

Cabinet Meeting – 1 November 2006

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Cultural Strategy 2006 - 2009

Purpose of Report

1. To approve the adoption of Dudley Council's Cultural Strategy for 2006 – 2009.

Background

2. Culture and cultural activities are an important part of peoples' lives and provide opportunities for personal fulfilment, enjoyment and development as well as contributing to health improvement, promoting social cohesion and community development.
3. Dudley Borough is rich in cultural resources from its natural and historic environment, to its sports and leisure facilities, museums, libraries and the strength of its artistic communities. Culture has an important role in helping to make Dudley a safe, peaceful, attractive and vibrant place to live and visit for residents and visitors alike, hence the need for a strategy to demonstrate this contribution and identify future Council priorities and actions in respect of Culture.
4. The richness of this cultural landscape includes the Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve whose fossils are held in collections throughout the world; Stourbridge's reputation as a centre for hand made glass; The Leasowes being the only Grade 1 listed park in the West Midlands along with the unique collections held by the Archive Service
5. Cultural Services are almost with one or two exceptions, entirely a discretionary set of activities that Council's provide. Consequently in the face of every increasing financial pressures on Councils to deliver those services that it has to provide, it is essential that expenditure on areas such as Culture is firmly grounded within Council and Community priorities.
6. Furthermore the need for culture to demonstrate its linkages to the Council's corporate priorities and those of the wider community was emphasised during the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of Cultural Services conducted in 2005.

7. The recommendations of the CPA identified that in order to ensure that local people have access to a wide range of high quality cultural experiences the Council should:-
 - i) Work with the Dudley Community Partnership and other partners to develop a clear vision for culture in the Borough;
and
 - ii) Communicate a coherent and sustainable strategy as to how the Council's cultural services in Dudley will contribute to that vision.
8. The Dudley Community Strategy 2005-2020 clearly identified heritage and culture as one of its six priority themes. "Celebrating our heritage and local Cultural Life" incorporates a vision for Culture in the Borough that has been drawn from the extensive consultation process which has been subsequently utilised in the development of this Strategy.
9. The key objectives of this theme are to increase the percentage of the population with good access to cultural, leisure and sports facilities; to build on the range of sports, arts and leisure activities for Children and Young People and the improvement of parks and open spaces of the Borough.
10. Culture's role in supporting the Community Strategy is not limited to one theme. Within the "Safeguarding and Improving the Environment" Theme the value of the Borough's parks, open spaces and nature reserves is further reinforced through the Vision of an attractive, healthy, safe and sustainable natural and built environment which promotes and protects the heritage features that are a legacy of the Borough's geological and industrial past. As part of this vision the community's needs for parks, green spaces and recreational facilities is an identified priority.
11. Culture is also included within the "Well-Being and Good Health" Theme where there are actions to promote and improve access to physical activity as a means of improving health and reducing obesity levels whilst leisure and tourism's role in developing Dudley as a visitor destination is a key part of the "Creating a Prosperous Borough" Theme.
12. The provision of facilities for Children and Young People is a priority for the theme "Make Dudley a Safe and Peaceful Place in which to Live" and completes the Cultural Vision for the Borough which is firmly embedded at all levels of the Community Strategy. Dudley Council's Cultural Strategy articulates the ways by which the Council takes this vision forward with regard to the Cultural Services that it provides.
13. Additionally the future measurement of the Council's Cultural Services through the CPA process for 2006 onwards has also had a bearing on the Cultural Strategy with Performance Indicators grouped under Access, Participation, Quality and Value for Money headings.

14. As influential as both the Community Strategy and the CPA framework are, as important to the development of the Strategy has been the local context for culture.
15. Locally the sector is fragmented and a key challenge for the Dudley Community Partnership is to ensure that through one means or another the sector works together in a more effective, cohesive and joined up way given past difficulties in establishing a culture thematic partnership. Within the Council this inter service cooperative working began during the Regular Performance Assessment of Culture in 2004 and has continued through to this strategy and action plan.
16. Similarly the cultural infrastructure of the Borough is ageing and requires significant investment in order to be sustainable in the long term. Both the Leisure Centres Strategy for the future and the Playing Pitch Strategy identified significant investment requirements whilst the Liveability Project, having provided much needed capital investment in the Borough's parks, through the development of Parks master plans has also served to highlight additional investment needs in order to meet community aspirations.
17. Similarly the Libraries Service, through its peer review, has also identified significant investment requirements for the Service in order to retain existing levels of provision. Clearly the Council is not in a position to fund all of these requirements and will need to carefully consider its position and prioritise accordingly.
18. The other important local dimension relates to the impact that the service has and how widespread engagement is by all parts of the Community, particularly those in areas of social deprivation. Most available evidence, statistical and anecdotal, suggests that participation is concentrated on the more affluent social groups, with also variations according to age, ethnicity, gender and physical health. It is imperative that through this Strategy services are made more accessible to target groups to address equality issues and promote social inclusion and community cohesion.
19. Consequently the Council's Cultural Strategy has been developed to reflect the vision articulated in the Community Strategy, having due recognition of the future CPA assessment framework for Culture and taking account of the local context of service provision, demographics and participation. This has involved the assimilation of actions/priorities from other existing corporate strategies within the Cultural Strategy where appropriate, and also involved extensive consultation with key organisations and agencies, local, sub-regionally and regionally.
20. In summary the Cultural Strategy proposes the following strategic aims:-
 - To increase access to and participation in cultural activity

- To improve the quality and extend the range of cultural choices in the Borough.
 - To stimulate economic and social regeneration within communities.
21. At the heart of the Cultural Strategy is the fundamental belief that providing access to and increasing participation in cultural activity can derive benefits for individuals not just in the context of their enjoyment of that activity but more broadly such as improved health and well being, lifelong learning or enhanced quality of life. Providing greater opportunities and access for people to share in the cultural life of the Borough will not just benefit those individuals but will also be of benefit to wider society.
22. The strategic aims, objectives and actions are closely aligned with the contents of the emerging draft Local Area Agreement which at present contains a cultural outcome within the “Stronger Communities” block which aims to ‘Increase and broaden the impact of Culture and Recreation to enrich individual lives, promote inclusion and cohesion and enhance community spirit’, as well as other outcomes in both the Children’s and Young People and Healthier Communities and Older People blocks that have performance indicators for Cultural Services contained within them.
23. Key challenges for the Council and its partners to address in the life of this strategy will be to increase access and participation in cultural activities by currently under represented groups, improving health and well-being in the Borough and supporting both the “Every Child Matters” and “Independence, Well-being and Choice” agendas.
24. In order to attract people to participate and remain involved in cultural activities the quality of the cultural product on offer is all important. The Council, with its partners will seek to provide facilities and services of a consistently high standard in particular those aspects of the Borough’s cultural heritage that are unique to the area. Similarly it is as important to have an appropriate range of cultural opportunities available within the Borough in order that there is the opportunity to experience diverse cultural experiences to promote respect and cohesion across communities.
25. The full detailed Cultural Strategy document is available for Members to view either through the hard copy located in the Members Room or by viewing the document online at dudley.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/cultural-strategy. The 3 year action plan and outcomes framework will be overseen by the Council through the Select Committee for Regeneration, Culture and Adult Learning and also by the proposed Culture thematic partnership of the Dudley Community Partnership with recommendations submitted to the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Cabinet and full Council where appropriate.

26. The production of this strategy is not an end in itself. Rather it is the starting point for the cultural sector to demonstrate its value in delivering measurable impacts and outcomes against priorities established by the Council and wider community.

Finance

27. There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report.

Law

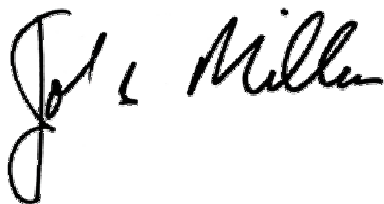
28. Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 enables the Council to provide a range of recreational facilities within or outside the Borough.
29. Section 111 of the Local Government Act, 1972 enables the Council to do anything which is calculated facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions under the 1976 Act.
30. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 empowers the Council to do anything which it considers is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic social or environmental well-being of the Borough.

Equality Impact

31. The aims of the Cultural Strategy are integral to the equality agenda in the pursuit of making cultural activities and services accessible to the whole of the community, with a particular emphasis on children and young people.

Recommendation

30. That the Cabinet approves the adoption of the Council's Cultural Strategy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Millar', written in a cursive style.

J MILLAR
Director of the Urban Environment

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