

## Agenda Item 9

Executive Board

10 May 2006

PJ/smep



### Cultural Services in East Devon District Council after the Leisure Trust transfer

#### Summary

This report examines the many residual cultural and community development roles left to the Council following the transfer of 'Leisure' to a Trust. It seeks a clear direction for the future.

#### Recommendation

**That Members determine the future shape, direction and priorities for the Council's cultural services, and agreement of any role which is to be discontinued.**

#### a) Reasons for Recommendation

There is a need to clarify, scope, purpose and continuing responsibilities following the transfer of leisure facilities management to Leisure East Devon

#### b) Alternative Options

Options are considered in the body of the report.

#### c) Risk Considerations

There is a risk that for lack of clarity and support that the intended and assumed culture issues are not being properly addressed.

#### d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

There is not necessarily any budget implication, the links to corporate strategy are set out in the body of the report.

#### e) Date for Review of Decision

3 years time.

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#### 1 Background

During the Leaders Prioritisation Exercise in 2004, Sports was evaluated as Band 4 (second lowest) and Arts under Band 3 (middle band). The Folk Festival was prioritised at Band 5 (lowest).

Consequently 2.5 full time equivalents were lost (without redundancy) from the sports and arts development teams, and the Folk Festival budget withdrawn (£60K). In addition the bulk of cultural grants were no longer made available, and subsequent operational savings have had to be made annually. Thus we now have 1.85 dedicated staff posts (F.T.E.) left, in total, from the development part of within the Communities Directorate, and a much reduced 'enabling' budget.

In 2006 the successful transfer of our Leisure operations to a Trust, and new management arrangements for the Manor Pavilion complex in Sidmouth, completed the actions required under the prioritisation process.

Together with the staff transfer to LED was a great deal of expertise, especially on the strategic and operational aspects of sport. The service level agreement with LED has ensured that we have ready access to this expertise. However any new significant areas of work would have to be commissioned from LED (as with any other local independent charity), at a cost. Part of the reason for creating LED was that its single focus on leisure facilities management would create efficient working, uncluttered by the other corporate demands that the Council previously had put upon them.

In the Audit Commission's Annual Letter 2006 a key message for Action by EDDC is to:-

“Ensure that the Council's Leisure Strategy is being met whilst being flexible in its approach to Trust performance and the levels of subsidy paid to the Trust”.

This follows a statement that:

“There are examples of service excellence, particularly in leisure and cultural services”.

The Council still has an adopted Cultural Strategy. This extends well beyond the realms of arts and sports alone and incorporates certain issues of:

- Community development
- Keeping Healthy and Independent
- Community Travel and Transport
- Young People
- Tourism/Economic Development
- Environment and Heritage
- Community Property & Resources
- Education and Community ICT

Other than 'Environment & Heritage' many of these issues have no other clear 'home' within the Council, and have little in the way of coherent, funded, strategies to drive them.

The new corporate strategy seeks to ensure:

- Thriving balanced communities (including satisfaction with Services, and Community engagement)
- Taking care and improving our environment (including satisfaction with parks, open spaces etc.)
- Encouraging a flourishing local economy (including regeneration of existing towns)
- Providing community leadership and 'good value for money' (including 'shaping the district')

Evidently there is a role for a range of cultural activities in supporting these, though in fact the corporate strategy does not significantly explore this general possibility.

One other area of discretionary work within the Council has similar themes and opportunities to that of the Culture team. This is the Countryside team, which also focuses on work that engages communities, but with our natural heritage. Some joint work between the teams has already been explored and there opportunity for greater synergy.

## Why should the Council get involved in “Culture” activities?

Evidently community groups and individual arts people in our community are already delivering much of the agenda. Members may, understandably, ask why we are involved in an activity which is pleasurable and welcomed but not always mandatory and is delivered by others.

The fact is that for some years the Council’s involvement in cultural activities has been focussed less on enabling outcomes (an exhibition, a play, the Exmouth Banners etc) than on using the process as a means of enabling community development. This is not a role that others in the community concentrate upon. Thus through the Council’s activities we have balanced a business-like, and promotional, approach with engagement of ‘hard to reach’ groups. Recent initiatives have specifically engaged people with physical disabilities, rural communities, children with learning disabilities, and disaffected young people and others for whom the socialisation, team working, and confidence building will be valuable. This community development role is often overlooked when just viewing the final ‘product’ of the initiatives.

## 2. Residual roles

A funding request to satisfy the Council’s residual cultural role was not supported during the recent budget process. So if we are now gradually moving towards minimising the previous leisure service cultural role the Council needs to be aware of a number of residual and future issues which it faces:

- i) The new CPA approach is proposed to incorporate a cultural element, and indeed the government and its departments have been issuing a lot of guidance and exhortation about using cultural services to engage and develop communities.
- ii) Associated with this (and indicating future direction) a new funding stream for play grants has come available (we expect this to be followed by sports grants) which has to be led and championed at a District Council level.
- iii) Further national health concerns, especially on childhood obesity, point the need for local authorities to work with (future) PCTs on physical activity (other than formal sports) and nutrition issues. PCTs are not substantially funded for this public health work either.
- iv) National and local demands for programmes which engage young people in productive activity (to reduce anti-social behaviour or ‘hanging about’ which many older people find threatening). This links to our new obligations under the Childrens Act, and Anti-social behaviour.
- v) Not only do the Council need to monitor the effectiveness of LED’s delivery (against our annual grant of around £1m) but also we need to ensure that we set an appropriate strategy for the future that ties into national demand and local need. This will involve maintaining links eg with Sport England. Whilst LED will be able to help advise us on this strategic role we cannot pass our ‘client’ role on to them.

- vi) Sports provision in East Devon still extends far beyond that provided by LED. The Council still has control of certain sports fields, but many other facilities are owned and managed by Sports Clubs. In effect these organisations could be seen as in competition with LED so the Council has to retain a role of ‘honest broker’. Furthermore local funding from regional allocations will in future demand greater linkage between clubs (the Hub Club concept). This will also require Council intervention if we are to attract investment to East Devon. The current East Devon Sports Council has suffered a crisis of confidence about its future role and will require support from EDDC and LED if they are to assist in this process. Similarly whilst the Sports College remains active, this function is not part of its key role.
- vii) In a similar way to sport there is a need to better identify, communicate with, and promote linkages between, other community interest groups in order to get best influence and funding from organisations such as Culture SW. This is part of building capacity in the voluntary and community sector – again a government requirement upon local authorities.
- viii) The earmarked lottery grant for Play in East Devon can only be drawn down via the District Council if a multi-agency group with a clear strategy and priorities is generated. This role falls to the Council to lead. This approach is likely to be replicated for other funding streams.
- ix) Future reviews of playing fields, areas, etc will require funding and commissioning if we are to feed useful information into the planning process.
- x) The Thelma Hulbert gallery role and approach is changing. The new business plan sets a direction that reduces the funding requirement, integrates to the proposed community centre. The net cost this year was only £14.5k. This new direction is very much about supporting local arts and crafts (professional and amateur) and engaging new audiences. This community participation role supports the Corporate Strategy.
- xi) Community arts in East Devon such as Villages in Action, Digital Express, Common Ground Players, Annual Sand Sculpture competition, and Sidmouth Folk Festival still require some support and a channel of communication with the Council. There are good examples of where such schemes can help in the renaissance of community activity in small locations.
- xii) Community Arts initiatives (Excite and Banners in Exmouth, Big Jurassic in Honiton, proposed ‘street art’ in Seaton) have been supported through officer time and money. Whilst these might have been visible to the public only in terms of their output they have each involved groups of young people and often those with particular difficulties. Hence their community development role cannot be ignored.
- xiii) Cultural industries locally, especially sales of arts and crafts, are not only economically important in their own right but also in the tourism that they increasingly bring. Projects such as Devon Artists network, ‘Nine Days of Art’ link local professionals (often those just starting out) and bring them to the attention of a wider audience (and customers). The Cultural Economy is a major new force we cannot ignore and is a destination theme under the new thinking for tourism.

- xiv) Our many local museums are run through our local communities. In order to attract vital grant funding they must have curatorial advice in order to get accreditation. Since the loss of our previous qualified advisor, and the loss of the post he vacated, we have commissioned a small amount of work via Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. In turn the work, progress and output of this advice needs to be monitored.
- xv) Whilst it is intended that the Manor Pavilion complex will transfer to LED, the board of the Trust has requested that this transfer be delayed until the autumn. Thus the management and development of the facility remains with the Communities Directorate at present. There is the opportunity, now being taken, to build on the community benefit (and hence income indirectly of this facility).
- xvi) We are approached for East Devon's view and engagement in cultural issues (eg a recent Culture SW consultation event). We have the opportunity to shape the agenda only if we have the capacity and knowledge to do so.
- xvii) As Cranbrook takes shape there will be an early need to ensure it develops a community spirit of its own. Experience of other new towns show this only happens through facilitation in the early stages.
- xviii) The volunteers supplying 'audio description' for plays at the Manor Pavilion (and elsewhere) are fostered by, and receive support and encouragement from, the arts development team.

### 3 **Capacity and the future**

As can be seen the range of roles has not significantly diminished. Many of the functions were previously supported by the Head of Leisure and Lifestyles, prior to transfer, but they have now (other than leisure facility management) been added to the remit of the Corporate Director, and also the Portfolio holder. This means that beyond the immediate transition we will not be able to support the same range of activities sustainably.

The 4 remaining staff from the 'Arts' side of Leisure, all of whom work part-time (1.85 F.T.E. in total), are at capacity in dealing with a range of functions that previously used the time of almost twice that number of staff. Their only option is to reduce the levels of service. Whilst we can call on advice from LED we cannot call on significant time from them, which leaves a significant capacity issue. Ironically making arrangements to reduce costs, increase income, or disengage from services will also cost officer time.

These residual issues were initially brought to the attention of Members in the consultants report about transfer to a Leisure Trust and subsequently discussed at Committee. The proposal for replacement resources was not funded in the budget process. The proposal to draw together all of the staff from across the authority (engaged on cultural activities) into one team, was also rejected. This would have given some 'critical mass' and consistency that cannot be achieved with 4 part time officers, working very different hours, and part of the time of the Director and Portfolio holder.

At this point therefore Members seem to have a number of options before them:

1. **To disband or further minimise the residual cultural role**

This will mean a cut in almost all of the services we are able to give to others, the ability to attract grant aid and the ability to deliver against the government's agenda. A small residuum of matters would need to be tackled by the Director alongside his other roles.

2. **To retain the present minimal staff quota** and focus on a few key activities.

However this gives no capacity for ad-hoc demands, to develop initiatives, to support or retain staff effectively. It will also mean that those elements of service which we must drop could cause disappointment to the community groups which they serve.

3. **To provide additional capacity and expertise**

This option was offered to Members as part of the budget exercise but was not supported. Obviously there would be a continuing cost to such an approach, and seeking reinvestment in arts and sports could be seen as contrary to the Leader's Prioritisation exercise.

4. **To combine teams across a 'Cultural Services agenda' to create critical mass**

This option is likely to look at combining staff and management between the various small 'cultural' services across the Council. The obvious linkages could be with the Countryside team, and the residual tourism function. A merger could give a consistent and full-time concentration on managing the service with better support to the range of part-time staff. It could also help to apply better concentration of skills, and creative exploration, to a lesser number of initiatives.

There is an opportunity to create a new and unique East Devon approach around the use of our special environment. Thus a team around "community engagement through culture and countryside" could create a themed approach appropriate to a mainly rural District with a richness of natural heritage. Such a creative approach would support our corporate strategy 'community engagement' outcome and help avoid the allegations of or 'nature for nature's sake' which still are aimed at the teams.

5. **To put the work out to an external agency**

Whilst LED may be able to tackle some of this work other parts would result in a conflict of interest. There would be no apparent cost benefit in the transfer and indeed if a service level was specified there may be a need for a cost increase (this was the situation when another community infrastructure organisation was asked to look at the possibility of transfers). Adding 'Arts development and management' to LED's role would dissipate its single focus.

Outsourcing would mean that the Council itself may not be seen as the body delivering on these 'quality of life' issues.

6. **Disseminate the residual work to different services**

This is unlikely to create additional capacity or reduce costs and may be an unwelcome additional burden and distraction from core work.

#### 4. **Conclusion**

Despite the loss of the facilities management role to LED the Council retains the responsibility for cultural development and strategic direction. Furthermore the opportunity for community development through culture is clearly an element the Council should engage with. These are not roles the Council can easily abdicate even if it sheds further operational work. Following transfer to LED there is little capacity or scope for flexibility within the minimal, part-time, direct staffing.

As such the Council must determine whether it is going to give some sustainability to these matters (whether through modest investment or by amalgamation), or whether it wishes to take a deliberate decision to cease certain functions, and thereby free up time for other continuing Council obligations.

There is no doubt that the services provided under the previous Leisure and Lifestyles Service were well received by the public, and both in terms of their emphasis on health and community engagement that they fitted well within the Communities Directorate. After the transfer of facilities management to LED the residual roles are better highlighted but the officer capacity and flexibility to 'absorb' these has also been hugely reduced.

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#### **Legal Implications**

No comment.

#### **Financial Implications**

No clearly stated financial implications are stated within this report. However, a number of options identified would require additional funding and if recommended should be the subject of a further detailed report.

#### **Consultation on Reports to the Executive**

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#### **Background Papers**

- Consultants report on transfer to a Trust

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