

December 2004

Arts at the Strategic Centre 2004

A partnership between the local authorities in the North West, Arts Council England North West and the Improvement and Development Agency for local government

Copeland Borough Council review report

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1. Summary of key recommendations

Detailed signposts for development are set out in Section 4 of this report. The key recommendations for engaging arts at the strategic centre are:

- Develop member understanding of the role of the arts as a tool for addressing corporate priorities and wider agendas, by providing regular information, and reports. Design a tailored induction programme for the new Portfolio holder so that he or she can benefit from a specific introduction to the work of the art service.
- Raise the profile of the art service, and understanding of the role of the arts as a tool for addressing non arts priorities, amongst senior managers. Use team building sessions, service planning and away days to develop strategies for using the arts to address service priorities.
- Strengthen the partnership with Allerdale Borough Council encouraging joint working amongst officers and amongst elected members, to develop existing strategies.
- Jointly complete the exercise of mapping partnership working. Then identify appropriate partnerships to enable the service to extend its delivery, particularly those which will assist the team to deliver projects which contribute to the priorities of the local strategic partnership and the council.
- Similarly, jointly conduct a review of arts facilities across Copeland and Allerdale. Use the outcomes of the review to inform decisions on investment and planning for the future, taking account of the conditions of the facilities and the audiences which each attract.
- Build capacity within the team by appointing a senior officer to the vacant post.
- Review the arts service plan. Identify actions and timescales for the delivery of the objectives in the plan. Identify those who will be responsible for the achievement of the actions. Ensure the plan incorporates actions for improvement from the Best Value Review.
- Identify performance measures which will enable the service to measure service outcomes. Include both qualitative and quantitative indicators which measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. In the absence of specific arts indicators adopt those of other services to measure the contribution of the arts to cross cutting agendas and priorities for example in respect of waste minimisation.

2. Background

- 2.1 The review of Copeland Borough Council was carried out as part of the Arts at the Strategic Centre project, a partnership between the local authorities in the North West, Arts Council England North West (ACE, NW) and the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA). Cumbria County Council was one of seven NW pilot authorities participating in reviews during autumn 2004. The pilot authorities were all of the Cumbrian local authorities (Cumbria County, Copeland, Barrow, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland).
- 2.2 The reviews formed the pilot phase of the Arts at the Strategic Centre project in the NW region. This followed on from work with authorities in the NE region. The rationale was the same in both regions, and that was to articulate and test what it means in practical terms to “put arts at the strategic centre”.
- 2.3 To test the notion of “arts at the strategic centre” initially involved the IDeA working with ACE, NE, six NE pilot authorities and a number of comparator authorities to develop a toolkit. The aim was to make this a practical and useful tool both for ACE, NE in engaging with local authorities and for local authorities in achieving strategic placement and engagement of the arts. The development of the toolkit tested the benefits to be gained from this approach, specifically whether more strategic working does deliver more, better and relevant work on the ground. It also explored the challenges in placing the arts at the core of local government activity. The toolkit was used in the review of the Cumbrian authorities.
- 2.4 The six key themes of the toolkit are shown in figure one below.

Figure 1 – toolkit themes



- 2.5 The purpose of the review of Copeland Borough Council was to help the council to assess its current achievements and identify areas for future development in putting the arts at the strategic centre, using the toolkit as an assessment tool.
- 2.6 This report summarises the main findings of the review. It should be read in conjunction with the toolkit and background information about the council and its locality, which provides the context to this review. The report has three primary functions. It will:
- feed into an action plan to be devised by the council to address the identified areas for improvement. The action plan will be integrated into the council's work on its arts and cultural strategy, development and delivery, as well as corporate, service and budget planning processes;
 - act as an exploratory opportunity to examine the Local Arts Development Agency development policy of separating strategy from delivery, integrating arts development within the CPA regime, renegotiating agreements and looking at the consequences of this policy; and
 - have the potential to be used as a basis for future funding partnership protocols.
- 2.7 The review involved a self-evaluation by the council against the toolkit themes, a document review and a one-day visit to undertake a programme of individual or group interviews with the following key stakeholders:
- David Chapple, Arts Development Officer;
 - Jane Hanlon, Creative Partnerships;
 - Martin Jepson, Head of Legal and Democratic Services;
 - Christine Jones, Disington Community Partnership Project;
 - Fergus McMorrow, Community Regeneration Director;
 - Phil Sutton, Head of Leisure Services;
 - Keith Parker, Head of Amenity and Environmental Services;
 - John Stanforth, Chief Executive;
 - Peter Tyas, Arts Development Officer;
 - Kate Whitmarsh, Director Rosehill Theatre and
 - Cllr Elaine Woodburn, Leader
- 2.8 The information and interview programme provided by the council had a bearing on the detail of the assessment made against the toolkit themes.
- 2.9 The review was carried out by Ruth Phillips, Associate Consultant, with the support of Mark Harrison, Principal Consultant, IDEa Services Directorate.

The consultants were very appreciative of the warm welcome provided by the council during the visit and would like to thank all those involved for their valuable contribution and for their assistance in organising the review.

3. Main findings and achievements¹

Political leadership

- Economic regeneration is the number one priority for the council, with a significant percentage of the revenue budget spent on it. Recently there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of the environment in underpinning economic development and regeneration.
- Some members have shown a commitment to public art as part of the economic regeneration of the borough. The development of the dock area and the arts centre at 'The Beacon' are a demonstration of that commitment and an example of the contribution of the arts to regeneration.
- Beyond public art there is wide support by members for the cultural events such as the 'Worlds Biggest Liar' competition born from the history of story telling in the region.
- A number of members were supportive of the Best Value Review of the Leisure Service carried out in 2002/3. Recently the Deputy Leader has raised the profile of the arts by acting as a champion for the service.

However:

- Members in general have a growing understanding of the potential role of the arts as a tool for addressing the council's aims, beyond regeneration. However there is still scope to raise awareness amongst members of the wider role of the arts in contributing to the quality of life in the borough.(see a on p 13)
- Whilst some members have a commitment to public art as part of the regeneration of the town, the development of a shared public art strategy with Allerdale is still in its early stages. The draft discussion paper 'Raising the Bar' has only just been circulated for comments and the future of a joint Public Art Strategy is therefore uncertain. (see c on p13)
- Public perception of the arts is conservative. Local people have expressed their preference for more traditional art and in a recent survey by the council to determine what local people wanted the arts did not fare well.(see c on p13)
- Whilst there is a cultural services portfolio which includes arts development the portfolio holder has died recently and the post is currently vacant. The deputy leader is covering this in the short term until a new portfolio holder, with an interest in and understanding of the arts can be appointed. (see b on p13)

Corporate arrangements

- The council is currently restructuring its service delivery and has made a number of new appointments to service areas. Recent appointments include the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services who will along with others take up his post in the New Year. The Arts service will sit within this service area.

¹ References to Signposts for Development are given in brackets

- The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services has experience of managing the Arts prior to a previous restructure, and is supportive of and committed to arts and sport development. He has a good understanding of the potential for the arts not only in terms of regeneration but also in respect of other priorities for the borough such as health.
- A Leisure and Cultural Services Best Value Review has been undertaken and the action plan which has been produced is a key plan for improving service delivery. This is noted in a number of documents including the self assessment for CPA. The review report and action plan demonstrates an understanding for the potential for the arts as a tool for addressing community and council priorities and an intention to use the arts service in this way.
- The arts service has worked well with the council's waste management department to deliver environmental projects; Project 52 and Personal Baggage have been a successful partnership within the council working to reduce waste. Officers consider that this project helped increase understanding amongst the local community of the importance of waste minimisation at a time when the service was introducing changes to its collection of waste. Importantly officers intend to directly link the contribution of the arts service towards waste minimisation through shared responsibility for achieving targets.

However:

- Whilst partnership working to reduce waste has been a success there were few other examples of partnership working across the council. Generally the arts service has struggled to raise its profile within the council with other colleagues.(see d on p13)
- The significant reorganisation at Chief Officer level has resulted in the appointment of a number of people who are new to Copeland Borough Council and they have yet to take up their posts. The reorganisation has meant that in the recent past there have been few natural champions for the arts at senior management level.(see e on p 13)
- Interviews which the reviewer held with managers indicated that there are few current examples of using arts projects to address service priorities, and that there may be a reluctance to use arts based solutions if there are budget implications. (see f on p13)
- The newly appointed head of Amenity and Environmental Services is however committed to implementing the recommendations of the Best Value Review and has a good understanding of the potential for the arts in addressing community and council priorities. He is a natural champion for the arts and has a commitment to strengthening the service. (see d on p 14)
- Members of the arts team recognise that they have not been successful at marketing themselves within the council and to local people and pointed to the successful relationship which Allerdale has with its communications team, resulting in a number of articles in local papers which have helped raise the image of the service. (see q on p14)

External engagement

- The service works with a number of partners strategically and operationally. At a strategic level its partners include the North West Development Agency, Arts Council England, North West and Cumbria County Council. Service level agreements exist with the County and with the Arts Council England, North West.
- The Arts Council through its partnership agreement with Copeland Borough Council identifies a number of priorities which reflect those of the council. They include creative economy, healthy communities, vital neighbourhoods, and engaging young people.
- A significant partnership exists with Allerdale Borough Council. Together they have an integrated Local Strategic Partnership, the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership..
- There is a good working relationship between the arts team in both councils which goes back a number of years. Together they have developed the Rural Touring Scheme, which has been successful in extending access to film using local village halls. The partnership is being developed further through the joint Public Art Strategy, and the West Lakes Tourism Partnership. Both Allerdale and Copeland are talking of extending the partnership along the west coast to include Barrow Borough Council. (see g on p13)
- The service holds a number of service level agreements with its delivery partners, including the Rosehill Theatre. In the case of the Rosehill Theatre the agreement sets out the grant provided, and the conditions of payment which are the supply of data for attendances, numbers of performances and box office and grant receipts. There are a number of stated services to be supplied by the company in respect of the facilities including audience development. However there are no specific targets set for any of the above. (see h on p13)

However:

- Whilst the borough is developing a strong working relationship with Allerdale Borough Council, strategic working with the County is not as well developed as it might be. Officers suggested that there is a willingness to work with the County but that the current structural changes at the County and their culture does not encourage close working. Officers would welcome more leadership from the County in the strategic development of the arts. (see g on p13)
- The joint Local Strategic Partnership, (LSP), the West Cumbria Partnership, with Allerdale Borough Council is not well developed, and is only now developing its strategy and action plan. There has been limited arts activity through the Partnership and there is little involvement or integration of culture and the arts across the LSP board. (see i on p 14)
- Although the service has built some strong delivery partnerships for example with education, partnership working is not sufficiently widespread to ensure that the council is reaching and engaging with all communities, although there are plans, for example, to extend the reach of the Rural Touring Scheme. (see j on p14)

- Neither do the current partnership activities fully address the aims of the council particularly in respect of the economy, and healthy and safe communities. There is currently little contribution of the arts to health and well being and little promotion of the impact that cultural activities can bring to the health agenda. (see j on p 14)

Performance management

- The council's primary objective is one of regeneration and improving job opportunities for local people, but its corporate aims also include improving health, and community safety, and improving and protecting the environment. This reflects the aims of the community partnership which in its strategy sets out its vision for 2020 to *'have a prosperous outward looking and inclusive economy with local initiative and local enterprise creating high quality job opportunities'*
- Culture is one of the specific themes of the partnership and there are aims set out for the group within the partnership strategy. These include encouraging participation, developing the cultural infrastructure and creative industries.
- The Council developed and adopted a cultural strategy, in 2003. The strategy recognises the role the arts plays in education, health, and community development and sets actions for the arts to address these.
- The 2003-4 service plan, for commercial and cultural services has been developed within the wider context of the council's aims and the community plan. The plan covers the arts service, and also recognises the potential for arts projects to improve the employability of local people, and the health and safety of local communities.
- It was updated in 2004-5 and includes key objectives for the arts service. These include establishing a new Arts Development Agency for West Cumbria, increasing access through the development of the West Cumbria Rural Touring Scheme, developing youth arts and arts in education programmes, and nurturing and developing partners with shared objectives.
- A number of performance measures exist for the arts service. These include:
 - More organisations and individuals employed to develop and deliver arts programmes
 - Increased arts activity to rural communities and young people
 - Improved partnership working particularly with the education sector.

However:

- The West Cumbria Local Strategic Partnership is still in its early days and an action plan to deliver its strategy has not been developed beyond the identification of a number of key objectives. The contribution of the arts service towards the achievement of the aims of the partnership well being groups has consequently not yet been determined. (see k on p 14)

- The arts development department service plan for 2004-5 sets out a number of objectives to address the council's aims in respect of inclusion, young people, and economic regeneration and also to promote and market itself. However the objectives in the plan are not broken down into actions with timescales and named individuals or groups of people responsible for delivery are not identified. (see l on p 14)
- Few performance measures exist for the service beyond the numbers of workshops held, audience participation figures, and the money spend on the arts by partner groups. In particular there are no identified measures in the arts service plan to map progress in delivering the objectives, although as mentioned above there is an intention to tie project outcomes to waste minimisation targets. (see m on p 14)

Capacity

- The strategic documents and plans which have been produced for the service demonstrate that there is a clear view amongst the arts team and those who have written the plans of the agendas for the arts and their connection to the priorities for the community, council, and strategic partners.
- The members of the arts development team have a good knowledge of the local region and the context within which the service operates.
- Whilst the senior arts post is currently vacant there is a commitment to build capacity within the team at a senior level and to appoint to the vacant post.

However:

- Whilst the strategic plans and documents demonstrate that there is a good understanding of how the arts service can support the aims and priorities of other service areas the arts development team has not been as successful as it might in addressing these priorities through its partnership working. The strongest partnerships are with Education and the youth service. (see j on p 14)
- Capacity to deliver is restricted by the absence of a senior officer post. As a result of the Best Value Review a decision was taken to establish a leisure trust to manage the council's facilities. This will benefit the arts service as the formation of a trust will release savings to invest in sport and art development. However this has not happened as yet and it is not clear when the post will be filled. This reduces opportunities for the service to promote itself and raise its profile amongst members and officers across the council. (see o on p 14)

Service delivery

- Close partnership working with Allerdale offers opportunities to maximise efficiency. Funding from the Arts Council England, North West is enabling the two councils to map their partnership working to identify which projects can be shared across boundaries.

- The Audit Commission CPA report in April 2004 recognised the success Copeland has achieved in engaging with young people and providing a range of arts development programmes.
- The arts service has been successful in supporting arts in education, working with the youth service and schools on programmes such as artist in schools residency programmes, and youth theatre projects. Work with young people in Disington has resulted in the establishment of a Youth Development Worker post and a long term programme of arts activities.

However:

- The service recognises that it has not been very successful at communicating with local people both to get their views on the arts and to raise their level of awareness and understanding of service achievements. Officers consider that they have a lot to learn from the parks service which has achieved high satisfaction ratings, attributed in part to marketing. (see p on p 14)
- Whilst both Allerdale and Copeland have the same priorities in respect of regeneration and employment the councils are at different stages of development in respect of councillor and officer commitment to and engagement with the arts. This may reduce the opportunities for each to fully benefit from the joint partnership mapping exercise. (see o on p 14)
- Arts facilities in the Borough require investment. The Beacon which opened in 1996 is the only purpose built visual art exhibition space in Cumbria, and is now in need of updating to increase visitor numbers and satisfaction.
- The council managed venue at Cleator Moor also requires considerable investment, and the Rosehill Theatre which the council supports through grant money is not easily accessible for many, as it is served by poor transport links. The Carnegie Theatre in Allerdale similarly requires investment and a review of its future use is currently taking place. To date there has been no joint review of facilities, their use, or their audiences. (see q on p14)

4. Signposts for development

Political leadership

- a Develop member understanding of the role of the arts as a tool for addressing corporate priorities and wider agendas including regeneration by providing regular information and reports and by celebrating arts successes with members such as Project 52. Develop the induction for new members to include a tour of arts facilities and projects.
- b Design a tailored induction programme for the new Portfolio holder so that he or she can benefit from a specific introduction to the work of the arts service in Copeland including a visit to arts facilities and arts based projects.
- c Strengthen the partnership with Allerdale Borough Council by encouraging the portfolio holders to work together to develop joint strategies such as the Public Art Strategy, and to develop a shared understanding of the future needs of local communities.

Corporate arrangements

- d Raise the profile of the arts service as a tool for addressing non arts priorities at chief officer level and amongst senior managers. Use success stories such as project 52 (waste management project) to celebrate arts achievements.
- e Identify champions for the arts amongst newly appointed senior managers in non arts services across the council.
- f Use team building sessions, service planning and away days to develop strategies for using the arts to address service priorities learning from successes at Allerdale and the other councils in the region, as well as from internal successes.

External engagement

- g Continue to develop the close working relationship with Allerdale Borough Council through the development of existing strategies and by looking for other opportunities for closer working. With Allerdale seek to extend the partnership to include Barrow Borough Council as planned.
- h Ensure that funding agreements with partners include measures of success so that partners can demonstrate how their projects are contributing to the council's priorities and aims of the arts service.

- i Build relationships between the arts officers of the council and members of the sub groups of the strategic partnership. Continue to identify and raise the profile of the role of the arts in contributing to the objectives of the LSP.
- j Further develop partnership working to extend service delivery. Identify and develop partnerships which will assist the team to deliver projects which contribute to the priorities of the council.

Performance management

- k Ensure that culture and the arts are represented and championed in the LSP and that the potential for the arts as a tool to address community agendas is not only understood but specified within the action plan when it is developed.
- l Review the 2004-5 arts service plan. Identify actions, and timescales for the delivery of the objectives in the plan. Identify those who will be responsible for the achievement of the actions. Ensure the plan incorporates actions for improvement from the Best Value Review. Review progress on a regular basis
- m Identify performance measures which will enable the service to measure service outcomes. Include both qualitative and quantitative indicators which measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. In the absence of specific arts indicators adopt those of other services to measure the contribution of the arts to cross cutting agendas and priorities for example in line with the intention for waste minimisation.

Capacity

- n Build capacity within the team by appointing a senior officer to the vacant post. Consider a joint appointment with Allerdale Borough Council to further develop the partnership which the service has successfully forged.

Service delivery

- o Complete the exercise of mapping partnership working with Allerdale identifying practical opportunities for extending effective partnership working across West Cumbria. Present a report to senior managers and to councillors which provides clear recommendations and which clearly makes the case for proposed changes.
- p Build a closer relationship with the marketing team to publicise the work of the arts development team and its partners, and to celebrate the successes in order to increase the public appetite for the arts.
- q Conduct a review of arts facilities across Copeland and Allerdale. Use the outcomes of the review to inform decisions on the investment and planning

for the future of each of the theatres taking account of the conditions of the facilities and the audiences which each attract.