

VOCAL

Culture: Service and Delivery – Seminar and Workshops

Wednesday 14th June 2006

Summary notes of speakers – key points

Angela Saunders

Began by reminding attendees of the important role that local authorities have in delivering culture to their communities. This reflects the position of the Executive who place high importance on this 'front line' element of the service.

Outlined that she would focus her address on Executive policy and their commitment to generating strategies for implementation. Furthermore, the Executive publication on the delivery of cultural policy is designed to be as 'readable' as possible. The Executive's position is that it will strive to provide clarity in disseminating roles and responsibilities in the challenge of delivering cultural policy.

National priorities:

- develop individual talent
- allow individuals to enjoy items of National significance
- recognise the positive effect that culture has on lifestyles and communities.

Local priorities:

- develop a 'menu' of cultural entitlements (for individual local authorities)
- recognise significant National collections that are held locally
- promote cultural planning and cross-cutting links with community planning.

Creative Scotland is an organisation (whose formation was first mooted in the Cultural Commission report) that will be set up to advise on matters of cultural policy and delivery. Their aims are to provide support and guidance for local authorities in delivering the following wider policy issues:

- developing audiences
- developing a set of standards which artistic organisations must adhere to
- developing private and voluntary sector involvement (and investment)
- developing talent and excellence.

The final aim is to be delivered by an escalator strategy – Pathfinder – whose goal it is to provide a development pathway offering the opportunity to maintain involvement in the artistic sector on leaving school; this progression is the job of local authority departments as well as individuals in artistic organisations.

The publication of the Culture Bill is scheduled for the end of the year (so coverage isn't deflected by the 2007 Scottish Parliamentary elections) and will cover the following points:

- details of Creative Scotland, its members and partners

- isolation of the roles of local authorities
- initiatives and delivery ideas for local authorities
- a clear account of requirements and goals.

The working group responsible for the Bill will work with various artistic providers in an attempt to develop policies and strategies for Creative Scotland - specifically how can local cultural entitlements be articulated and, ultimately, delivered. The working group will consist of members with experience in the following fields: local authorities, tourism/culture public sector delivery, VOCAL members, Scottish Arts Council, Museums sector etc. The working group will attempt to reflect consultation feedback and will link up with central Government in explaining findings.

The intention (and remit) of the working group is to provide guidance on the following:

- cultural planning and forging links with community planning in local authorities
- monitoring of delivery of cultural entitlements
- quality assurance frameworks
- the extent to which culture can address specific local (social) issues (for instance, via the Pathfinder process)
- incentivising local cultural provision.

Information on the Bill and on the findings of the consultation will appear on the Executive website, via various industry newsletters (such as VOCAL and COSLA), in libraries and through local authorities.

Angela Saunders offered some ideas on how cultural entitlement ought to, and may come to, be articulated. It was suggested that it covers the *opportunity to take part in or view art/culture* though any agreed definition will be open to interpretation on an authority by authority basis, achieved through listening and reacting to the views of communities on the 'contents' of their cultural package.

A more proactive approach to isolating what it is communities and individuals would like to see was encouraged. It was noted that the mooted framework is not exactly a 'blank canvas' as there are best practice examples to be witnessed throughout various local authorities.

Finally, on the question of how standards (for cultural providers) will relate to entitlements, it was stated that National bodies would be responsible for developing standards through a process of stakeholder consultation. These standards are intended to be helpful and provide an ongoing tool for further development of delivery of the artistic product.

Tricia Kilsby

Began by reminding us that culture was high on the agenda both in Scotland and the UK.

Tricia mentioned the publication of the Government's white paper setting out a system of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and discussed the 'shock' felt by members of the cultural sector at the prospect of them being rated.

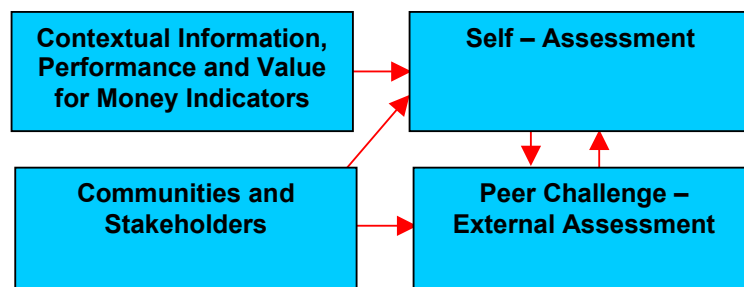
In attempting to articulate exactly what culture is, or is there for, the DCMS have come up with the following adjectives/statements:

- fun
- challenging and inspiring
- aspirational
- binding communities.

Crucially, it contributes significantly to many regeneration initiatives and provides a massive boost to the economy of certain areas. Furthermore it can be argued to have a tangible effect at community level.

Councils/local authorities' role is create an environment where culture can flourish; culture as a whole does, ultimately, add up to more than the sum of its parts – moreover it is embedded in communities; it is local as well as National. The primary benefit of culture is the self-esteem that communities and individuals derive from it.

The results of the CPA assessments in its first two years proved to be rather enlightening; they demonstrated that there wasn't the drive within local authorities to improve their cultural package(s). The DCMS subsequently produced a framework, to be used by local authorities, that was designed to be descriptive, not prescriptive.



This model stresses the importance - when attempting to deliver a public service - of involving communities as well as those of stakeholders, who can contribute significantly to the delivery of culture.

The model was generated from an amalgamation of the following inputs:

- PA consulting report which stated the importance of improving efficiency of delivery structures and developing strategic relationships that will add value to public services
- the finding that many local authorities went outwith the service domain
- analysis of the 'chain of delivery' i.e. from policy makers down to council officers
- acknowledgement that culture is very diverse in nature and consists of many delivery networks.

The ultimate goal of any legislation must be to support performance management locally. There needs to be a more streamlined approach to delivering culture both in terms of working in conjunction, not isolation, as well as reducing the amount of

replication and overlapping of roles (an example being how different cultural service providers define children – 16? 18? Under 21?).

Cultural providers must isolate what is important Nationally and how this will vary locally. Culture is vastly different to health and education where large scale initiatives and central Government legislation is implemented in more or less identical fashion UK-wide. Local authorities must enjoy the freedom to interpret policy and implement it accordingly; they ought to be afforded the chance to develop system of performance monitoring and to formulate their own set of performance indicators.

Tricia summarised by suggesting the main points were:

1. There must be a commitment to monitoring performance.
2. There are ways to manage cultural delivery – it is not a question of spending or investment but about efficiency and achieving best value. Furthermore, structures can be put in place to achieve this.
3. National Government, local Government and communities all have a role to play in delivery; no one has a larger role to play than the other – they depend on one another to provide a successful service.

Bryan Beattie

Bryan suggested that a lot of issues that face cultural delivery have arisen due to poor communication. Specifically, National and local Government do not link up as well as they perhaps could. Similarly, the public and private sectors occupy a position akin to a 'stand-off' that prevents much needed communication.

How local government relate to, negotiate and work with central government is crucial to the overall effect of cultural provision. There must be room to tailor the cultural delivery process for individual local authorities and areas that still allows policy requirements to be satisfied.

With regards policy formation, we often witness a long period of deliberation over the evidence base for placing any emphasis on culture. It can be characterised as an iterative process involving negotiation and debate. There are however examples of a more 'gung-ho' approach based on feeling rather than argument (Gateshead, for instance).

The importance of strategic networking - though a jargon heavy term - cannot be underestimated; the various partners associated with delivering culture ought to stay open minded and focus on strengths in community planning partnership arrangements.

Working practices and the level of efficiency that is exhibited by any authority is more important than investment. The attainment of best value is in no way tied to the amount of funding received. Rather it is about isolating the best working practices for one's community and applying them in an economic fashion.

Staff and buildings were highlighted as the two most important assets in cultural delivery and their successful management is key to success. Cultural providers, and to some extent policy makers, need to analyse what processes or styles underpin the way that these assets are managed.

Finally, local authorities require guidance on the following issues to ensure successful delivery of cultural provision:

- cross-management issues
- Best Value examples
- availability of various support networks.

Question and answer session (chaired by Rod Stone)

Q. *About timescales for delivery and how members will deal with the issues raised in the consultation paper.*

AS responded that timescales will be considered and factored in accordingly.

Q. *About training of staff in local authorities and the manner in which individuals work and interact with colleagues.*

TK stated that communication skills are key and stressed that contact (and dialogue) between members and DCMS officers improved as a result of the CPA framework.

RS suggested that organisations such as VOCAL have attempted to improve contact with agencies and members.

Q. *About National Centres/Collections, their location and how their pieces are, or ought to be, shared.*

AS stated that greater communication between authorities and cultural providers will improve access to entitlements and various collections. Furthermore, improved digitisation and IT and the prospect of e-collections will aid information sharing. Finally, the attendees were reminded that artistic treasures and items of cultural significance had been identified all over Scotland.

Q. *How will National policy/initiatives conflict with long term local planning and how can local authorities be considered to be delivering the former?*

AS pointed out that, if a local authority is integrating culture with community planning then they are probably doing the correct thing. Similarly, involving local residents and consulting with the community can all contribute to successful delivery and will not conflict with Executive policy. Furthermore, any consultation carried out by the Executive will involve local authorities; it will consider the success experienced in individual authorities and will therefore reflect this.

TK added that there was concern about the usage and implementation of performance indicators though stressed that PI's will eventually fade away and become irrelevant in the day to day delivery of cultural provision.

Q. *Where does responsibility lie when initiatives are good but not utilised widely enough?*

TK indicated that the responsibility lies in the management of cultural delivery. Council officers must strive to ensure that culture is, firstly, integrated into community planning and, secondly, that there is communication with departments such as education to help deliver wider policy initiatives. It must be remembered that culture does not exist in a vacuum.

Q. *Cultural initiatives can help to deliver certain aspects of educational policy but how do the two link up?*

BB stated that sharing of knowledge amongst local authorities is very important. AS added that ensuring that this communication took place would be part of the remit of the working group set up by the Scottish Executive.

BB pointed out that formulating initiatives and local strategies for delivery takes the form of an iterative process of negotiation between the individuals at the 'coal face' of cultural delivery and members and council officers.

Q. *How did English local authorities resource performance management systems?*

TK stated that there were funding agreements set up between National bodies and local authorities designed to raise quality of delivery in the respective body's artistic sphere. Individuals from these bodies were seconded to work in local authorities and they, in turn, inform the working groups that drive cultural delivery.

Summary

The articulation of entitlements is not clear, nor is it clear how much control local authorities have in directing policy implementation and forming their own cultural strategies. The largest problem faced by the cultural sector is 'selling' the benefits of making culture a statutory requirement to council members. Though TK stressed that its benefits are tangible the links between culture and any discernable benefit are less direct than those associated with sport and leisure, for example.

One point for consideration is the not the manner in which the Executive sets policy but how it chooses to enforce it. There seems to be flexibility required in applying said policies in order to prevent bureaucratic barriers to cultural delivery. The primary role of the Executive ought to be to provide management and training resources.

The issue of monitoring is one which there was some agreement yet devising a system is one that will take widespread consultation and isolation of best examples. Delegates were not in favour of a 'naming and shaming' approach but approved of a more constructive approach that allows monitoring to become part of a system of continuous improvement.