Guide to the Strategic Policy Framework for Culture in Tower Hamlets
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1 BACKGROUND

1.1 TOWER HAMLETS CULTURAL STRATEGY 2003
In line with guidance from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and as part of Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) requirements, Tower Hamlets adopted a Cultural Strategy in March 2003. The BVPI requiring local authorities to produce Cultural Strategies has since been deleted. However, in order to develop and deliver cultural services effectively, and to comply with the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) for Culture, there is a need to maintain a clear strategic cultural policy framework within which to operate, although not necessarily in the form of a bespoke cultural strategy.

1.2 RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS
Four years after adoption of the Cultural Strategy much has changed, both nationally and locally. In 2004 DCMS published *Leading the Good Life*, proposing the integration of cultural and community planning. There is increasing recognition of the contribution that cultural and leisure activities make to the Shared Priorities agreed by Government and the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2002. In addition, the Audit Commission established a Culture Block within the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) framework. Funding arrangements have changed and cultural services have a key part to play in delivering Local Area Agreements (LAA’s).

Locally, too, there has been progress and change, with a number of significant achievements against the agenda set out in the Cultural Strategy. Since the adoption of the Cultural Strategy significant changes have occurred in national, regional and local priorities, which impact on the overall cultural offer in East London. Besides the obvious opportunities and challenges presented by the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, other significant changes include the development of the Thames Gateway, the Mayor’s London Plan, and a range of sub-regional cultural developments.

1.3 CULTURAL STRATEGY ACTION PLAN
At the time of drafting the Cultural Strategy in 2003 an Action Plan was developed. It was presented to the Corporate Management Team and since March 2003 Cultural Services have delivered against this Action Plan internally. In summer 2004 an external evaluation of progress against the Action Plan was undertaken, which showed that the majority of activities within the Action Plan were completed.

Since the original Cultural Strategy has been adopted, we have made significant progress towards making Tower Hamlets a better place for everyone to participate in and enjoy cultural activity.

Annual attendance at our cultural facilities is increasing significantly with nearly 2m visits to our Idea Stores and libraries, about 1.4m visit to leisure centres, 12m visits to parks, and an ever expanding festivals and events programme, which in 2006/07 saw us support over 75 festivals and events.

We have invested significantly in our cultural facilities by

- Opening three further Idea Stores in Whitechapel, Chrisp Street and Canary Wharf, bringing the total to four.
- Opening Mile End Park Leisure Centre and Mile End Park Football Development
Centre.

- Refurbishing York Hall and completely re-designing the Turkish baths to provide spa and leisure facilities fit for the 21st century.
- Rolling out the first two years of our parks and open space improvement programme, which has seen parks in all LAP’s refurbished and improved.

These improvements have been recognised at national level. Cultural Services in Tower Hamlets are considered to be a good three star service under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework for local authorities. Our Idea Stores have won an award from the Academy for Sustainable Communities for the innovative way in which they deliver library and learning services and engage with the communities they serve. Five of our parks now hold Green Flags, a national award for well maintained parks, which provide facilities people want.

But more importantly, Tower Hamlets’ residents are more satisfied than ever with the cultural facilities and services available in the borough. 65% of residents are satisfied with our parks (up from 57% in 2003/04), 52% are satisfied with leisure and sports facilities (up from 44%), and 61% (up from 43%) are satisfied with libraries and Idea Stores.

1.4 CULTURAL STRATEGY REVIEW (2006)

A further review was carried out in autumn 2006 recommending that the Strategy be updated to address policy changes and incorporate a Priority Plan. It further concluded that the basic observations made in the Strategy and the themes that emerged from the process are still relevant in 2006, and for the foreseeable future, and can continue to serve as an over-arching framework for the development of culture (using the widest definition of that term, adopted in the Strategy) during the next 5 years.

In addition, the need to respond at a strategic level to ongoing and emerging opportunities and challenges arising from demographic changes and associated urban development in Tower Hamlets was identified. While growth and increased development undoubtedly place pressure on existing services and facilities, development pressure also lever in substantial amounts of funding through planning gain contributions. A cultural policy framework with clear priorities for capital investment needs will provide an evidence base for entering into negotiations with developers and is vital to support officers from Development & Renewal in this process.

Instead of producing a new Cultural Strategy the review recommended the adoption of a Strategic Policy Framework for Culture in Tower Hamlets building on the strengths of the original Cultural Strategy (2003).

2 PURPOSE

This Guide to the Strategic Policy Framework for Culture in Tower Hamlets serves as a guide to a number of policy and strategy documents, which together form the framework for the delivery of cultural services in Tower Hamlets. The main aim of this set of documents is:
To develop a flexible cultural policy framework for Tower Hamlets, which will support the Community Plan, the Local Development Framework and the Local Area Agreement process, guide service delivery and development, and inform future investment priorities.

The Strategic Policy Framework for Culture in Tower Hamlets consists of a range of separate but interlinked documents as listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Status/last update</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Cultural Strategy</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sector Specific Strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Open Space Strategy</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Play Matters in Tower Hamlets</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Idea Stores Strategy</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Sport &amp; Physical Activity Strategy: Seizing the Moment</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Playing Pitch Strategy</td>
<td>Under development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Arts and Events Strategy (to be developed)</td>
<td>To be developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Public Art Policy (to be developed)</td>
<td>To be developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Olympic and Paralympic Strategy and Programme</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Guide outlines the reasons for adopting a Strategic Policy Framework for Culture in Tower Hamlets and highlights the interdependencies between the four key elements of the framework.

3 THE STRATEGIC POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURE IN TOWER HAMLETS

In order to develop the Strategic Policy Framework for Culture in Tower Hamlets the 2006 review recommended the following steps.

3.1 PARTIAL UPDATE OF THE ORIGINAL CULTURAL STRATEGY

Chapter 2: Setting the Scene of the original Cultural Strategy outlines the policy context within which cultural services in Tower Hamlets operate. Much has changed in this area since 2003 and this chapter requires updating to reflect national, regional, sub-regional
and local developments. The Policy Context for Cultural Services: An Update to the 2003 Cultural Strategy for Tower Hamlets (2007), provides an update on policy developments affecting cultural services and should be read in conjunction with the relevant chapter of the original Cultural Strategy.

3.2 IDENTIFICATION OF A SET OF SECTOR-SPECIFIC STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

A set of sector-specific policy documents has been identified to focus on the strategic development and delivery of services in the areas of (a) Parks, Open Spaces and Play, (b) Libraries and Idea Stores, (c) Sport and Physical Activity, and (d) Arts and Events. Some of these strategic documents have already been produced; others are currently under development, while the Arts & Events Strategy will be developed in the near future. The sector-specific strategic documents are each supported by an action plan.

3.3 DEVELOPMENT OF A PRIORITY PLAN

While the process of developing and delivering some and updating other sector-specific strategies and action plans is ongoing, there is a need to produce a Priority Plan to guide the strategic development and delivery of Cultural Services as a whole. The strategic priorities included in the Priority Plan emerge from the existing sector-specific and overarching strategic documents (Local Development Framework and Olympic and Paralympic Strategy and Programme).

The Priority Plan for Cultural Services links the contribution of culture to the Council’s key priorities. The purpose of this Priority Plan will be:

- To identify the key priorities to be addressed by each of the Cultural Services over the period 2007 to 2010 in support of corporate priorities, particularly in light of the Tower Hamlets 2012 Strategy and Programme. From 2010 onwards, cultural planning will be integrated into the new Community Plan for Tower Hamlets.
- To set a timetable for the development of the remaining and reviewing existing sector-specific strategies and action plans.
- To provide a framework for identifying investments priorities for Planning Contributions and other external funding. The Priority Plan will identify priorities for negotiation purposes only and proposed priorities can only be taken forward if funding becomes available. If funding cannot be secured priorities relating to investment will not necessarily be able to proceed.

3.4 A VISION FOR CULTURE IN TOWER HAMLETS

The Community Plan sets out the vision the Council and its partners have for the Borough as being:

- A better place for living safely
- A better place for living well
- A better place for creating and sharing prosperity
- A better place for learning, achievement and leisure
- A better place for excellent public services
Culture is central to supporting all of these corporate priorities. But culture also enhances people’s quality of life, brings enjoyment and contributes to people’s experience and understanding of the places where they live and the people they meet.

The vision for culture in Tower Hamlets underpins the Community Plan vision:

To build on Tower Hamlets’ position as the culturally vibrant and rapidly changing heart of East London making the Borough a place with excellent cultural activities and facilities, where people from all backgrounds can participate, share cultural experiences, explore diversity, enjoy high quality of life, and harness the economic benefits of cultural activity.

In broader terms, the strategic vision will help us to build a place where:

- Cultural activities and facilities reflect the needs and aspirations of our diverse communities, and are attractive and accessible to the young and the old, to people from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, to people of all faiths, to those who have disabilities, and to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

- People of all backgrounds live together in harmony, enjoying and sharing cultural and sporting experiences.

- Building on the rich provision of excellent cultural facilities and activities within the Borough we promote understanding between established and new communities by celebrating everyone’s contribution through arts, sports, heritage, parks, and libraries.

- We maximise participation of children and young people in the Sporting and Cultural Olympiad, providing opportunities to showcase their talent and supporting opportunities for training and volunteering to ensure young people can access future employment opportunities arising from the Olympic and Paralympic Games and the future development of the cultural sector.

The strategic vision is supported by the themes identified in the original Cultural Strategy. As highlighted by the 2006 review of the Cultural Strategy the themes remain valid and can serve the Borough for the foreseeable future.

The table below sets out how the Cultural Strategy themes link to the Council’s key priorities identified in the Community Plan. Chapter 6: Summary of Consultation and Chapter 8: Conclusions draw out the main findings from consultation and desk research carried out as part of the strategy development process. Based on these key findings, the Cultural Strategy identified four main themes:

**Cultural Cohesion**
Enabling and promoting cultural activity that encourages tolerance, understanding and respect for people from all communities to come together and enjoy life to the full.

**Cultural Celebration**
Promoting a sense of well-being through the celebration of individual and collective identities across all communities within the Borough.
Cultural Prosperity
Promoting cultural activities as a key driver in the regeneration of the social, economic and environmental prosperity of the Borough.

Cultural Partnerships
Delivering through the direct provision and the development of partnerships, cultural activities with a range of organisations, which have an impact upon the well-being of individuals and communities.

In the light of the impetus the Olympics have brought, the 2006 review has identified a fifth theme, which can be traced back to the original consultation findings:

Cultural Well-being
Increasing the levels of physical activity and improving health amongst residents at all levels - those previously inactive, those participating in sport regularly, and those who are elite athletes in their sport.

Together these five Cultural Strategy Themes will form the basis of the Priority Plan, and support the Council’s key priorities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Strategy consultation &amp; research findings</th>
<th>Cultural Strategy theme</th>
<th>Community Plan theme</th>
<th>LAA block</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Social cohesion</td>
<td>Cultural Cohesion</td>
<td>Living Safely</td>
<td>Safer &amp; Stronger Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide and protect cultural infrastructure for future generations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of identity</td>
<td>Cultural Celebration</td>
<td>Learning, Achievement &amp; Leisure</td>
<td>Children &amp; Young People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Making services more relevant to the needs of young people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improving sense of well-being</td>
<td>Cultural Well-being</td>
<td>Living Well</td>
<td>Healthier Communities &amp; Older People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overcoming barriers to participation</td>
<td>Cultural Prosperity</td>
<td>Creating &amp; Sharing Prosperity</td>
<td>Economic Development &amp; Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensuring local and sub-regional facilities serve local people and attract tourism to the Borough</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improving partnership working</td>
<td>Cultural Partnerships</td>
<td>Excellent Public Services</td>
<td>Cross-cutting themes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improving communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Making it Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop various cultural services so they build on existing cultural zones</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. Making it Local</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Excellent Public Services</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4 CONCLUSION

This paper provides an overview of the suite of documents that make up the *Strategic Policy Framework for Culture in Tower Hamlets*. It identifies linkages between the various documents, highlights recent policy developments, and demonstrates how the framework contributes to the Council’s key priorities.

The framework as a whole will serve Tower Hamlets’ Cultural Services as a strategic tool for decision-making and future investment. In the light of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, a clear strategic framework is very important, to ensure emerging opportunities are seized whilst delivering the Council’s long term vision for the Borough.