

TITLE:	“Arts at the Strategic Centre” Self Assessment
TO/ON:	Executive 12th March 2007
BY:	Nick Wiggins, Acting Head of Leisure Services
PORTFOLIO:	Strong Communities
STATUS:	Report

STRATEGIC FACTOR CHECKLIST

The Council’s Corporate Management Team has confirmed that the Strategic Factor Checklist has been applied to the development of this report, and there are no key issues, over and above those set out in the body of the report, that need to be brought to Members’ attention.

1. SUBJECT MATTER AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the process and outcomes of the “Arts At The Strategic Centre” Self-Assessment which has taken place between September 2006 and February 2007, and asks Executive to agree a number of Recommendations which have come out of the consultation and self-assessment processes, so that your officers (including staff transferred into Derwentside Trust For Sport and the Arts) can work with partners to produce and implement an agreed Improvement Action Plan for the arts service.

2. BACKGROUND

Strategic Context

- 2.1 This authority is currently at the end of a 3-Year Partnership Agreement with Arts Council England North East (ACENE) through which ACENE has provided arts development grant of £21,218 per annum to support an agreed arts programme. This work has been guided by a set of objectives and priorities produced in late 2003 following an inspection by the government’s Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA), using the “Arts At The Strategic Centre” (A@SC) template.
- 2.2 A@SC has been developed and refined as a strategic positioning tool to enable local authorities to embed their strategic and corporate use of the arts to meet wider outcomes, raising the profile of the arts and providing benefits to the arts service as a result. The benchmark and methodology of A@SC is based around a self-assessment process, and 16 regional local authorities including Derwentside, have undergone the self-assessment process in the 2006/07 tranche.
- 2.3 A@SC forms one of a suite of self-assessment tools that have been developed within the cultural services, the other two being “Towards An Excellent Service” (TAES) originally developed to assess performance management within sports and recreation, and “Inspiring Learning For All” (IL4A) which was developed to measure learning outcomes within the museums, libraries and archives sector.

Members may also be aware that a DCMS consultation paper, “A Passion For Excellence: An Emerging Self-Improvement Strategy For Cultural Services”, was published in March 2006, as part of the process of reviewing Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of cultural services, post-2008.

- 2.4 As well as providing a body of information with which to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the first three year agreement period and shape the priorities and objectives for the next stage of the Partnership Agreement with ACENE commencing April 2007, our Self-Assessment has an additional relevance in the context of the transfer of the entire arts service into the new Trust. Because A@SC is concerned primarily with corporate and strategic positioning of the arts, and not just the effectiveness and outcomes of service delivery, the recommendations and Improvement Plan subsequently agreed by members must be “owned” by the authority. However, responsibility for the practical implementation of improvements and related tasks will in some cases be delegated to the new Trust, and in some cases be a joint responsibility. Some actions will also require the active involvement of (or further consultation with) external partners to be fully effective.

A@SC Self Assessment Methodology

- 2.5 Undertaking the A@SC Self assessment requires the authority to work through a five-stage process, under the following headings:

Stage 1: Prepare the ground

Stage 2: Plan the self-assessment

Stage 3: Carry out the self-assessment

Stage 4: Plan improvements

Stage 5: Implement improvements

Stage 6 (Optional): External validation. *(Members are informed that it was agreed at the outset with ACENE that Derwentside did not need to opt for external validation).*

- 2.6 The process centres around a Benchmark Framework document (attached as Appendix 1) that identifies five themes:

- Leadership and governance
- External engagement
- Resource and performance management
- Organisation and people
- Achievement

- 2.7 These themes are sub-divided into 10 “elements” which in turn are broken down into 25 discreet “headings”. The self-assessment is carried out by assessing each of these headings against a set of “ideal features” described in the benchmark, using evidence gathered from a number of sources.

- 2.8 Self-assessment under each heading is carried out on a scale of 1 to 4. The benchmark provides a standard which defines each score, as follows:

1. There is little or no evidence that the “ideal” features are in place, *or* little or no awareness of or commitment to putting them in place
2. There is evidence of concrete progress towards the “ideal” features being in place
3. There is evidence that the majority of the “ideal” features are in place
4. There is evidence that all the “ideal” features are in place *and* that this has had an impact in terms of real outcomes.

- 2.9 Once all the evidence has been collated and recorded, and the scoring process carried out, a total score for the authority can be arrived at. More importantly, the process allows the authority to identify which headings demonstrate weakest performance (i.e. those that are scored at 1) and which therefore require prioritisation in the subsequent improvement planning.
- 2.10 Having identified and prioritised a set of improvements, a “SMART” action plan is drawn up, with input from external partners and stakeholders as required, and implementation agreed. This can have implications for resourcing, both staffing and financial, and the improvement action plan should identify these.
- 2.11 Finally a process for monitoring and reviewing progress needs to be established, linked to internal business planning cycles, the annual review of the Partnership Agreement with ACENE, but also involving the other stakeholders in the process. This review process in turn informs subsequent improvement planning and updating of the action plan.

3. RELEVANT MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS/OPTIONS

The A@SC Self Assessment Process in Derwentside

- 3.1 Implementation of the process by this authority commenced in September 2006, and followed the stages set out in paragraph 2.5 above, as follows:

Stage 1: Prepare the ground. Briefing paper prepared for Executive member for Strong Communities, Chair of Strong Communities Scrutiny, and agreement obtained to undertake the process. Briefing material also circulated to Executive Director and CMT, to make them aware of the process and obtain their support.

Stage 2: Plan the self assessment. A Steering Group was established, comprising the EM for Strong Communities, Chair of SC Scrutiny, the council’s representative to ACENE Local Authority forum, and officers from Corporate Policy, Development and Asset Management, and Leisure Services. This group was briefed in more detail with the full A@SC benchmark and background document, and met to agree the scope of the assessment, the range and sources of evidence which might be required to score the assessment, and the methodology.

Stage 3: carry out the assessment. It was agreed that a range of consultation should be undertaken with different sectors with a direct interest or involvement in the arts service:

- Elected Members and Directors
- Representatives of the LSP and other key external stakeholders
- Professional arts organisations and artists
- Staff from Leisure Services
- Young people (via the Derwentside Young Peoples Forum)

It was agreed that an independent facilitator would be recruited to run a number of focus groups, and to write up the evidence that was obtained. A full list of people and organisations consulted, or who offered information and evidence during this stage, is attached as Appendix 2.

Supplementing this consultation process, a range of corporate documents, reports, and other material was surveyed to provide further evidence.

The evidence and recommendations arising from the various focus groups and some other one to one meetings was then written up by the independent facilitator in five thematic reports, grouped around the five themes of the self-assessment. This

information, together with the other evidence gathered through the desk research, was then collated into an Evidence Table against the 25 Headings of the self-assessment. (Please refer to Appendix 4) This document formed a key part of the scoring process, with the evidence, positive and negative, being assessed against a set of ideal features for each heading within the A@SC Benchmark document. Scoring the self-assessment was then carried out by the A@SC Steering Group, meeting on 08 February. A set of individual assessments was written up, and an average score for each heading arrived at through discussion and further reference to the benchmark. The summary of scores for each heading is attached as Appendix 3.

Stage 4: Plan Improvements. Based on the material in the thematic documents, and the scores agreed for each heading, a set of Recommendations has been drafted as the basis for the Improvement Plan. This is set out below in the body of the report. All participants in the consultation and evidence-gathering process have been circulated with the recommendations, to inform them of the outcomes of their involvement, and also to provide advance notice of the council's intention to invite further involvement in the production of the Improvement Plan.

Stage 5: Implement Improvements. The final stage following consideration of this report by Executive, and pending members' approval, is for your officers, including Arts and Leisure Service staff transferred to the new Trust, to work with the various partners on the production of a prioritised Improvement Plan. This will involve allocating tasks and responsibilities, identifying resources required (both internally and from external sources if appropriate) and establishing target dates for completion and the anticipated outcomes and benefits. The Improvement Plan will need to be considered and approved by the Council's Executive and the Board of the new Leisure Trust.

Results and Outcomes of the Self Assessment

- 3.2 **Score: A score of 53 out of a possible 100 was obtained** based on the total of the average scores agreed for all 25 headings. Whilst this result might fall below expectations, members are referred to the criteria for each score set out in paragraph 2.8 above. From these standards it can be seen that even obtaining a score of 2 identifies that "concrete action" towards achieving the "ideal features" for that heading is in place. Only headings scoring 1 require urgent remedial action.
- 3.3 **Identified weaknesses:** 5 headings attracted the lowest score of 1. Three of these related to strategic issues around linkage with the LSP, partner involvement in strategy development for the arts, and links between the council and arts partners in performance management systems and outcomes and data -sharing. The other two headings were in the Organisation and People theme, and related to a perceived lack of capacity within the arts service management to engage at the corporate/ strategic levels, and some deficiencies in knowledge and learning amongst arts staff about the work and strategic priorities of other Directorates, or how they should be contributing to corporate and community priorities and outcomes through their work areas.
- 3.4 **Strengths:** 8 headings were scored at 3. These headings centred around shared understanding and engagement (both politically and corporately); the level of commitment shown to the arts through financial and other resources; championing of, and advocacy for the arts; the ability of the organisational structure and culture to facilitate cross- departmental working and use of the

arts; use of IT to access and promote the arts; and the positive profile of the arts more generally within the district. The remaining 12 headings all scored 2.

3.5 Other findings and outcomes:

3.6 One of the most positive features of the process has been the willingness of so many people and organisations, especially from outside of the authority, to participate in the consultation and evidence gathering phase. I am sure members will wish to record your appreciation to everyone who took part for making the time available to attend meetings or send in written comments.

3.7 Another very useful function of the A@SC Self-Assessment has been to focus some attention on issues around the current Partnership Agreement between this council and ACENE in relation to the transfer of the arts service to the new Derwentside Trust For Sport and the Arts. Arts Council England have made it clear in previous partnership review meetings that they intend to renew and maintain the Partnership Agreement with Derwentside District Council, and will wish to be informed how the authority plans to retain a strategic overview of the arts function, as well as what arrangements will be made post-April 2007 for the handing over of monies from the core grant payment, which again will come to the council in the first instance and not to the new Trust. The current understanding is that this grant (amounting to £21,218 for 2007/8) will be paid over in full to the Trust in order to support an agreed arts development work programme. It will be necessary to clarify for ACENE the monitoring and reporting arrangements following transfer, and who is responsible for what tasks. The recommendations in the next section make reference to this.

3.8 Recommendations from the A@SC Self Assessment process.

Theme 1: Leadership and Governance

Policy and Strategy

- Enhance links with the professional arts sector, the LSP and other key stakeholders to improve understanding of and involvement in arts strategy and policy development.
- Develop and consult on an updated Arts Policy/ Strategy, to feed into the existing Leisure Service Plan, Corporate Plan, and the new Trust's Service Delivery Plan.

Corporate Arrangements

- Enhance relationships with other Districts, Parishes and the County Council.
- Increase understanding of the value of the arts among elected members, directors, and other service areas.
- Increase support given to the arts at a senior management level.
- Increase communication between the council and the Derwentside LSP regarding planning and delivery of the arts.

Theme 2: External Engagement

Outward Looking

- Establish regular meetings and other communication between the council and the professional arts sector, recognising the needs and interests of art form specialisms e.g. drama, visual arts, music, etc.
- Respond to findings of Equality Impact Assessment for the arts service by undertaking consultation with appropriate target groups currently under-represented or under-served within the arts facilities or programmes.

Partnership Working

- Improve the methods of collecting and sharing evidence of arts project outputs and outcomes between the council, LSP, and other key stakeholders.
- Communicate the value of the arts and creative activity to wider community priorities, and identify the contribution made by the arts to “non-arts” outcomes within the strategic plans of the council and the LSP.
- Seek formal arts sector representation on the LSP.

Theme 3: Resource and Performance Management

Performance Management

- Improve the performance management framework for the arts, and strengthen links between the corporate/ strategic levels of the council and front line service delivery managers and staff.
- Improve internal communication systems to increase effectiveness.
- Agree mechanisms with arts sector & other partners for the collection, sharing and dissemination of relevant performance management data and project outcomes.

Resource Management

- Explore the practicalities of creating closer links between the council's website and other technical resources, and those of local arts organisations and agencies.
- Ensure that the current agreement between the council and Kalapremi (UK) for office space at The Lamplight Arts Centre is safeguarded and formalised upon transfer to the new Trust.
- Identify staffing resources and current functions within the Theatres and Arts structure to enable more effective external fund-raising to be undertaken.
- Expand budgets available for flexible arts programme development, especially to address agreed priority areas.
- Clarify position regarding arts budgets to the professional arts sector.

Theme 4: Organisation and People

Staffing Levels

- Identify a responsibility for the arts service at Director level within the council. *(This includes strategic corporate overview & monitoring of the DDC-ACE Partnership Agreement and Council ownership of agreed A@SC tasks and responsibilities)*
- Agree information requirements and reporting mechanisms for the arts service following transfer to Trust.
- Examine staff roles and capacity issues within the current staffing structure for Theatres and Arts. *(This includes identifying roles and responsibilities within the new Leisure Trust for taking forward agreed A@SC tasks, programme/ project delivery and Trust input into the DDC-ACE Partnership Agreement and related grant monitoring/reporting).*
- Improve knowledge and understanding within the arts service staff team of corporate and community priorities, structures and processes, and how the arts service can contribute and benefit.

Theme 5: Achievement

Service Delivery

- Improve links and co-operation with major service areas to encourage greater use of the arts.
- Improve the relationship between strategy and delivery.
- Encourage the arts service to become more pro-active.
- Work more closely with the Derwentside Community Empowerment Network in order to improve communications with voluntary/ community sector organisations, such as use of the DCEN newsletter, sharing mail-outs etc.
- Based on findings of consultation relating to equality and diversity issues, agree practical measures to address gaps in service provision for specific community groups.

Community Profile

- Increase the coverage of the arts across the district within “Inside Derwentside” (DDC magazine).
- Provide more assistance to local arts organisations in order to gain more publicity within the “Consett & Stanley Advertiser”.
- Develop links between the council website and those of independent arts organisations.
- Improve awareness amongst elected members and council employees of the wider arts programme across Derwentside.
- Celebrate and publicise the successes and achievements of the arts sector more regularly, using the “What’s On”, “Inside Derwentside”, the council website and local newspapers/ media.

Community Outcomes

- Develop a greater understanding amongst the district’s ward partnerships and other community/ voluntary networks of the contribution made by the arts to improving the quality of people’s lives, and to other community outcomes.
- Explore ways in which the council could do more to support the creative and cultural businesses based or working within the district.
- Review the programmes and usage levels of The Lamplight Arts Centre and Empire Theatre, Consett to see if they are being used to their full potential.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND REASONS

- 4.1 Members are invited to receive the report and note the process, findings and outcomes of the “Arts At the Strategic Centre” Self Assessment of this authority, conducted between September 2006 and February 2007.
- 4.2 Members are asked to approve the Recommendations set out in section 3.8 as the basis for the development of an Improvement Plan in collaboration with external partners, on the understanding that, once drafted, it will be submitted to Executive Committee and to the Board of the new Leisure Trust for final approval.
- 4.3 Executive is asked to approve the continuation of the Partnership Agreement between this authority and Arts Council England from April 2007, and confirm to ACENE the arrangements for the paying over of the core arts development grant of £21,218 to the new Trust, along with related monitoring and reporting responsibilities.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: A@SC Self Assessment - The Benchmark Framework

Appendix 2: List of Participants/ organisations and individuals consulted

Appendix 3: Self Assessment Scoring Summary
Appendix 4: Self Assessment Evidence Table

Background documents:

“Arts At The Strategic Centre” Derwentside DC. Report by I&DeA, September 2003

“New 3-Year Partnership Agreement with ACE”. Executive report, 1st. March 2004.

If members wish to obtain background documents on the A@SC Self Assessment process, these can be made available in hard copy or electronically.

For further information on the details of this report, please contact:

Martin Weston, Arts Development Manager. Tel. 218988

E-mail: m.weston@derwentside.gov.uk