and tourism in the area

#### **4 Objectives not yet achieved?**

The pilot project's original ambitions were high, and are ongoing – for example, ensuring culture is central to LAA's. Knitting together local, regional and national priorities and initiatives is also a continual challenge, with lessons learnt around the capacity of agencies of national government to engage in this aim.

An audit of the use of improvement tools did not produce conclusive results, with some low response rates – further work is necessary to identify the gaps to be filled and how agencies can collaborate to help fill them. A plan to create a shared database of key contacts across the sector has been challenging from a technical viewpoint.

#### **5 Factors leading to the objectives not being achieved**

- A lack of time and resources for extensive relationship building, and work to meet the ambitious objectives of the pilot project, has been the key issue
- Despite benefits of regional organisation of project, meaningful engagement is done at local level – requiring extensive local data and knowledge – a major challenge for project team members and agencies
- Agencies have varying levels of 'readiness to engage' – but also distinct agendas, programmes, and pre-existing relationships. The capacity of agencies to engage in project work has been one of the major issues. Agencies also have had to manage other priorities and agendas!
- Councillors have sometimes proved to be difficult to engage across the region and sector
- Counteracting the nature of the regional commentaries (process-driven assessment) needed time and space for trust and relationship building – but the project hasn't had such space
- Not all services or agencies have been included, or have engaged throughout the project. Representation of services relating to tourism has been a particular issue for authorities focused on these areas of work

#### **6 Key barriers to the success of the pilot project**

- The regional commentary process has had a strong impact on the project. It has developed better results and relationships for some agencies and

authorities than others – such as district councils, or agencies such as tourism and heritage. The process consumed much of the effort and resource necessary for this pilot to be successful – and exposed capacity gaps within agencies and authorities, damaging to relationships in some instances

- The cost of initiating the project was high – collaborative working required a great deal of capacity to get going and implement at a time when unpredicted amounts of time were being devoted to regional commentaries
- Consistent engagement by regional stakeholders including the Government Office due to time and resource pressures
- Capacity and competing demands prevented the full engagement of some cultural agencies – some agencies are not resourced to work at grass roots level with numerous authorities

## **7 Key Learning points**

- It is not possible to build strong individual relationships between councils and agencies through a shared ‘evaluation’ or ‘commentary’ process – relationships grow through shared working over time. There needs to be significant investment in relationship building following challenges such as the regional commentaries process
- If agencies in the cultural sector want to make a difference, they have to be able to allocate sufficient capacity to do so. Relationship building and partnership working take time to nurture and develop – it doesn’t happen overnight! Credibility and trust are required, particularly before experiences and information is shared
- Agencies can and should work together where appropriate to deliver shared learning. Opportunities for sharing learning within and between agencies – helping agencies facilitate the sharing of good practice across the region. Key contacts of all agencies should be encouraged to advocate and promote cultural services
- When engaging members, there are varying rates of success for different agencies in different areas, dependent on need and circumstance of each area
- Multi-agency sessions need extensive preparation, data and information sharing, and design. For example, case studies used need to be appropriate to all agencies – to ensure no part of the sector is ‘lost’
- Authorities need clear priorities and measures from DCMS, enabling them to measure their local delivery against a cultural entitlement – this will add to the self-assessment tools already available
- Councils need to take on board the messages about how much can be delivered through culture, how it can change people’s lives and how it can help shape the places within which people live, work and play. They need to require agencies to exercise the new LAA duty to cooperate by including targets/indicators about culture/sport in their LAAs

## **8 Sustainability of the project in the future**

The project has delivered a real proof-of-concept – that collaborative working between agencies can deliver real improvement support to local authorities. As working relationships develop between the agencies, the group are looking to forward-plan activity further into the future.

## East of England

In the East of England a small project team has helped authorities manage their own performance and improvement. The key output of the project was to present the Towards an Excellent Service (TAES) self-assessment and validation tool in a creative and interesting way. The team linked TAES to concepts of excellence and continuous improvement, which generated an interest in the tool and motivation among the delegates.

Consultant support focused on building skills within the sector for self-assessment, peer validation, and improvement planning. Networks and champions got the tool successfully tested through peer-to-peer challenge between authorities – and opened the way for the development of a sport/cultural improvement network across Essex.

The improvement pilot was driven by a small project team: Chris Cutforth (Sport England), Steve Wood (consultancy support), Brian Bennett (Tendring DC), and Martyn Allison (IDeA). The project was delivered within a wider programme, building on earlier work between Sport England East, Sportessex (the County Sports Partnership) and the Essex Local Authorities. Although agencies supporting sport services were most heavily involved in the pilot, authorities have used the project to benefit all cultural services.

Timescales were largely met – although the six week period allotted for self-assessment and peer challenge proved very tight!

### 1 Project Original Aims and Objectives

1. Clear understanding of, commitment to and use of the values and habits of continuous improvement, TAES Self Assessment and improvement planning amongst the participating local authorities
2. Clear understanding of the principles of Non-directive Coaching and experience of using these techniques to establish and commit to clear and succinct change goals and improvement projects
3. Agreed methods of sharing best practice across the organisations within the network
4. Improvement plans for each participating local authority, comprising improvement projects with clear outputs, responsibilities and timeframes, and commitment to these projects amongst the management teams
5. A best practice benchmarking method in operation within the region
6. An agreed review and improvement cycle for each participating local authority, including future Self Assessment and improvement plan reviews
7. A sustainable TAES 'Peer Challenge' system (or knowledge of what prevents this from working), which will assist organisations to carry out incisive and accurate Self Assessment and develop people's knowledge of practices used by another organisation within the network

8. Knowledge of the success of the training and development interventions (i.e. the two training courses and SE regional office support) in achieving the above goals, and how they can be improved in the future
9. A plan for rolling out the successful elements of this pilot project throughout the region and nationally

Objectives for the project were developed alongside medium and long-term goals (up to July 2011). These are now being considered as part of developing the county improvement network.

## **2 Have the Project objectives been achieved overall?**

1. All immediate objectives have been achieved: the project has been delivered to timescale, with 10 authorities and County Sports Partnership involved
2. The pilot has delivered a proof of concept of the peer challenge model
3. The project has also delivered clear evidence of the benefit of committing to the TAES model – greater effort applied to TAES brings greater reward

## **3 Commentary on the achieved objectives**

Thanks to significant planning, effort and teamwork, all of the pilot project's objectives were achieved. The team initially developed a peer challenge model, adapting the TAES methodology. This meant that the tool could be applied more effectively and efficiently, meeting authorities' specific needs by pairing authorities (to challenge and support each other) according to interest or service focus.

Authorities were encouraged and supported by their Improvement Champion – a peer in each county. The project team used existing networks, both formal and informal, to promote the tool. Across Essex ten authorities completed the programme, providing a proof-of-concept for the model.

A major challenge for the authorities was timescales – delivering self-assessment, peer challenge and validation, and improvement planning within a short period. This urgency did help ensure a clear focus by authorities, and helped achieve the TAES objective – a snapshot of the situation in each organisation.

Progress is being made towards achieving the medium and long term objectives identified during initial project planning. However, achieving these will require commitment from all partners and ideally some additional capacity (human and financial) to support the work. Work continues!

## **4 Factors leading to the objectives being achieved**

- Strong project leadership and management by the team, with a clear vision for the pilot and longer-term programme
- The quality, commitment and effort of individuals involved. The central team and key stakeholders worked 'above and beyond' to achieve

success, responding to the demands of regional-level work. The support of participants was essential!

- Development of excellent working relationships between project team, access to existing (formal/informal) networks through improvement champion (although more successful in Essex than other counties)
- Clear focus on service performance, with development of TAES framework for more straightforward, meaningful application: for example, the 'red thread' concept helped authorities link services, processes and improvement, and develop a common language
- External support (Steve Wood) brought in fresh perspective, with an emphasis on continuous improvement and business excellence. Steve focused everyone on outcomes – via values, habits, skills, and competencies. He also brought in appropriate skills – facilitation, coaching, 'high performing'
- Evaluation was conducted by a consultancy outside the local government sector – bringing in useful business experience. For example, evaluation explored issues like the marketing of the project

## **5 Factors leading to the objectives not being achieved**

All of the pilot's short-term objectives were achieved, and progress is being made on medium/long term objectives of the wider programme.

## **6 Key barriers to the success of the pilot project**

- Senior management buy-in from authorities involved was hard to achieve, particularly as service structures vary widely. Participants varied in number per authority, seniority, and capacity to respond to the demands of the pilot
- It was hard to find the 'right time' for the project. Elections and the Easter holiday proved issues in this cycle – but these challenges informed a robust planning process for next year
- The scale and challenges meant some opportunities were missed, as participants simply ran out of steam. For example, peer challenge was used effectively in reviewing self-assessments, but not applied to improvement plans to the same extent
- Balancing timescales – six weeks for self-assessment and peer challenge was a very tough timescale – but any more would have led to a loss of focus and urgency
- Often the process comes down to a few key individuals – essential they are available at the right time. Training two officers per authority would cover risk and ensure succession, if resources allow
- Need for extensive preparation, learning the TAES model, carrying out research and document review, and logistics - setting dates for self-assessment etc.
- The capacity of officers has been an ongoing issue and is proving to be a key challenge in sustaining a coordinated and collective approach to improvement planning.

## 7 Key learning points

### Working regionally

Constant, consistent communications between participants is essential – both information, and ‘softer’, proactive support. Capacity in sector is already stretched! It’s best to have an improvement champion as part of the central project team, seconded at least part-time – while improvement is part of the day job, the champion role is vital to achieving the step change we need now!

There’s clearly a continuing challenge of making this type of work part of the day job for sport/cultural service managers rather than an ‘optional extra, and providing them with ongoing advice and support (a potential role here for the regional agencies). It’s clear that creating an improvement network to sustain the work in the medium/long term, and to maximize impact, will be essential.

### Involving stakeholders

Ideally train the senior manager and the ‘organiser’ of the TAES process in each authority. As with any project, ensuring the necessary skills and knowledge are shared by key individuals is essential to ensure success and mitigate risk. Consistent senior management buy-in across authorities is essential to the process – and to building awareness and understanding of the centrality of cultural services. Member involvement is desirable, but more useful in some localities than others.

There is no ‘right way’ to self-assess and peer challenge – for example, at Tendring, officers were involved from across the council and partners, but at Chelmsford only cultural service officers were involved. In reality learning is around finding the balance of value, resources and rewards of self assessment. It would be great to build succession planning into the project plan – the RADAR tool may help embed improvement in the authority rather than the individual.

### Driving improvement

The project demonstrated the benefits of the peer challenge model as an alternative to external validation and/or peer review – and the benefits of a collaborative approach to organizational and service improvement. It’s essential to balance performance awareness/assessment, improvement planning, and implementation.

The shared learning and relationship building, generated by the peer challenge process, will be critical to further improvements in future. This is what differentiates the peer challenge model from validation, peer review and inspection.

The pilot demonstrated that using innovative training content and techniques can turn a ‘dry’ subject into something that is interesting and motivational. Coaching, to help stimulate organisational and service improvement, should be considered!

## **8 Sustainability of the project in the future**

This project was developed as part of a longer term programme, fitting into a 'real vision of the future'. The next step is the development of Improvement Network for Essex, comprising representatives of the County Sport Partnership, Essex Association of Chief Leisure Officers, 'Business Forum' (facilities management), and Sports Development Forum. The programme will be integrated with the implementation of the CLG and cultural improvement strategies at regional and local levels, including alignment to LAA priorities.

Learning from the pilot is being taken forward, developing the model and tools for future use. For example, protocols for peer challenge are in development, to ensure that this model has the rigor of consultant-led validation. The model will be offered as a development of existing options, rather than a whole scale replacement, with guidance for authorities considering.

## Appendix C: Key regional contacts for further information on each pilot project

<b>Region</b>	<b>Name and Organisation</b>	<b>Telephone/email</b>
NW	Abigail Gilmore Director, Northwest Culture Observatory	0161 817 7435 <a href="mailto:abigail.Gilmore@nwda.co.uk">abigail.Gilmore@nwda.co.uk</a>
YH	Jason Doherty Head of Policy, MLA Yorkshire	0113 394 4869 <a href="mailto:jason.doherty@mlayorkshire.org.uk">jason.doherty@mlayorkshire.org.uk</a>
EM	Bill Cullen Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council	01455 238141 <a href="mailto:bill.cullen@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk">bill.cullen@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk</a>
WM	Phil Fellows Head of Performance and Improvement, Sport England	020 7273 1798 <a href="mailto:phil.fellows@sportengland.org">phil.fellows@sportengland.org</a>
SE	Sophie Jeffrey	07929 362671 <a href="mailto:sophie.jeffrey@artscouncil.org.uk">sophie.jeffrey@artscouncil.org.uk</a>
London	Sue Thiedeman Cultural Service Improvement Manager	07852 915789 <a href="mailto:sue.thiedeman@redbridge.gov.uk">sue.thiedeman@redbridge.gov.uk</a>
SW	Libby Grundy Culture South West	01392 229 587 <a href="mailto:libby.grundy@southwestrda.org.uk">libby.grundy@southwestrda.org.uk</a>
EE	Spencer Harris Head of Performance and Improvement, Sport England	020 7273 1836 <a href="mailto:spencer.harris@sportengland.org">spencer.harris@sportengland.org</a>