

Inspection report

October 2004



Cultural Services

Middlesbrough Council

Contents

Summary	3
Scoring the service	4
Recommendations	6
Report	7
Context	7
The locality	7
The council	7
The service inspection	7
How good is the service?	9
What links can be clearly illustrated between the council's cultural services' ambitions, and the ambition for the local area?	9
How effectively do cultural services contribute to local area priorities and achieve service priorities	11
How good are cultural services at providing a quality user experience?	15
Summary	17
What are the prospects for improvement to the service?	18
Does the Council have the capacity and systems to deliver its cultural ambitions and drive improvements in cultural services for all sections of the community?	18
How effectively do the council's future plans sustain a clear focus on achieving its ambitions for cultural services?	22
Summary	25
Appendices	26
Documents reviewed	26
Reality checks undertaken	26
List of people interviewed	27
Shared Priorities	28
Improving public services	29

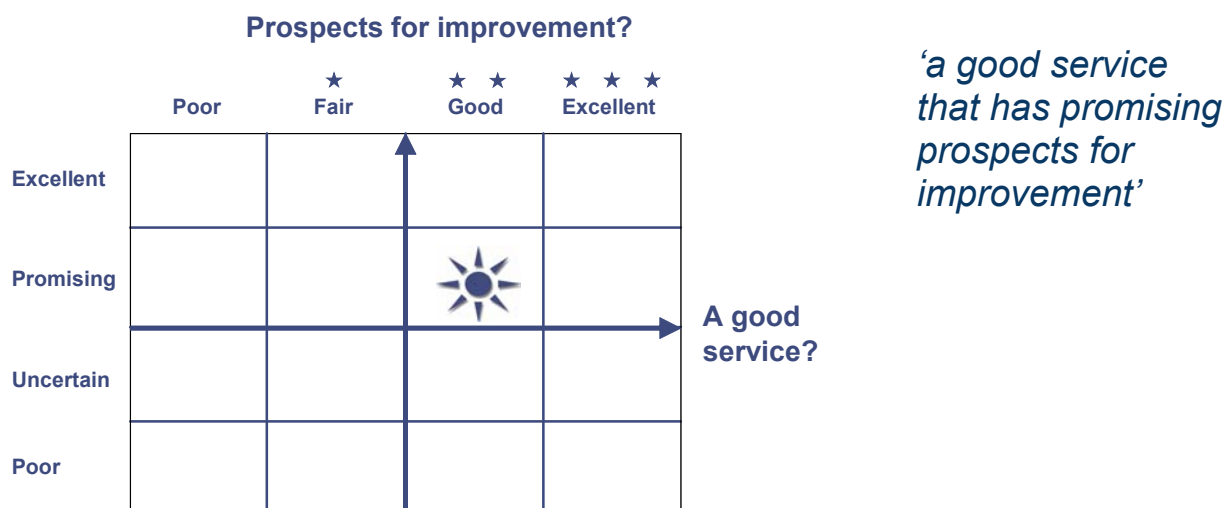
Summary

- 1 Middlesbrough is in the north east of England. The population is 140,700 and is expected to decline in the next ten years. With a rich industrial past as a centre for the iron and steel industries, Middlesbrough's economy is now service based with the town centre providing most of the town's employment. The borough has a culturally diverse population with some 7 per cent from ethnic minority communities, the highest concentration of anywhere in the north east. Although Middlesbrough has areas of affluence, parts of the borough experience levels of deprivation more than twice the national average and 16 of its 25 wards are amongst the 10% most disadvantaged in the country. Crime, unemployment, and levels of ill health are higher than average.
- 2 The council has 53 councillors and a modernised decision making structure with an elected mayor and a multi-party executive board. The executive board consists of eight executive members and the mayor and is advised by the overview and scrutiny board and the corporate management team.
- 3 The cultural services inspection included arts, arts development and theatres; museums; parks and open spaces; leisure centres and sports development, and libraries. These services are provided by two directorates – Regeneration, and Environment and Neighbourhood Services. The cultural services combined cost £5.33 million for 2004/05.

Scoring the service

- 4 We have assessed the council as providing a 'good', two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Scoring chart¹: Middlesbrough Council - Cultural Services



- 5 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 the service provision and has a balanced approach to meeting national and local objectives;
- ◆ The council has a good understanding of the needs of the 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 the cultural services for 'hard to reach' groups.

however

- ◆ the Cultural Strategy lacks prioritisation;
- ◆ some facilities are in a poor condition;

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

- ◆ performance across the cultural services to increase user numbers is varied and some targets have not been met;
- ◆ The council is unable to demonstrate the impact that its cultural services have on priorities or on the lives of the borough's residents.

6 The cultural services have promising prospects for improvement as:

- ◆ 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;
- ◆ Service 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.

however

- ◆ Further progress is necessary to complete the alignment of the Cultural Strategy with corporate objectives and to identify non priorities within the cultural services;
- ◆ The council has been slow to consider alternative methods of service delivery;
- ◆ There are no mechanisms in place to measure the impact that cultural services have on the residents of Middlesbrough.

Recommendations

- 7 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendations:
 - ◆ 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.
- 8 We would like to thank the staff of Middlesbrough Council, particularly to those members of the cultural services, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

David A. Pattison

Peter Kilkenny

Inspectors

Dates of inspection: 6th – 8th July 2004

Email:

d-pattison@audit-commission.gov.uk

p-kilkenny@audit-commission.gov.uk

Report

Context

- 9 This report has been prepared by the Audit Commission ('the Commission') following an inspection under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, and issued in accordance with its duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

The locality

- 10 Middlesbrough Council is in the north east of England. The population of the area is 140,700, living in 55,164 households, making it the most densely populated borough in the Tees Valley. 7.65 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities making it a place which has the highest concentration of people from ethnic minorities in the north east. The population of the town is relatively younger than the average for of England and Wales. This masks, however, a shorter life expectancy than for the country as a whole, and an increasing tendency for younger people to leave Middlesbrough to work elsewhere, a trend which is not compensated for by similar numbers migrating inwards. The population of Middlesbrough has declined in the past 30 years and is projected to continue to decline and to become relatively older.
- 11 Unemployment is a significant issue for Middlesbrough. The claimant count level of 5.2 per cent is more than twice the national rate and in some of the town's neighbourhoods it is five times as high.
- 12 Middlesbrough has twenty-five wards, of which sixteen fall amongst the most deprived 10 per cent of wards in England. One road in Middlesbrough has the lowest rate of income of any street in the country. 53 per cent of Middlesbrough children live in households claiming Income Support, Family Credit or Income-based Job Seekers' Allowance. These factors combined present Middlesbrough with the highest concentration of deprivation in England.

The council

- 13 The council has 53 councillors and a modernised decision making structure with an elected mayor and a multi-party executive board. The executive board consists of eight executive members and the mayor and is advised by the overview and scrutiny board and the corporate management team.
- 14 The council's overall budget for the year 2004/05 is £164.4 million. The 2003/04 budget was £167.4m and the unaudited projections indicate a net under spend of approximately £0.260million
- 15 The council's priorities as identified in The Corporate Performance Plan for 2004/05 are:
- ◆ A clean, safe environment in which people can go about their business without fear of crime and anti-social behaviour;
 - ◆ Physical regeneration of the borough's run down sites and buildings;
 - ◆ A business-friendly enterprise culture which welcomes would be investors;
 - ◆ A transport network which can meet the needs of a borough on its way up.
- 16 The Plan also states that 'education and care of young people and support to vulnerable people in the borough provide a foundation for these corporate priorities.'

The service inspection

- 17 The Service we have inspected consists of arts, arts development and theatres; museums; parks and open spaces; leisure centres and sports development, and libraries.

- 18 The council reviewed its service groupings and senior management structure in 2003, a review which was in part driven by a need to ensure that management structures were re-aligned to deliver the council's priorities effectively. The impact on the cultural services was to integrate them into two Directorates.
- 19 Cultural services i.e. arts, arts development, events and entertainment, libraries, museums and galleries, are part of the Regeneration Service Group. This reflects the council's view of the strategic priority attached to the contribution which these services can make to the regeneration of individuals, communities, and boroughs.
- 20 The Environment and Neighbourhood Services Group delivers a wide range of community and customer focussed 'front line' services. The council believe that the functions of Sport and Leisure and Countryside and Landscape fit this context. Within this group the Countryside and Landscape teams are part of the Streetscene Service creating a strong focus on urban green space, its development, maintenance, management and use. Sport and Leisure are incorporated into the Community Protection service because of their obvious relevance to the community safety and health improvement agendas.
- 21 The cultural services budget for 2004/05 is £5.33 million, a four per cent increase from the previous year.
- 22 Our inspection focused on:
 - ◆ Contribution of cultural services to the regeneration of the Borough;
 - ◆ Cultural services leadership and performance management;
 - ◆ Access to services by residents;
 - ◆ Investment in future of cultural services.

How good is the service?

What links can be clearly illustrated between the council's cultural services' ambitions, and the ambition for the local area?

- 23 Inspectors look to see how ambitions for cultural services support ambitions for the local area and evidence that the ambitions are focused on improving quality of life for all sections of the community by balancing national, regional and local priorities.
- 24 Inspectors also look for evidence that the council's cultural services support and contribute to shared priorities.²
- 25 The council's ambition for cultural services is integral to the council's overall ambition for the area.
- 26 The mayor's and council priorities are encapsulated in the theme of 'Raising Hope', a vision documented in the 2004/05 Corporate Performance Plan and built on the four pillars of:
- ◆ A clean, safe environment in which people can go about their business without fear of crime and anti-social behaviour;
 - ◆ Physical regeneration of the borough's run down sites and buildings;
 - ◆ A business-friendly enterprise culture which welcomes would be investors;
 - ◆ A transport network which can meet the needs of a borough on its way up.
- 27 Executive members support this vision and consider that culture has a strong role to play in regenerating the borough through contributing to these priorities.
- 28 The council played a lead role in formulating a Cultural Strategy for Middlesbrough. Councillors were involved in open workshops, think tank sessions and briefings to guide the development of the strategy. To ensure however that this is a community rather than a council strategy the Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership and other stakeholders locally and regionally were involved in its development. The Cultural Strategy reflects the council's drive to regenerate Middlesbrough and has as its objectives:
- Driving economic regeneration through cultural initiatives;
 - Improving access to provision;
 - Offering cultural opportunities that enrich people's lives;
 - Providing excellence and innovation in cultural endeavours;
- and
- Developing the cultural infrastructure to encourage sustainability.
- 29 There is a match between the cultural and corporate strategy objectives but there are issues still to be addressed to further strengthen the focus of the cultural services, and to make clear what the council considers are not cultural service priorities. This applies to prioritising between and within the services and to prioritisation in relation to contributing to corporate objectives.
- 30 The council's relatively recent identification of culture as a key element in the delivery of corporate objectives means that the cultural services objectives are not fully aligned with those of the council. For example although there are clear

² Shared priorities have been agreed between local and central government and are set out in Appendix 2 to this report.

linkages between the objectives of the Cultural Strategy and the corporate priorities there is still a need for the Cultural strategy to give greater priority to issues such as community safety and to the 'education and care of young people and support to vulnerable people in the town' which is the foundation for the 'Raising Hope' priorities.

- 31 The Cultural Strategy's approach to the contribution that all of the cultural services can make to corporate objectives is imbalanced. Currently the Cultural Strategy vision is weighted towards arts, crafts and related cultural industries development, particularly those which can build on skills already developing in the borough's higher education establishments.
- 32 The timing of preparing various strategies has also impacted on the current situation. Strategies such as that for libraries, sports and leisure pre-dated the council's current view of the importance of culture, other strategies such as that for parks and open spaces are in the formulation process. Consequently the objectives and action plans within these strategies are not cross referenced and harmonised with each other and with the overall Cultural Strategy. The council is aware of the need to address these issues and is currently reviewing the Cultural Strategy and accompanying action plan, as well as clarifying the culture priorities.
- 33 Consultation with the Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership is an important part of this review as the council recognise that the Partnership members and other stakeholders will play an important role in the delivery of the Strategy.
- 34 Some established strategies for individual cultural services have not been updated in the context of the longer term future of Middlesbrough. In particular the role of the borough in the regional context and the provision of services in a climate of local change are important issues. For example significant change will take place over the next decade in the profile of Middlesbrough residents, and as an outcome of the council's regeneration ambitions for the borough. User demands will change as the local population volume, profile and location alter. The council claims to be aware of such long term strategic issues but in practice the cultural strategies tend to be set within a five year cycle. Some decisions are consequently being made on the future of major facilities without a strategic context having been determined. The current decision to refurbish Clairville Stadium is an example.
- 35 The Cultural Strategy recognises that in part the ambition to improve the quality of life for all sections of the Middlesbrough population can be achieved by embracing national ambitions. Thus national priorities such as improving the quality of life for young people, promoting healthier communities, creating safer and stronger communities, transforming local environments, and promoting economic vitality are mirrored in local aspirations and feature as key elements of the Cultural Strategy. The improvement challenges for the cultural services therefore incorporate national, regional and local ambitions, and the service delivery plans relate actions to corporate objectives.
- 36 The council has a good understanding of the aspirations and needs of the Middlesbrough residents. This understanding derives from regular surveys and consultation with residents, groups within the population, and service users. Where strategies are being formulated, as for example with the 'Green Spaces and Public Places' strategy, public consultation is taking place to use their views to influence the strategy content.
- 37 The cultural services follow through positively on the outputs from this range of consultation and respond with services to meet community aspirations. Residents' aspirations in arts and entertainments are a motivating factor in the provision of new events and in the development of the infrastructure supporting these events. Similarly events within the museums reflect the demands of the borough's

population by increasing the number of free holiday period events. Libraries are developing to meet the ambitions of local ethnic minority communities and improve community cohesion by engaging with minorities on specific projects such as Asian women's writing groups, and ascertaining the ambitions of Surestart parent groups. This resulted in increased provision for the under four age group in some library refurbishments. The council's events and entertainments staff respond to the diverse ethnic groups aspirations to celebrate their cultures through projects in film and art in conjunction with local higher level education establishments and in the staging of festivals and events such as the annual Mela for the Asian population.

- 38 The council works well with a range of partnerships, organisations and local communities to determine how best culture and cultural services can meet their ambitions
- 39 Partnership working is a key element in the council's approach to delivering its agenda of community renewal. The most important partnership is the local strategic partnership – the Middlesbrough Partnership, which brings together agencies and stakeholders from all sectors of the community. The aspirations of the Middlesbrough Partnership in the Middlesbrough Community Strategy complement those of the council, and these are important guidelines for the ambitions in the Cultural Strategy for the borough.
- 40 Services across the culture grouping are represented on various strategic boards or advisory panels, and have links to specific projects and initiatives relating to establishing and meeting the ambitions of specific groups of people, such as:
 - SureStart;
 - Education Action Zone;
 - New Deal for Communities.

How effectively do cultural services contribute to local area priorities and achieve service priorities?

- 41 Having considered the ambitions that the council has set for the service, inspectors make an assessment of how well the council is meeting these ambitions. This includes an assessment of performance against specific service standards and targets and the council's approach to measuring whether it is actually delivering what it set out to do. Inspectors look for evidence of outcomes and impacts for various sections of the community and consider the council's track record of delivering continuous service improvement.
- 42 The cultural services have consistently been addressing local area priorities over a period of years. The extent which this activity impacts on local communities is not known as it lacks quantification other than for example the number and type of projects or initiatives, numbers participating and anecdotal evidence from community representatives.
- 43 The structure locates the cultural services in two different directorates – Regeneration, and Environment and Neighbourhood Services. This maintains the focus on service delivery to meet the priorities of the local areas.
- 44 The cultural services focus on their contribution to "cross cutting" issues such as community cohesion and older people through a range of working groups and projects at an operational level. The services that make up culture are good at working together to meet local priorities. For example, the sport and leisure service, the Street Warden service and representatives from the cultural service grouping, police and Connexions provide a co-ordinated range of diversionary activities designed to reduce anti social behaviour in the borough over the summer and autumn months. There are also examples of community cohesion projects and drug rehabilitation work to which the sport and leisure service has contributed.

- 45 The service's contribution to local priorities has been enhanced by introducing a greater variety of uses of existing facilities. For example a Mother and Toddler crèche is held in Pallister Park Pavilion and relates to the corporate objective of the education and care of young people as do the play areas for children and young people provided in other borough parks. A number of the borough's parks are also the location for health improvement initiatives as well as being centres for sports based community activities such as bowls clubs, football leagues, tennis and basketball.
- 46 The cultural services target sections of the community with for example the aim of reducing crime, engaging with young and old people and encouraging community cohesion and social inclusion.
- 47 Libraries use dedicated staff on targeted initiatives to encourage constructive use of the service. These are particularly aimed at 11 – 16 year olds in the community and involve partnership with the Police and Social Services in initiatives such as 'Boro-Buzz' and 'Operation Strongbow' to reduce crime against elderly and vulnerable people. Libraries also have initiatives targeting 'hard to reach groups such as children, young people and families at risk. A range of activities such as the Primary Link project, summer reading scheme, and homework clubs have aims to improve the quality of life, improve literacy and increase employability
- 48 The Arts Development team's current focus in working with young people is to improve learning and skills through creativity, and to encourage and develop positive, constructive use of leisure time through cultural/creative activity. This work is largely 'preventative', bringing together priority groups of young people in contexts that allow them to mix with other young people and experience positive peer influence. Specific projects such as the 'Vybe' community arts and cultural programme to create safer communities by tackling anti-social behaviour and crime and/or seeking to encourage a positive attitude within the community.
- 49 The Parks Service is working to increase the use of the borough's parks by black and minority ethnic communities. In Albert Park a Women's Asian Group is undertaking activities to improve physical and mental health, and specific initiatives are in place to promote healthy lifestyles to black and minority residents as well as to the population as a whole. Special activity groups within the local community use venues in Albert Park for weekly Tai chi and Yoga classes, a baby and weenie gym, and for young people roller hockey and skating takes place on the newly developed skating rink. The library service has introduced provisional library membership to assist those without a fixed address to access the service, in particular asylum seekers and the service is able to provide 25 per cent of its information in 3 different languages.
- 50 A local Residential Children's Home uses Pallister Park twice a week for arts, craft and physical activity as do two specialist centres for people with learning disabilities.
- 51 Local needs and ambitions have influenced the location of sport and leisure, libraries and parks and open space facilities and activities. Evidence of cultural services investment and outcomes being guided by the borough population's aspirations identified through resident and user consultation include:
 - The continuation of the winter festivities, and the level and quality of infrastructure supporting these events;
 - Improvements to green spaces such as the work completed at Riverside Park;
 - The range of stock ordered by the library service and the facilities created through the library refurbishment programme.

- 52 The national modernisation agenda influences the activities of the cultural services in the borough, although balance is maintained between national, corporate and local ambitions at a service delivery level. For example, museums, sports and arts development assist in raising standards across schools with initiatives such as sports coaching, educational projects in the museums, and using schools as arts venues.
- 53 Examples of health improvement and building community capacity initiatives include self sustaining groups such as the twice weekly 'Walking the Way to Health' walks at Hemlington Recreation Ground and Lingfield Countryside Centre; the 200 strong Women's Walking Network group encouraging women to walk within the countryside to gain companionship, confidence, increase awareness of the countryside and improve health; a Healthy Eating initiative included in local play schemes in Pallister Park; and the "Get Active on Prescription" (GAP) scheme, a joint initiative with the Neptune Leisure Centre and based on GP referrals, to improve fitness and health through activities such as walking or playing bowls also at Pallister Park.
- 54 The Captain Cook Birthplace Museum participated in the Middlesbrough Healthy School Scheme by providing workshops for secondary schools linking Cook's voyages with life today. Issues that were highlighted included diet, safety, disease, hygiene and relationships. The museums service also works with the Healing Arts Coordinator at the James Cook University Hospital to provide loans and information for staff and patients.
- 55 The council's leisure centres are extensively used to promote healthier communities and narrow health inequalities through schemes such as the Active for Life programme to address obesity in young people, and making health suites available and accessible to all of the population.
- 56 Cultural services contribute to creating safer and stronger communities through libraries stocking a wide range of material in ethnic languages and in providing for asylum seekers located in the borough. The sports development initiative to train three Community Sports Leaders will strengthen the Community Cohesion programme and leisure centres issue free vouchers to street wardens to give to young people to prevent anti-social behaviour and encourage them to participate in sport.
- 57 The work in recent years on parks and open spaces such as at Stewart Park and the municipal golf course has played a part in transforming local communities by giving access to additional sports facilities and the golf club house is an eating out and functions venue. The development of multi function centres including leisure centres, libraries and health centres with retail outlets are important developments in regenerating local communities.
- 58 Effective local transport already exists in Middlesbrough and concessionary fares are used to encourage its use to access cultural facilities such as the theatre and museums.
- 59 Partnership working is also used to enable services to contribute to corporate priorities. For example the council receives funding from the Primary Care Trust to operate free swimming sessions at all three swimming pools over the summer period, and a free after school session at Southlands Leisure Centre which serves deprived wards in East Middlesbrough.
- 60 The council has recognised the crucial role which culture can play in promoting the economic vitality of Middlesbrough and their investment in major flagship cultural projects, such as Albert Park, the Neptune Centre and the refurbishment of the Town Hall event spaces are economic drivers essential to the regeneration needs of the wider population.
- 61 Quantifiable evidence of the outcomes and impacts against national, corporate and local priorities is however scarce. Numbers attending courses or using facilities are available in most cases but such evidence doesn't relate to outcomes

or impacts on issues such as crime and disorder, health improvement, or at corporate and local levels care of young people or impacts on black and ethnic minority groups. Some relevant evidence is beginning to appear, for example a recent local survey registered 74% of respondents feeling that leisure activities contributed to reducing crime, there are still outstanding issues to be addressed to ensure the services are able to illustrate that they are delivering value for money by the extent of contribution they are making to the 'Raising Hope' agenda.

- 62 The council's track record of improving the cultural services facilities is good, but there is mixed performance in the area of reaching targets.
- 63 Some recent large scale developments and improvements to cultural facilities have been achieved. The refurbishment programme of the borough libraries and, in response to needs identified in user surveys, of Middlesbrough Theatre auditorium seating and foyer, Town Hall concert and events areas, the Dorman Museum extension, the restoration of Albert and Pallister Parks including new facilities for young people, and the development of the Neptune Centre are all significant examples of improvements to the council's cultural services.
- 64 Arts and sports development provide instruction and activities for all age groups within the population, the parks are now used for an increased variety of activities, the museums stage temporary exhibitions, often with a local theme, to supplement their permanent collection displays, and the events and entertainments programme is targeted to meet and develop the demand from the age and cultural diversity profile of the population.
- 65 However some facilities have declined such as the Clairville Stadium, some of the smaller parks and open spaces, and the borough's arts and crafts gallery has closed in the hiatus period until the new art gallery opens in around two years time.
- 66 Some aspects of service have improved resulting from best value reviews noticeably the library service. More cross-departmental projects are in place, and these promote the role of libraries in a range of further initiatives including the Primary Link project - a literacy project targeted at 8 primary schools in disadvantaged areas to improve literacy, play and study for young people and their families. The project has led to a 53 per cent increase in the number of books lent to children in the target area.
- 67 The council has responded to an inspection of the library service in making current service information (e.g. addresses, opening times, housebound service, etc.) is now clearly available in all libraries and on the Council web-site. The library service is also developing a customer care standard. The Council's performance against the public library standards is displayed in all libraries as well as the results of recent internal surveys.
- 68 Service delivery performance is mixed. Increases in the number of users of some cultural services are counterbalanced by a decline in others. For example library visits increased by 29% between 2002/03 and 2003/04, although visits are still below the Public Library Standard of 6,300. Twenty nine per cent of library users in 2003/04 were children – but this was below target and a one per cent decrease from 2002/03. Furthermore only 50% of available ICT hours in libraries were used.
- 69 The number of swims/visits to leisure facilities per 1,000 population in 2003/04 was 8,133, just below target but a 5% decline on 2002/03. This performance however should be set against a background of a second private health and fitness facility opening in the town centre and three neighbouring local authorities refurbishing their own public swimming and recreation facilities.

- 70 Audiences and participants at Town Hall or Theatre events in 2003/04 totalled 127,089 an excess of 14,000 over target, and the re-opening of the Dorman museum was a prime factor in the number of visits per 1,000 population totalling 2,094 – well in excess of the 1,000 targeted.
- 71 Early indications from unaudited data for 2003/04 indicate satisfaction levels achieved by parks exceeded the target set by the council, libraries and museums were within one per cent of target, but arts activities and venues were seven per cent below target and sports and leisure fell 10 per cent short of target.

How good are cultural services at providing a quality user experience?

- 72 In order to judge the quality of cultural services it is important to find out the views of people who use those services as well as the views of those who don't. Inspectors look at levels of user satisfaction and consider the views of stakeholders such as voluntary sector groups and community organisations. Inspectors are particularly looking for evidence that services are developed in line with the identified needs and aspirations of users and non-users, and that services are accessible to all sections of the community.
- 73 To provide residents with the opportunity to experience and benefit from the cultural services the facilities and activities provided by the services have to be accessible. All of the cultural services are engaged in developing initiatives to meet specific needs and aspirations.
- 74 The accessibility of Middlesbrough's cultural services is good, and for example the service meets 24 of the Public Library Standards as set in 2001.
- 75 Opening hours of the various facilities vary to meet customer needs. Libraries offer an average of 63 hours access per week. 23 per cent of opening hours for libraries fall outside 9am to 5pm on weekdays. The sports service takes a very flexible approach to opening hours and operates seven days a week for 14 hours a day. Hours are adjusted within the 14 hour period primarily to meet local demands but also to reduce operating costs when there is no user demand.
- 76 Cost is a major consideration for the people of Middlesbrough when deciding whether or not to go to an event or facility. In response to this, the Council offers free admission to the Dorman Museum. Major cultural events and festivals organised by the Council are free. The Sports Service has introduced concessionary prices targeted at those people who are likely to be on low incomes or who are more likely to be non-users of leisure facilities. This includes young people under 18, senior citizens, and full-time students. The approach helps to support the health agenda with those groups and remove a potential barrier to participation. Concessions are also available to people on benefits or allowances, who may see price as a barrier to participation. In 2002/03 there were over 4600 concession members.
- 77 The location of the cultural facilities assists accessibility. The leisure centres and libraries are situated in local communities, mainly in the deprived wards of east Middlesbrough. Parks and open spaces are spread throughout the borough. These facilities are all within easy walking distance of most of the population. Theatres, events venues and museums, apart from the Captain Cook Museum, are in or close to the town centre. However there is a comprehensive network of public transport services within Middlesbrough enabling easy access to such facilities and the events held there. Furthermore ease of access is increased by the concessionary bus pass schemes in operation.
- 78 Eighty per cent of respondents to the council's 2003 Neighbourhood Survey taken from a representative cross section of the borough population thought that leisure facilities were close enough, and only 0.5 per cent of respondents said they couldn't get to a venue due to transport difficulties.

- 79 Not all buildings and areas offering cultural services are accessible under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). All the libraries are DDA compliant due to a £2m capital programme of work to install automatic doors, new internal layouts and counters. The remaining cultural properties have been surveyed with respect to access and all leisure venues have received access audits undertaken by Cleveland Disability Forum. The outcome of these audits is that the council has now doubled the budget for DDA related improvements to £100,000 in 2004/05 to resolve major barriers to access. However even with a 'managed approach' to access issues and a prioritised programme of works it is unlikely that all the cultural facilities will be compliant within the legislation time table.
- 80 The cultural services are active in seeking to ensure that equality of access is provided for the diverse population in the borough. Examples of initiatives currently underway include promoting concession leisure cards and discount tickets at arts events to young people and residents on low incomes; establishing a sports club for young people with disabilities; introducing culturally diverse projects in the museums and involving Black and Asian artists; and holding a wider language range of stock in the libraries.
- 81 There are still issues relevant to access to services which are still to be fully addressed by the council, and although the Child Protection Policy originated in the sport and leisure service it has still to be mainstreamed throughout the council.
- 82 Accessibility is also increased for local community groups and community cohesion encouraged by integrating the services into local environments. Outreach activities are operated using local schools and neighbourhood centres by libraries, arts and sports development staff and events are also staged in local venues. These activities target a cross section of the local community and respond to the local aspirations.
- 83 At present ICT is used mainly for internal administration, accounting and collection of a limited amount of data on service users. The council is however developing ICT systems to improve the accessibility of the cultural services. The libraries make computers and internet access available to the public and the council's web site is used to promote information on the range and availability of all the cultural services. The borough's performance venues have an IT box office system which is integrated with the concessionary bus pass system, but on line reservations are not yet available for any of the cultural services.
- 84 The quality of the cultural facilities offered by the council to residents varies considerably. The libraries are all of a good standard and recent improvements to the Dorman Museum have resulted in both that building and the Captain Cook museums offering good facilities. The sports and leisure, and parks and open spaces are however much more variable in quality. A number of the more recently developed centres such as the Rainbow and Neptune centres are of a good standard but the Acklam Centre and the Clairville Stadium are poor. It is similar in the case of parks and open spaces. There is a good quality public golf course, and the recently improved Albert and Pallister Parks which include sports and other facilities – particularly for young people. Other parks and open spaces however are disappointing with a poor range and quality of facilities to engage the local population in their use.
- 85 Residents' level of satisfaction with the cultural services is mixed. Recent, unaudited analysis of the council's resident satisfaction survey shows that 82 per cent of residents were satisfied with parks and open spaces in 2003/04, 72 per cent with libraries, 65 per cent with sports and leisure facilities, and 58 per cent with museums, but only 50 per cent were satisfied with arts activities and venues.

- 86 Data contained in the council's performance clinic reports and based on surveys carried out by the council show that satisfaction levels of users of the cultural services is much higher standing at 99 per cent against a council target of 80 per cent for 2003/04, and the participation by young people has also been in excess of the council target.

Summary

- 87 The council has identified cultural services as an important driver in its objective of regenerating Middlesbrough. The ambitions in the Cultural Strategy already support the corporate ambitions, and are balanced between national and local priorities. Further fine tuning of the alignment of the cultural ambitions is taking place to ensure that they are prioritised to capitalise fully on the beneficial outcomes they can produce, but the council's strategic approach to the development of culture in the borough beyond the next five years is not yet fully developed.
- 88 Service delivery is user focused and the council has a good understanding of the aspirations and needs of the local communities through working in partnership with a range of stakeholders and consulting with the residents of the borough.
- 89 Each of the cultural services provides a broad range of activities which take both a positive lead in their contribution to delivering national and corporate agendas, and which have developed in response to users needs. The measurement of the extent of this contribution and of the improvement outcomes is however weak.
- 90 The council provides a good range of cultural facilities and activities, but the quality of the facilities ranges from very good to poor. The council has addressed access issues such as service delivery locations, social inclusion, equality and diversity by various mechanisms, however not all of the facilities are accessible to people with disabilities.
- 91 Overall the council's cultural services improvement track record is variable. High profile improvements in facilities have taken place in the museums and parks services for example, but equally there are sports facilities and open space areas which have not improved. The service delivery performance is mixed with increased usage in some services, decline in others and failure to reach some performance targets.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

Does the Council have the capacity and systems to deliver its cultural ambitions and drive improvements in cultural services for all sections of the community?

- 92 In assessing the council's capacity, inspectors will look at the following areas;
- ◆ Service leadership
 - ◆ Financial management
 - ◆ Performance management
 - ◆ Addressing equality and diversity
 - ◆ Successful partnerships.
- 93 In high performing councils, senior managers and councillors know what matters to local people and use this information to set clear and consistent priorities. They focus on achieving impact in priority areas and concentrate effort and resources in proportion to priority.
- 94 Successful councils have sound performance management systems and effective financial management including flexibility to move money and people to tackle the most important problems. They have clear lines of accountability for action and have the skills to build effective partnerships to help bring about improvements.
- 95 The improvement of the cultural services is central to the council's agenda for change in Middlesbrough. The council now has in place strong leadership to ensure that this improvement takes place.
- 96 The outcome is that members, management and front line staff own the council's ambitions and priorities for corporate and service improvement. Through structures such as the Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership and other partnership arrangements these ambitions and priorities are also shared by stakeholders and other relevant participants involved in the strategic development and delivery of the cultural opportunities in the borough.
- 97 The Mayor and the Cabinet are committed to improving cultural services and a number of portfolio holders and members are actively involved with the cultural agenda. In addition, a programme of workshops in relation to cultural and key corporate priorities is part of the members development programme: These have themes such as:
- Culture: diversion, engagement and young people
 - Creativity: Improved Learning & Routes to Further Education
 - Culture: driving community & economic regeneration, developing local pride
- 98 The council is aware of the need to meet the aspirations and needs of the local population, but also to lead on the regeneration of the borough and to raise its regional and national profile. This requires flagship initiatives which are unlikely to be identified by residents as priorities over neighbourhood projects in routine consultation exercises. For example, the development of a new art gallery did not feature highly when the residents were consulted on their cultural needs, but this project is now underway as part of the corporate ambition for Middlesbrough.
- 99 Senior management leadership is provided by the Culture Lead Officer Group which discusses service delivery, capacity and consolidation of resources and develops agreed proposals for action.

- 100 A programme for a comprehensive corporate approach to staff training, aligned with priorities, is currently being developed. This includes working towards the achievement of Investors in People (IIP) status for all services and the development of a corporate minimum standard for appraisals which will translate cultural objectives into personal objectives and targets as well as identifying individual training needs.
- 101 The council is following through on their commitment to cultural services as an important force for regeneration by developing a cross cutting approach to community building. The council is also a principal player in the Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership which they are encouraging to make a strong contribution to delivering the ambitions of the Cultural Strategy.
- 102 Currently the Culture Lead Officer Group is developing proposals to address issues of building sustainable communities and improving opportunities through considering the concept of 'Culture Sites' or spaces for sports and arts activities, and establishing a 'Cultural Inclusion Team' consisting of staff to develop cooperative work programmes across council services and to target priority issues.
- 103 Annual Diversity Action Plans are in place for the Regeneration and the Environment and Neighbourhood Services Directorates. The Plans have common cross cutting themes and maintain a clear focus on increasing accessibility opportunities to cultural services for all Middlesbrough residents.
- 104 Staff training in equality and diversity issues, including the training of Community Sports Leaders as part of the Community Cohesion programme, is part of the Diversity Action Plans and is a key element in improving the quality of experience for all users of the cultural services.
- 105 The council's commitment of resources to the cultural services confirms their resolve to use these services as important to the delivery of their ambitions for the borough.
- 106 Elements of the cultural services such as sports and leisure centres have experienced budgetary constraints in recent years, but when setting the 2004/05 budget, councillors considered and rejected potential savings in the cultural services allocations in recognition of their key role in delivering the corporate objectives. Given the continuing priority attached to regeneration and community protection it is anticipated by senior management that this position will remain in the 2005/06 budget round.
- 107 Overall the cultural services received a four per cent increase in revenue funding taking it to £5.33m for 2004/05. Within this total the council increased the level of funding to the museums, sport and leisure services; maintained the same level of funding to the landscape, countryside and arts, events and entertainments, and the libraries service between 2003/04 and 2004/05.
- 108 This budget is enhanced by the council's successful track record of attracting external capital and revenue funds for the delivery of the cultural services. Substantial sums have been secured for major projects such as the Dorman Museum, Albert Park redevelopment and the new Art Gallery. Partnership funding levered in 2002/03 included revenue grants or in kind support to the value of £474,546, for arts development work with over 35 different partners. On capital projects, £14 million of partnership funding has been obtained for the new Art Gallery and Civic Square from the Arts Council Lottery Fund, English Partnerships and One North East. Investment into sports provision in Middlesbrough has included £500,000 for 'Spaces for Sports and Arts', improvement to sport and arts facilities in schools.
- 109 The council's strategic approach to developing cultural services as a component of regenerating the borough is not however driven by the availability of external

funds, but by focusing on implementing the Cultural Strategy. Where external funds are involved the long term sustainability of these initiatives is taken into account in assessing their financial feasibility and future maintenance.

- 110 The Lead Officer Group is responsible for assessing available capacity in relation to available resources and agreeing which are the most immediate priorities for action as a consequence. Thus a mechanism is in place to ensure that once the fixed operational costs have been met resources can then be allocated to priorities in line with corporate and service objectives
- 111 The Culture Lead Officer Group is developing a training plan for their services to reflect service priorities as well as addressing the individual needs of highly diverse and specialist staff teams. The basis for the combined cultural services' training plan is the existing staff development plan and framework within the sports service.
- 112 Corporate Performance Management is well established across the council and the system is cascaded into the cultural services. This includes an assessment of partnerships that support each theme.
- 113 This system results in monthly executive reports to full council containing regular updates against cultural initiatives and milestones featured in the Cultural Strategy.
- 114 The performance of the cultural services is monitored during the year at three performance clinics at which Directorates report progress against Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) and priority actions identified in the Corporate Performance Plan. The clinics examine each BVPI considering current performance and future targets set against top quartile performance. The financial performance of the services is monitored quarterly and these clinics providing a forum to raise any budgetary issues.
- 115 The reports submitted to the individual and integrated clinics are also submitted to the relevant scrutiny panel.
- 116 The previous focus on business viability of some of the services such as the leisure centres remains, but all the cultural services will now be performing to criteria which include value for money, outcomes relative to the corporate priorities and impacts on the borough's residents.
- 117 Specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and timetabled targets for cultural services are set in the 2004/05 Corporate Performance Plan, although the Local Public Service Agreement targets don't contain any directly related to the cultural services. The service action plans for each of the cultural service plans include not only the corporate level targets but also targets relating to cultural services and relating to local outcomes. Numerical and measurable targets in the service plans include:
 - 75 per cent user satisfaction provision in parks and open spaces;
 - 75 per cent user satisfaction with provision in leisure facilities;
 - Ten per cent increase in revenue from functions; and
 - Increase in library visits to 6,300 by 2004/05 and 6,800 for 2005/06, to exceed the current Public Library Standard.
- 118 Other targets in the service plans relate to introducing new activities or improving existing activities. These are also measurable, and will, if achieved, increase levels of participation across the board and in key target groups, thereby contributing to corporate priorities. Examples include:

- 3 new Active For Life Programmes delivered outside sport and leisure operated venues;
 - All clubs using council venues to hold club mark or equivalent by March 2005
- 119 The council has a good understanding of the needs communities it serves. This understanding is achieved through regular consultation and communication with borough residents, stakeholders, partners and community based organisations, and with service users.
- 120 The Culture Lead Officer Group is addressing the issues arising from the consultation process and is also sharing work to date on establishing baseline information on users and non-users.
- 121 The outputs from general surveys of residents and consultations with specific interest groups are used effectively to influence the service delivery and plan facility developments. For example the parks service is not only using the Planning Policy Guidelines assessment to guide the council on where resources need to be channelled, but a general consultation process is also under way to collect residents opinions on the draft Green Spaces Public Places Strategic Plan. A Parks Focus Group is currently being set up and a local involvement programme being developed for friends of parks groups and users to have a say in the development, management and maintenance of parks and open spaces.
- 122 Responses in a survey of users of the museums resulted in the provision of a café at the Dorman Museum. Service point refurbishment and the appointment of specific outreach staff are service improvement outcomes resulting from information collected by the library service on user opinions, library usage and usage of IT. This is supplemented by information on age, disabilities and ethnicity of the service users. The Sport and Leisure service operates a feedback scheme at each venue using information boards placed in the reception areas encourage comments from users and visitors, and these have resulted in new activities, or in the case of the Rainbow Leisure Centre and the Neptune Pool, a new swimming pool and new sauna respectively.
- 123 A survey of users of the cultural services produced information on which services need improving. Only 1.6 per cent of respondents thought that libraries were most in need of improvement, 3.5 per cent considered improvements were necessary to sports and leisure facilities, and 1.7 per cent to other cultural facilities. The response to this survey is also analysed by age, gender, ethnicity and ward of residence.
- 124 Despite having outsourced the delivery of some cross cutting services such as some support services, the council has been slow to fully consider alternative means of delivering the cultural services.
- 125 There is a lack of clarity on the council's strategic approach to alternative means of provision. Opportunities exist with initiatives such as the 'Future for Schools' programme which could result in a significant positive change in the availability of facilities at a local community level, and although the 'Active Middlesbrough' Strategy aims to make better use of community facilities within the wards this is in the context of increased access to local facilities rather than in a strategic context. As the Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership matures this could also result could result in management initiatives being identified in the arts, events and entertainments services.
- 126 At an operational level each of the cultural services has a wide range of partnerships. These include sports development work with organisations for the disabled and sports clubs, friends associations for several parks, arts development work with the University Hospital and with Cleveland College, and libraries work in partnership with the police and social services as well as support for the Friends of Teesside Archives, a very pro-active group funding IT as well as other work such as digitisation of records and leaflets.

- 127 Plans to consider alternative methods of delivering the leisure centre service have been delayed due the need to resolve the position regarding the reception staff employed by the external contractor providing support services. Other services such as grounds maintenance are subject to contract tendering procedures at regular intervals.
- 128 At a local level there is some self management of cultural facilities by local clubs or organisations, examples being the Lingfield Countryside Centre Management Association, the lease of pitches to Middlesbrough Rugby Club and Middlesbrough Swimming Club's management of pool time at the Neptune Centre under a Service Level Agreement.
- 129 The council now has in place a Procurement Strategy and this will provide the cultural services with a framework and clear and strong guidance on the principles of considering alternative service delivery means and on the processes to be followed.

How effectively do the council's future plans sustain a clear focus on achieving its ambitions for cultural services?

- 130 Successful councils have effectively integrated cultural priorities into corporate plans and focus is maintained through regular reporting. Plans are reviewed and revised to reflect changing circumstances and partners and stakeholders are effectively engaged in developing and monitoring cultural plans.
- 131 The plans being developed by the council are based on sustaining a clear focus on achieving its ambitions for the cultural services. The council recognises that if the cultural services are to be an important driver of the regeneration of the borough then this focus is essential.
- 132 The method of sustaining focus was an outcome from the 'think tanks' and workshops integral to developing the Cultural Strategy. A Cultural Inclusion Working Group has been established to formally take a cross cutting strategic approach to work with corporate priority groups across cultural services. Membership is taken from service delivery officers in each of the cultural services and representatives from corporate priority group services. The Group has only recently been established but it is clear that it provides a forum to improve the effectiveness of the cultural services in contributing positively to cross cutting issues which are priorities for local communities.
- 133 The individual service delivery plans are documented on the basis of relating service and corporate objectives, identifying resource requirements - and allocating responsibility amongst officers for delivery to set targets.
- 134 There is a strong link between the continuing work of the services in facility improvements, and national agendas such as health improvement, reduction in crime and social inclusion.
- 135 The council depends on external funding for more ambitious capital projects and the service development plans are realistic in identifying those projects or activities where external funding contributions will be necessary for implementation. The council is successful at attracting such funding from a variety of sources with the consequence that major new projects and refurbishment of existing facilities such as the new art gallery, the Dorman Museum extension, and the large scale improvements to Albert and Riverside Parks have been able to proceed. External funding support has also been secured for activities such as the sports coaching schemes and various health improvement initiatives involving walking or the use of the leisure centres' fitness suites.

- 136 Corporate building condition surveys are currently in progress to inform future years planned maintenance programmes and assist in prioritising projects. These condition surveys will enable the council to move towards a more planned, rather than reactive, maintenance programme. In 2004/05 eight of the 15 planned maintenance schemes are for cultural facilities.
- 137 The council is also reviewing its asset management plan to embed it in a property strategy. This approach will enable the property strategy to be used by services as a 'management tool' to ensure properties are fit for purpose.
- 138 The importance of ensuring that sustainability is planned into projects is recognised by the council. Sustainability of new facilities will be achieved by building adequate provision for future maintenance into the funding arrangements. This is now the council's practice for all new schemes with for example the new art gallery project having 'whole life costing' included as part of the design brief, and funding set aside to meet a maintenance plan for the building. This will also avoid having to spread existing maintenance provisions more thinly.
- 139 The Cultural Services Lead Officer Group shares learning from best practice across the services. Current examples include the improvement of the leisure card discount scheme; the Museums & Galleries Service learning from the Cultural Services team experiences commissioning of public art and which is an activity undertaken by both departments, from the Arts Development team approach to audience development and from the Library services approach to the targeting of the Asian Community through the co-organisation of the Mushara event.
- 140 The Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership also enables transfer of learning and best practice at service delivery level and with key partners.
- 141 The cultural services also measure their contribution to the Community Strategy themes through monitoring progress with the provisions of the Cultural Strategy. This mechanism is based on assessing how the cultural services improvements have assisted in delivering the Community Strategy themes by reviewing achievements, identifying gaps, agreeing remedial action and confirming ownership of actions against a timetable.
- 142 The difficulty in identifying robust, direct measurements of how cultural services contribute, for example to reducing anti-social behaviour or improving the health of the community, is a national issue. The council is aware of the need to monitor impacts more closely especially in the context of corporate objectives and is setting local performance indicators for the cultural services.
- 143 The council is slow to develop the benefits which the use of IT systems can bring to service users.
- 144 There has been significant development in the use of IT systems to manage the library service. The Libraries Management System (LMS) provides a wide range of information on users and use made of the service as well as monitoring the use made of public access to computers. Developments to the system are now progressing to allow for a more local approach to providing management information and provide remote access to catalogue, renewals and reservations as well as on-line membership.
- 145 The other cultural services have less well developed IT systems to interface with users. In the main the systems in place relate to 'back office' functions and are able to provide only very limited information on service users, and enable ticket or session purchases. There is a lack of cross service linkages between the user facing elements of the IT systems.
- 146 The council's web site provides information on the full range of cultural services but again is not interactive with the user and lacks the facility to make on line reservations.

- 147 The council has established a Business Analyst Group to identify IT needs across the council and to act as a link between service areas and the e-Government Management Board.
- 148 To prioritise the identified IT needs the council has set up an e-Government Management Board. The cultural services are represented on this Board which is responsible for prioritising projects, both corporately and at a service level.
- 149 The Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership provides a focal organisation for consultation to take place across the range of cultural services on strategy formulation. The composition of this body, involving national, regional and local organisations also provides access into the various branches of the cultural services to allow stakeholders to participate in the specific service plans and initiatives.
- 150 A significant output from this engagement is that the Cultural Strategy has been adopted by the Partnership and is regarded as a strategy for culture in Middlesbrough and is not simply the council's strategy.
- 151 Council officers are in regular dialogue with a range of organisations, clubs and users of the various services. This allows these stakeholders to have an input to the development of strategies and the management of service facilities and activities. For example the Friends of Albert Park have the free use of the West Lodge in Albert Park and run a small drop in café. Consultation with Middlesbrough's residents also takes place during the formulation of service strategies. Currently the draft 'Green Spaces and Public Places' strategy is going through this consultation process.
- 152 Relevant stakeholders are also engaged in the development and implementation of specific projects, many of which are related to corporate aims. This includes the organisation of events and entertainments, staging theatre productions and work with SureStart on a number of initiatives to encourage use of the libraries.
- 153 The Scrutiny Committee has an important role to play at councillor level in assessing future plans for culture provision. In the current year they are scheduled to review public facilities in libraries and the 'active Middlesbrough' strategy.
- 154 The Cultural Strategy is under review through the Middlesbrough Cultural Partnership and is being further re-aligned under new Community Strategy themes. Achievements of major cultural partnerships are also being reviewed to assess how they contribute to the Community Strategy themes. The review includes:
- contribution to Community Strategy themes;
 - documentation of milestones achieved and not achieved;
 - identification of gaps, remedial action and adjustments;
 - ownership of key actions/milestones;
 - amendments due to shifting priorities;
 - timetable/target setting;
 - monitoring/evaluation process.
- 155 The parks and open spaces strategy encompasses the need to prioritise between individual parks, whilst a feasibility study is being carried out on the provision theatre and indoor events spaces in the borough with a view to developing a future strategy.

Summary

- 156 The council and its staff are giving strong leadership and commitment to improving cultural services in Middlesbrough. The council's ambition and focus on improving this group of services derives from their clear decision that culture is an important driver in the implementation of their corporate strategic priority to regenerate the borough.
- 157 The council's commitment to the service is demonstrated by their actions to sustain the cultural service budgets and to ensure the capacity and expertise exists within the services to improve the range of opportunities and delivery to the borough's residents. The council also has a good track record of sourcing external funding to implement major capital projects and revenue funding to provide specific activities related to corporate priorities or sectors of the population.
- 158 The council's performance management system is good and is embedded into the cultural services thus enabling progress on service delivery and improvements to be tracked. Performance indicators are lacking particularly to enable the measurement of outcomes and impacts from cultural service activities and to determine the extent of contribution made by the services to corporate objectives. The council is aware of this and are in the process of establishing such indicators.
- 159 The service plans are realistic and robust and are based on understanding residents' ambitions and needs resulting from consultation with stakeholders and with the Middlesbrough residents. In delivering such plans the council has however been slow to consider the alternative options for service delivery.
- 160 The service plans do reflect areas of priority in the delivery actions and there are mechanisms in place to address areas which are underachieving and to review future plans.

Appendices

The purpose of a best value inspection is to make two judgements. The first is how good is the service being inspected? The second is what are the prospects for improvement? We carried out a range of activities to enable us to reach our judgements.

Documents reviewed

Before going on site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that the council provided for us. These included:

- ◆ 'The Way Forward' Corporate Performance Plan 2004/05 Parts I & II
- ◆ Middlesbrough Community Strategy
- ◆ A New Gallery for Middlesbrough – The Business Plan
- ◆ 'Green Spaces and Public Places' - Strategic Plan Consultation Document
- ◆ Medium Term Financial Plan 2004/05 – 2006/07
- ◆ Capital Expenditure Budget 2004/05
- ◆ Diversity Action Plan 2004/05 – Environment and Neighbourhood Services
- ◆ Diversity Action Plan 2004/05 – Regeneration
- ◆ Community Safety Improvement Plan
- ◆ Service Plans for cultural services
- ◆ Performance Clinic Reports May 2004 for Regeneration and for Environment and Neighbourhood Services
- ◆ Note on Community Safety Section 17 Workshop
- ◆ Self Assessment – Access to Services
- ◆ Scrutiny Work Programme 2004/05
- ◆ Middlesbrough Sports and Leisure – Investors in People Retention Strategy; March 2004
- ◆ Middlesbrough Leisure Charter Mark awards 2001 Assessment Feedback Report;
- ◆ Active Middlesbrough - A Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity in Middlesbrough.
- ◆ Community Safety in Middlesbrough – Outcomes of Consultation 2001/02
- ◆ Range of satisfaction and needs surveys undertaken in local communities and with users of facilities within the cultural services

Reality checks undertaken

When we went on site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. We also followed up on issues relating to the management of the review and the improvements flowing from it. Our reality checks included:

- ◆ Visits to leisure centres and parks across Middlesbrough

List of people interviewed

Cllr. D. Budd	Exec. Member Economic Regeneration & Culture
Cllr. M. Carr	Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Board
Cllr. B. Coppinger	Exec. Member Community Safety & Leisure
B. Dinsdale	Chief Executive
J. Farrer	Development Manager Cultural Services
P. Kelly	Director of Public Health, Middlesbrough P.C.T.
Cllr. R. Kerr	Exec. Member Environment
R. Mallon	Mayor
C. Mellor	Chief Librarian
P. Rabbits	Landscape Design Manager
J. Richmond	Asst. Chief Executive (Performance and Policy)
M. Shepherd	Corporate Assets Officer
D. Simon	Leisure Team Manager
J. Smith	Health Inequalities Manager, Middlesbrough P.C.T.
A. White	Head of Lifelong Learning
T. White	Asst. Chief Executive (Regeneration)
Cllr. M. Williams	Lib Dem Opposition Member
G. Worsdale	Director Museums and Galleries
Middle Managers Focus Group	
Marketing Staff Focus Group	
Stakeholders Focus Group	

Appendix 2

Shared Priorities

A set of shared public service delivery priorities were agreed by the LGA's General Assembly and the Central Local Partnership in 2002. Central and local government agreed seven areas in which it was most important to deliver tangible improvements over the following three years.

Raising standards across our schools

- ◆ matching excellence of the best
- ◆ transforming secondary schools
- ◆ workforce capacity

Improving the quality of life

- ◆ of children
- ◆ of young people and families at risk
- ◆ of older people

Promoting healthier communities through key local services – such as health, education, housing, crime and accident prevention

Creating safer and stronger communities, by working with the police and other local agencies

Transforming our local environment

Meeting local transport needs

Promoting the economic vitality of localities.

Further information from www.lga.gov.uk

Improving public services

The Government has placed a duty upon local councils to deliver services to clear standards – of cost and quality – by the most economic, efficient and effective means available.³ Best value is a challenging framework that is designed to improve local services. Councils are required to assess their own performance and put in place measures to ensure continuous improvement in all of their services.

Councils must show that they have applied the 4Cs of best value:

- ◆ **challenging** why and how a service is being provided;
- ◆ **comparing** their performance with others' (including organisations in the private and voluntary sectors);
- ◆ embracing fair **competition** as a means of securing efficient and effective services; and
- ◆ **consulting** local **taxpayers**, customers and the wider business community.

The Government has decided that each council should be scrutinised by an independent inspectorate. The Audit Commission performs this role.

The purpose of the inspection, and of this report, is to:

- ◆ enable the public to see whether best value is being delivered;
- ◆ enable the council to see how well it is doing;
- ◆ enable the Government to see how well its policies are working in practice;
- ◆ identify failing services where remedial action may be necessary; and
- ◆ identify and disseminate best practice.

³ This report has been prepared by the Audit Commission ('the Commission') following an inspection under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, and issued in accordance with its duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.