A Passion for Excellence

An Emerging Self-Improvement Strategy for Cultural Services

For Consultation

31st March 2006

We need your views

This document represents our current thinking on how the cultural sector can begin to address its own improvement. It has been developed over the last twelve months through dialogue with many partners and stakeholders at the local, regional and national level. We now need your views on our ideas.

It has been defined as "emerging" because the landscape of local government and its performance management regime is again changing with a white paper expected in the summer. We want to share our thinking and seek the formal views of partners and stakeholders, and eagerly await the emergence of the broader picture before finalising our own approach.

We would be grateful if you would consider the following key questions and send us your views in writing by May 26th.

1. **Will the component parts of the strategy lead to improvement in and delivery of local cultural services?**

2. **Are the emerging improvement tools appropriate for your needs: do we need a greater range of tools reflecting specific services, or fewer more coherent and focused tools?**

3. **Are the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders the right ones: what are your views about the roles and responsibilities suggested for your own organisation, and those for others?**

4. **Will the proposed regional and national structures enable the work being done to become self-sustaining in the future?**

5. **How might we incorporate citizen and user assessment and engagement in the self-improvement model?**

6. **What have we missed or what else do you think we should be doing to support this important area of work?**

Your response should be sent to: -
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Self-Improvement Strategy for Cultural Services in Local Government

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The cultural sector in local government has a valuable contribution to make to **improving public services** and building and maintaining **sustainable communities** but to do so it must address some recognisable weaknesses. There is now an appetite for change and a desire to address these weaknesses in a collaborative and holistic way.

The **objectives** of this strategy are:

1. To improve the quality and efficiency of services delivered by local authorities

2. To improve the quality and breadth of application of self improvement

3. To increase the capacity in the sector to support self-improvement.

The paper sets out a strategy for improvement to be delivered across the sector over the coming years and will address structural and functional weaknesses and also begin to establish a platform on which self improvement, and possibly self regulation, might be based in the context of the wider local government improvement agenda into which cultural services fit.

There is a range of existing and emerging tools in the sector that have different purposes. These need to be developed and refined to enable three key functions or processes to be effective: **Monitoring, Challenge and Support**. Underpinning these is the essential component of **Leadership** without which improvement will not take place**.**

It is essential that stakeholders are clear about their **roles and responsibilities** and these are set out in the paper.

Implementation of this strategy relies on:
- Corporate and operational commitment to the improvement agenda by key stakeholders
- Clear and sustained "enabling" leadership at all levels

It is important that as the strategy is implemented we build structures and processes that will **sustain continuous improvement** at the national, regional, and local level. The strategy outlined in the paper might then take the cultural sector some way towards the concept of self-regulation and internal quality assurance.

All the key stakeholders are asked to:

- Formally sign up to the strategy
- Promote the strategy in their own organisations
- Commit to undertaking the functions outlined in section 9
- Publicise the strategy widely
- Promote the tools and work with agencies and local authorities to improve services
- Support the creation of improvement networks
- Develop and create the structures to sustain the work.

2. CONTEXT

The cultural sector in local government has a valuable contribution to make to improving public services and building and maintaining sustainable communities. It has the benefit of many national and regional bodies, allied with a significant and well established local government, voluntary, and community sector. However in the past it has:

- found it hard to effectively demonstrate its impact and therefore its value and worth in relation to the Central Local Partnership's shared priorities either nationally or locally;

- found itself increasingly marginalized in an ever strengthening performance management approach to public service delivery;

- developed a complex organisational structure which makes addressing issues of strategic change difficult.

- been behind the pace in terms of reforming and improving public cultural services for a variety of reasons.

There is now an appetite for change and a desire to address these weaknesses in a collaborative and holistic way.

In considering the following strategy we propose:

- A definition of cultural services as defined by DCMS in their portfolio of responsibility (Appendix 1).

- A primary focus on local government, although the nature of the cultural sector means the strategy will also touch on and in some instances embrace the private, voluntary, trust and community sectors where they deliver services.

The improvement programme is designed to enable the sector to deliver local, regional and national objectives that reflect the shared priorities as defined in existing and new strategies and policies (see Appendix 2).

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this strategy are:

- To improve the quality and efficiency of services delivered by local authorities

- To improve the quality and breadth of application of self improvement

- To increase the capacity in the sector to support self-improvement.

4. BENEFICIARIES

The aspiration is to develop improved, citizen focused, customer led cultural services, therefore the ultimate beneficiaries of the improvement strategy have to be local people for whom cultural opportunities and services are provided either directly or through procurement by local authorities. The intermediate beneficiaries are local authorities themselves who stand to benefit by being able to demonstrate improved

services that are well delivered, and engagement with the emerging self-improvement agenda.

5. PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to:

- Describe existing and emerging improvement tools and techniques.

- Define the processes and functions integral to self improvement

- Clarify current and possible roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders

The paper sets out a strategy for improvement across the sector over the coming years, it addresses structural and functional weaknesses and begins to establish a platform for self-improvement, and possibly self-regulation, in the context of the wider local government improvement agenda into which cultural services operate and develop.

There is a balance to be struck between building long-term ownership and commitment to improvement within each arm of the cultural family (Libraries, Museums, Arts, Sport, Parks, Play, Heritage, Tourism and Licensing) and encouraging a rational approach across cultural services that makes sense to local government and local people.

This means compromises will be required and time to generate understanding and support. The journey will be as much, if not more, about winning "hearts and minds" as it will about creating technical solutions.

6. STAKEHOLDERS

For the purposes of this report we have limited our focus on the following key stakeholders although others such as RDA's also have a role to play:

- DCMS
- NDPB's (Sport England, Arts Council, MLA & English Heritage)
- Regional Cultural Consortia
- Local Authorities

- LGA
- IDeA
- Audit Commission
- Professional Bodies representing people working in cultural services

7. EXISTING AND EMERGING IMPROVEMENT TOOLS

There is a range of existing and emerging tools in the sector that have different purposes.

Performance Information and datasets that enable the cultural sector to measure its effectiveness in terms of meeting local, regional and national priorities, its efficiency and its impact.

Regional Commentaries developed in dialogue between regional NDPB's and local authorities will provide a view on the extent to which services meet a benchmark and how well national, regional and local priorities and objectives services are aligned.

Self-assessments enable local authorities to identify strengths and weaknesses and act as a basis for improvement planning.

Existing self-assessment tools include Towards an Excellent Service (TAES), Inspiring Learning for All, and Arts at the Strategic Centre.

TAES was originally developed to improve performance management in sport and recreation but was always perceived as a generic tool applicable across the cultural sector and a culture wide version has now been developed. It is also evolving for parks and green spaces and variants are being applied to County Sport Partnerships and Governing Bodies of Sport.

Inspiring Learning for All was developed to better measure learning outcomes in the Museums Libraries and Archives sector, and work is now in hand to identify and measure wider generic social outcomes for the sector. This approach has potential to apply to the wider cultural sector.

Arts at the Strategic Centre identifies the extent to which the arts are strategically positioned and have sufficient "profile" in corporate agendas and priorities. This too has the potential to evolve to have wider Culture applications, and a version is in development for use with Local Strategic Partnerships focusing on "Culture" at the strategic centre.

Other parts of the sector are being encouraged to adapt and use these tools rather than develop new ones. For example MLA are planning to develop and implement the **Library Peer Review** benchmark as a self-assessment tool in addition to Inspiring Learning For All, and CABE Space & ILAM have commissioned a version of TAES for Parks and Open Spaces.

A more integrated approach for the sector could be developed over the next two years in line with wider developments across the local government sector. In effect we are currently offering local government a menu of tools to suit a range of purposes and situations. But there is a strong view in local government that a simplified approach would be preferable to the multiple and differing tools currently available.

Validated Self Assessments are a further step in self-improvement. A composite approach to validating self-assessments carried out utilising any of the above tools will be offered to local authorities, particularly those judged in the CPA to be at or below minimum standards. Validation will utilise IDeA accredited officer Peers and Consultants to provide external challenge, but be less time and resource intensive than Peer Review.

Peer Reviews have been piloted and are available for libraries and arts. A Culture Peer Review has also been piloted against the Audit Commission key lines on enquiry normally used in cultural services inspection.

Peer Review, involving a team of officer and Elected Member peers, supported by Consultants will be available, particularly targeted at weaker services. Service specific Peer Review tools such as Arts at the Strategic Centre and Library Peer Review will remain available but could be supplemented by a more generic Culture Peer Review benchmark developed over the next six months.

Service and facility **accreditation schemes** to facilitate and promote the improvement of front line services such as Quest, Green Flag and the Museum

Accreditation Scheme will continue to be promoted and refined as part of this package of services designed to stimulate challenge.

8. FUNCTIONS and PROCESSES

Three key functions or processes are required if the tools available to the sector are to be effective, they are: **Monitoring, Challenge and Support**. These functions overlap and are complementary and will require national and regional agencies to be involved if they are to work.

Underpinning all three is an essential component without which improvement will not take place. The improvement agenda for the sector requires considerable **leadership** at all levels and we have all to play a part.
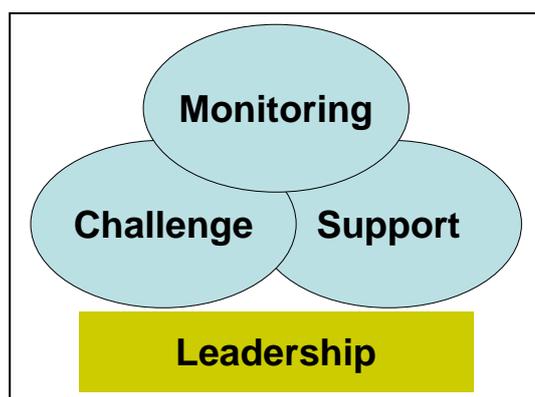
Monitoring good quality, up to date data that tracks performance against clearly defined and agreed local, regional and national goals, objectives, targets and priorities is critical to addressing our current weaknesses.

The sector needs in the short term to complete the development of representative datasets for cultural services within the CPA (upper tier and districts). It then needs to use these to develop more effective impact measures appropriate to positioning the culture sector in the emerging agendas of sustainable communities, partnership working, LAA's, and the new performance management framework likely to emerge for the post 2008 CPA and having regard for the continuing need to deliver efficiencies.

Challenge to current performance and current ways of working is critical if we are to improve. Challenge will need to range from self challenge through self assessment and the use of critical friends, to external challenge through validation, accreditation, peer review, and in some cases inspection.

Although inspection is unlikely to be widespread in our sector it will remain a valid form of external challenge where performance remains very poor or where specific circumstance dictate a need for external regulation.

For challenge to be effective it will need to be underpinned not only by good performance data but clearly defined standards and supported by effective challenge processes and tools, benchmarking, and easy access to high quality knowledge, information and advice.

Support will cover a range of themes and priorities however evidence to date suggests the priorities could be:

- Strengthening leadership across the sector including political leadership

- Strengthening strategic management in terms of positioning culture within key cross cutting agendas such as sustainable communities and children and young people

- Strengthening performance management

- Strengthening partnership working

- Strengthening and maintaining core competencies

- Support a range of activity which can be customised to meet specific local authority needs and may include:

  - Peer support
  - Critical friends
  - Consultancy
  - Knowledge exchange
  - Accelerated improvement consortia
  - Leadership programmes for managers and Members
  - Audit Commission improvement work

Support will also include a programme to **identify and celebrate good practice** and excellence across the sector. This will include work with the authorities scoring well above minimum standards within the CPA, the Beacon councils, councils recognised as positioning culture effectively within their LAA's and the cultural pathfinder councils.

Underpinning support will be an effective programme of communication with the sector providing access to **Knowledge and Information** delivered through integrated web based systems. These should provide advice, guidance, and examples of best practice and other material.

The main access point will be through **IDeA Knowledge/Cultural Connections** with links to other appropriate sites including the Regional Observatories being developed regionally by Regional Cultural Consortia, and the Regional Centres of Excellence.

Underpinning these functions is effective **Leadership.** It is clear that excellent organisations are nearly always characterised by good leadership. Local government is no different and leadership, both managerial and political, is critical to achieving effective service delivery, managing change and maintaining good governance.

If the sector is to improve and position itself in the key agendas at local levels it will be necessary to develop leadership skills and abilities among elected members and managers involved in culture, and to that end the IDeA's leadership programmes will be important.

There is also a need for regional and national leadership among the key stakeholders so that the improvement agenda can be promoted and delivered in a coherent and clear way, and that the sector represented by prominent and conspicuous advocates and champions. This will position the sector regionally and nationally and demonstrate that the sector has a significant contribution to make to cross cutting initiatives and partnerships.

9. ROLES

It is essential that we are clear about the roles and responsibilities of all the key stakeholders. For example: is the role of NDPB's to set service standards and monitor performance? Do they have a role in terms of challenging and supporting local government?
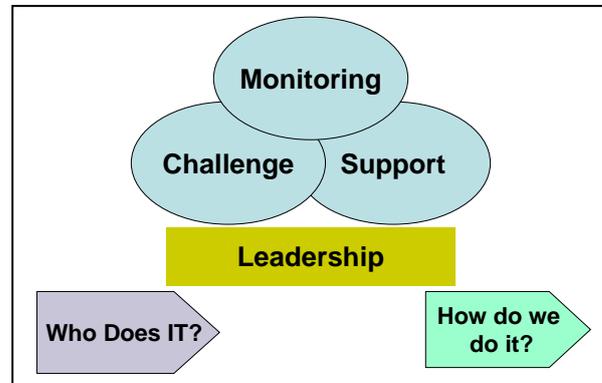
The following is an attempt to define roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders in terms of improvement:

DCMS

- Promoting the alignment of objectives across different NDPB's and service areas, ensuring incentives and accountabilities don't work against effective joined-up delivery on the ground;

- Encouraging the NDPB's to develop national standards for key outcomes, and holding NDPB's and local authorities to account for delivering them, but giving localities space the to develop the strategies for delivering outcomes that fit local circumstances. These standards need clearly to incentivise partners to work together.

- Ensuring existing high-level funding supports and incentivises the delivery of outcomes, while giving sufficient flexibility to enable local partners to work together to deliver them.

- Encouraging NDPB's and other bodies to develop appropriate means of monitoring performance, challenge and support including intervening where services are not improving.

- Demonstrating national leadership in service improvement through advocating, championing and promoting improvement tools, techniques, and raising expectations, and through encouraging its partner organisations to engage proactively with the improvement agenda.

NDPB's

- Developing national and regional strategy in the context of the national policy framework for culture and locally generated priorities

- Setting and monitoring performance against the national and regional strategies

- Setting and promoting minimum standards for service and monitoring performance against them including appropriate accreditation schemes
- Supporting improvement nationally, regionally and locally through the development and implementation of appropriate forms of challenge and support

- Demonstrating national and regional leadership, proactively promoting and advocating improvement initiatives, sharing best practice and setting standards

Regional Cultural Consortia

- Bringing together representatives from regional agencies working in the arts, heritage, museums, tourism, libraries, sport and archives, and from local government, as well as groups and individuals from the creative industries

- Supporting regional networks that support and influenced improvement in the region

- Drawing up strategies that set out the future of culture within their region. They provide a strong voice for culture and encourage a coherent approach to the delivery of regional cultural services

IDeA

Work with the sector to encourage and support self-sustained improvement by:

- Connecting ideas and expertise, both within the sector and beyond, to cross fertilise solutions and accelerate progress

- Focusing on best practice and forward thinking, enabling individual councils and local government to learn systematically and respond to the needs of changing environments

- Delivering a flexible range of tools and services, recognising that every community and locality is unique and everyone's journey of improvement and development is different

- Carrying risk on behalf of local government by innovating and incubating new joined-up but locally delivered initiatives

- Supporting leadership development and awareness through leadership programmes

Audit Commission

- Regulate the performance of the cultural sector though annual performance monitoring and reporting, inspection where appropriate, and through CPA

- Support improvement through comparator studies and research

LGA

- Facilitating and leading debate about improvement

- Securing resources and developing programmes for building capacity across local government
- Supporting councils that are subject to central government involvement

- Influencing central government policy and practice in relation to local government

- Influencing the CPA in the short and longer-term

- Securing the delivery of the freedoms and flexibilities

- Supporting the work of the "excellent" councils engaged in the Innovation Forum

Professional bodies

- Support improvement through a range of services to their members including the setting and maintenance of competency standards, promotion and advice on service standards and policy development
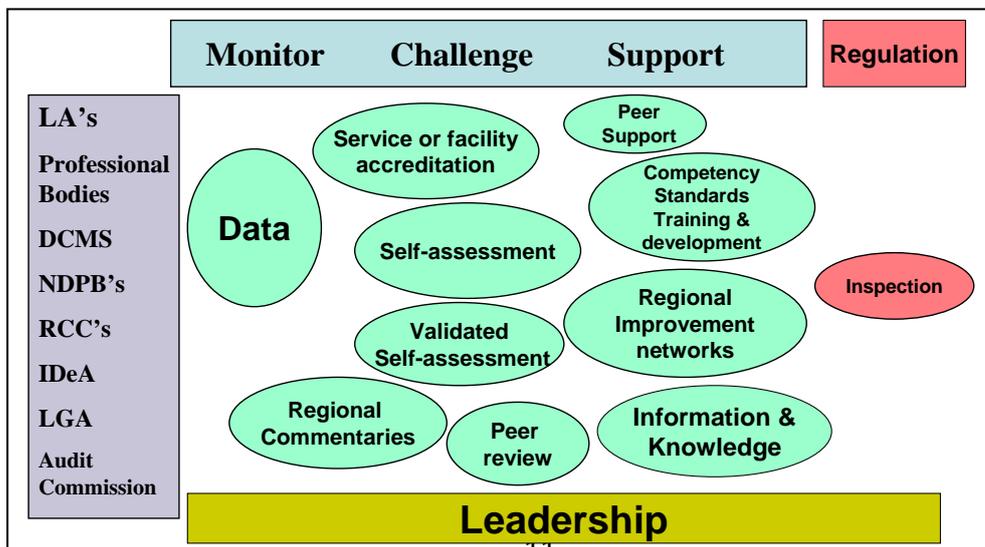
Local authorities

- Provide, commission, and improve the range of cultural services that achieve local, regional and national priorities and meet locally identified needs and aspirations

10. IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of this strategy relies on:

- Corporate and operational commitment to the improvement agenda by key stakeholders

- Clear and sustained "enabling" leadership at all levels

This is brought together in the following diagram:

Monitor   Challenge   Support   Regulation

LA's
Professional Bodies
DCMS
NDPB's
RCC's
IDeA
LGA
Audit Commission

Data

Service or facility accreditation

Peer Support

Competency Standards Training & development

Self-assessment

Inspection

Validated Self-assessment

Regional Improvement networks

Regional Commentaries

Peer review

Information & Knowledge

Leadership

If these are the critical success factors to our improvement strategy it is important that we are clear about who provides these functions and how they are provided.

It is also important that we are mindful of the need to build structures and processes that will **sustain continuous improvement** at the national, regional, and local level.

This may involve incremental change in the way the DCMS and NDPB's operate and relate to local government in the future as recommended to the DCMS by PA Consulting in their 2004 report "Extending your Reach".

Consideration will also need to be given to how at the national level DCMS and the NDPB's consult with and work with the professional bodies representing the sector and in particular the role of the **National Culture Forum**.

Within the Sport and Recreation sector in particular there are outstanding discussions relating to the concept of an improvement agency and the role of a single professional institute within it.

The **Regional Commentary** process will provide significant opportunities to develop the roles and relationships between NDPB's, the DCMS representatives in Government Regional Offices and the Regional Cultural Consortiums and local government.

Sport England are already under going structural change that is designed among other things to strengthen their capacity within the regions to support local government and the other agencies may be having similar discussions.

A number of regions are already developing and examining regional cultural improvement networks and investigating the links between these and the Regional Improvement Partnerships being supported and encouraged by the Office of The Deputy Prime Minister.

The following diagram may represent a future structure for sustaining self-improvement and promoting self-improvement:
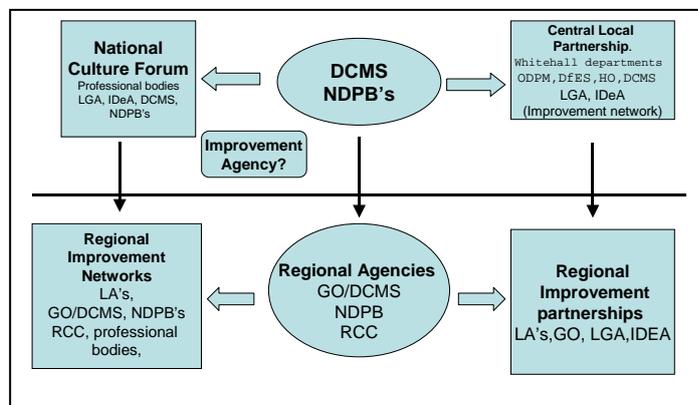

11. EMBEDDING SELF-IMPROVEMENT

There is now growing interest and momentum towards self-improvement and self-regulation. The launch of the document "Driving Improvement – a New Performance Framework for Localities" by the LGA and IDeA sets out a framework for improving local services and will stimulate a wide debate.

The strategy outlined here will, we believe, take the sector some considerable way towards this concept provided we can collectively complete the development of the main elements and put the structures and capacity into place to maintain and continue to develop it.

As an example, a model of self-regulation for our sector may look like this. A factor identified as missing however, is citizen and user perspectives on the service. We need to consider how we engage the public in assessing the quality of service they receive as part of the model.
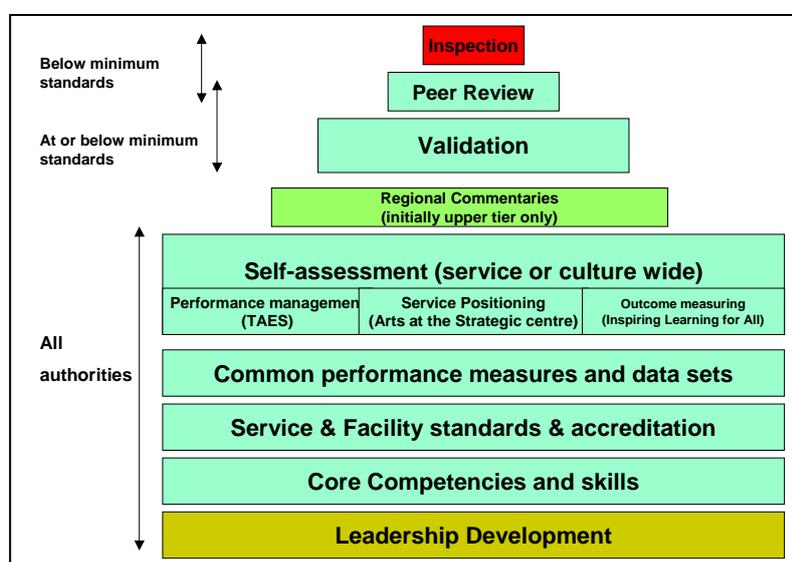
12. THE NEXT STEPS

All the stakeholders are asked to:

- Formally sign up to the strategy
- Promote the strategy in their own organisations
- Commit to undertaking the functions outlined in section 9
- Publicise the strategy widely
- Promote the tools and work with agencies and local authorities to improve services
- Support the creation of improvement networks
- Develop and create the structures to sustain improvement work

Appendix 1

Definition of Culture:

* the performing and visual arts, craft, and fashion
* media, film, television, video, and language
* museums, artifacts, archives and design
* libraries, literature, writing and publishing
* the built heritage, architecture, landscape and archaeology
* sports events, facilities and development
* parks, open spaces, wildlife habitats, water environment and countryside recreation
* children's play, playgrounds and play activities
* tourism, festivals and attractions
* informal leisure pursuits
* licensing of alcohol, entertainment and late night refreshment

Appendix 2.

DCMS Strategic Priorities

Our strategic priorities are four broad policy areas to which we are committed to making a difference. Each priority area has adjoining targets set by the Treasury, which we agree to meet.

Our four strategic priorities are as follows:

- **Children and young people**
  Further enhance access to culture and sport for children and give them the opportunity to develop their talents to the full and enjoy the benefits of participation
- **Communities**
  Increase and broaden the impact of culture and sport, to enrich individual lives, strengthen communities and improve the places where people live, now and for future generations
- **Economy**
  Maximise the contribution that the tourism, creative and leisure industries can make to the economy
- **Delivery**
  Modernise delivery by ensuring our sponsored bodies are efficient and work with others to meet the cultural and sporting needs of individuals and communities