

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

14 December 2004

<b>AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION OF CULTURAL SERVICES</b>
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<b>Jan Richmond – Assistant Chief Executive (Performance and Policy)</b>
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### Summary

To provide the Members of OSB with the opportunity to consider the Cultural Services inspection report from the Audit Commission and to agree the associated action plan.

### Introduction

In July 2004 the Audit Commission undertook an inspection of Cultural Services. This inspection included arts, arts development and theatres, museums, parks and open spaces, leisure centres and sports development and libraries.

Middlesbrough Council was assessed as delivering a “good service” and “promising” prospects for improvement, for this inspection. The Audit Commission report is attached as Appendix A.

### Evidence / Discussion

The inspection focussed on:

- Contribution of cultural services to the regeneration of the borough;
- Cultural services leadership and performance management;
- Access to services by residents; and
- Investment in the future of cultural facilities

The inspection process included:

- A review of the self assessment and supporting evidence provided by the Council
- Visits to several of the council’s cultural facilities
- A wide range of interviews and focus groups with Elected Members, council officers, partner organisations and service users.

The inspectors found that Cultural services in Middlesbrough are **good** because:

- There are clear linkages between the service ambitions and the ambitions for the local area;
- A Cultural Strategy for Middlesbrough is in place to guide service provision and has a balanced approach to meeting national and local objectives;

- The council has a good understanding of the needs of local communities, based on extensive consultation with residents and stakeholders.
- The council provides a good range of cultural facilities and activities which on the whole are accessible to residents;
- Not all of the services are delivering to a consistent standard but the quality of libraries and museums is strong, and significant improvements have been made to parks and arts over the past eighteen months;
- The range of cultural service activities positively contributes to delivering both national and corporate agendas;
- The council works well with a range of partnerships to deliver cultural services to residents;
- A range of initiatives is provided across cultural services for 'hard to reach' groups.

Cultural Services in Middlesbrough are judged to have **promising** prospects for improvement:

- There is clear leadership from councillors and staff and increased resource commitment from the council;
- The Cultural Strategy objectives are shared and owned by stakeholders;
- Partnerships are used to increase the service capacity;
- Service improvements are being driven by the council's performance management system embedded into the cultural services' operations;
- The council is effective at securing external resources for cultural service improvement, but delivery of improvements is not dependent on external funding;
- plans are realistic and robust and have been influenced by stakeholder and resident consultation;
- Mechanisms are in place to identify and address service areas which are underachieving against objectives and targets.

There were some recommendations for improvement:

- The council should prepare a long term strategic overview for the delivery of cultural services beyond the current five year strategies;
- Cultural services should focus on actions and activities to increase user numbers and to improve levels of residents' satisfaction with the service provision;
- Criteria should be established to measure the outcomes of the cultural services in relation to corporate objectives and impacts on the local population.

An action plan has been developed to address these recommendations, see Appendix B

## **Conclusion**

That scrutiny note the report and support the attached action plan.

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