

CITIZEN LED INSPECTION

FEEDBACK REPORT FOR WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL

Community Arts

APRIL 2014

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1 INTRODUCTION TO FEEDBACK

This feedback report has been produced following an inspection of **Community Arts** in West Lothian Council against the Citizen Led Inspection framework and using the framework rating system.

The inspection process took place over 12 days in **March 2014** and included the following steps:

- Evidence review and site visit planning
- Onsite observation and interviewing
- Consensus on strengths, areas for improvement and scores by the citizen inspection team

The inspection team comprised:

- **Mr Peter West**
- **Mrs Ann Pike**
- **Mr John McCulloch**

During the inspection process every effort has been made by the team to ensure that conclusions and feedback are based on fact and are the result of consensus. The team have interviewed more than **20** people individually or in groups and visited **3** locations.

2 KEY STRENGTHS

Community Arts has demonstrated good practice/performance in the following areas:

- The Service has a hard working and committed staff
- Strong commitment to showcasing the excellent facilities at Howden Park Centre and Linlithgow Burgh Halls for the benefit of the community
- Strong commitment to provide targeted activities in a way that benefitted the harder to reach communities.
- The team were focussed on the key outcomes for WLC and well aware of the key purpose for their Service

3 KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Community Arts requires improvement in the following areas:

- The way it collects, collates, analyses and uses results
- Interaction with Key Partners

4 RATING

The Citizen Inspection team have rated the service as follows:

CRITERION	RATING (✓)				
	<u>E</u> (Excellent)	<u>G</u> (Good)	<u>A</u> (Adequate)	<u>W</u> (Weak)	<u>U</u> (Unsatisfactory)
1 LEADERSHIP		✓			
2 SERVICE PLANNING		✓			
3 PEOPLE RESOURCES		✓			
4 PARTNERS & OTHER RESOURCES			✓		
5 SERVICE PROCESSES		✓			
6 CUSTOMER RESULTS			✓		
7 KEY RESULTS				✓	

5 TERMS OF THE REPORT

1 LEADERSHIP

Leaders:

- Identify a clear direction for the service
- Set long-term outcomes
- Are open, honest and accountable
- Put in place scrutiny to challenge performance

The core purpose of the service was well laid out and supported by a clear structure. The Vision from the top of the Council has definitely cascaded down to this Service and most staff readily spoke about the existence of the Council's new trimmed down Single Outcome Agreement.

Roles and responsibilities were very clear within the structure and staff spoke passionately about what they were accountable for within the Service.

Staff are generally very positive about how they view the roles and responsibilities of the Leadership and the values the Council want them to exhibit.

Leaders are very open and honest about the Service. They were very helpful in terms of assisting us in carrying out this inspection, accommodating our planned and ad hoc requests for information.

Leaders are aware of the challenges that exist and are actively trying to do things to overcome them. There are opportunities for Leaders to have a greater influence and ultimately be supported by other areas of the Council to help them become financially independent as a commercial entity in line with one of their core responsibilities.

There are opportunities to look longer term in the setting and reviewing of plans, activities and initiatives to meet the long term outcomes of the Council.

There was some evidence of how service performance is communicated to customers for example through 'You said - We did' Notice boards. There is a structured reporting system in place for internal reporting to Council and Elected members but the Team felt there were other opportunities to influence directly the very specific issues Community Arts experience which impact customer service. One example of this is the planned shutdown of IT systems when staff and customers actively require these to access offerings in Community Arts venues.

Recommendations

- Leaders should make the long term vision for the Service and its venues more transparent. This should make planning, target setting and monitoring more effective.
- Leaders should maximise on the existing creativity within the Service to drive innovative solutions for short term challenges and long term vision.

Rating: GOOD

2 SERVICE PLANNING

The service:

- Develop clear strategies
- Has effective annual planning that outlines the key activities
- Uses reliable tools and methods to engage and consult with customers
- Sets and meets targets for performance in all the key areas of activity

West Lothian Council has plans and policies in place that set out how it intends meeting the Scottish Government's national priorities and the local Single Outcome Agreement. The Council has produced a Corporate Plan to show how it will deliver 'Better Outcomes' from 2013 to 2017.

The Area Services Management Plan outlines all the planned activities for Community Regeneration and, in turn, Community Arts has produced a Team Plan. This plan sets out Community Arts' aims, service structure, its partners, outcomes, priorities and activities. It also sets out its activity budget and actions, as well as listing key performance indicators. Individuals within the service have their own work plans. These are reviewed annually, though revision is more regular, for example in monthly meetings.

The most recent draft of the Community Arts Team Plan (2014/15) indicates that Community Arts will engage actively with customers, and potential customers, to ensure that its services are accessible and focussed on their needs and preferences. It will do this by considering the outcomes of this inspection, by interpretation of the information from the Annual Survey of West Lothian Citizens Panel, and by collecting information from customers' surveys and focus groups. This is listed in a 'Customer Consultation Schedule,' although this contains no mention of Linlithgow Burgh Halls.

Community Arts has a range of targets that it strives to meet annually. Progress on meeting targets is reported quarterly. Internal communication of this is clear and consistent, though this is not so apparent externally.

The CLI team feels that the Service's involvement and engagement with customers in seeking their opinions in planning and decision making is weak. Customer questionnaires or surveys with a very low response rate produce unreliable or meaningless results. Some targets have unrealistically high scores and appear easily achieved without challenging the service to improve.

Recommendations

- The Service should consider how it can improve the Customer Consultation Schedule to collect more complete and meaningful data from existing customers and stakeholders, and also how it can gather more meaningful input from potential customers, and feed this productively into its planning process.
- Some targets should be reassessed. Target scores of (e.g.) 96% and actual (quarter) scores of 100% imply nothing needs to change. Whilst the facilities being assessed are undoubtedly of a very good quality, scores are skewed, often because of sample size.

Rating: GOOD

3 PEOPLE RESOURCES

The service:

- Identifies the right people resources it needs to achieve outcomes
- Sets out desired qualities and acceptable behaviours for staff
- Reviews and improves individual people's performance
- Communicates effectively with people
- Involves people in reviewing and improving the service

The Community Regeneration Manager is fully aware of the importance of Community Arts within the community at large and has the responsibility for other services which have a similar interface with the public. The Community Regeneration Manager has developed a good mix of staff and staff abilities in order to provide a comprehensive arts programme, encourage wider usage of its services and facilities and, also, meet a number of the prescribed Better Outcomes.

The Community Arts Coordinator is fully focused on the management of the team and the council's policies and is currently working with both the Head of Service and staff to create new, better and more innovative and cost effective strategies for the service. Because of the range of services on offer, staff work in two separate and distinct buildings and are loosely divided into separate teams.

One team operates from Linlithgow Burgh Halls where the Venue Coordinator has inculcated an excellent sense of teamwork, loyalty and togetherness but this otherwise ideal working environment is marked by a feeling of isolation. Unfortunately, there appears to be more to this other than purely geographical considerations. Also, there appears to be a particular grievance revolving around differing overtime rates for staff with differing job descriptions. Fortunately, this does not seem to have spilled over into personal working relationships.

The other teams work out of the Howden Park Centre where staff accommodation could be better. However, as such, the officers come into direct contact with the Coordinator and each other daily. The teams liaise well with each other and appear fully focused on their respective responsibilities. Many of the staff are personally involved in the arts and between them have an expertise in most, if not all, the arts.

Given the council's current long term financial strictures and the various commercial aspects under control of Community Arts it is important that management also has direct business experience and knowledge, whether directly or indirectly, but it is unclear the extent to which this is the case.

The Team are still unclear how the business plans are established and how appropriate staff contribute and commit to them.

There is no hard evidence of how values are communicated but the Team have been impressed with the levels of customer care and genuine concern shown by all staff within Community Arts and it is obviously something which has been encouraged and driven from the top down by personal example and expectation. There was some evidence of low staff morale, caused, for example, by negative comments in surveys, or by lack of praise from management.

Some staff members spoke of regular quarterly reviews and were of the opinion that their views were acknowledged and listened to. Use is also made of a Staff Suggestions Box.

There is evidence of skills development, identification and planning but although PRPDs have been mentioned there is no hard evidence of individual improvement programmes. Also, training seems to be provided on an ad hoc basis and not necessarily timely.

Interviews with Community Arts management team and officers identified the following aspects of the management team's approach to managing and developing its staff

Strengths

- Staff in all areas have a positive attitude to work
- For the most part work well as a team
- Genuinely believe in Customer Care
- Staff have a passion for 'the Arts'

Areas for improvement

- The sense of isolation at Linlithgow Burgh Halls
- Knowledge of the commercial aspects relating to the enterprises it has under its control
- PRPDs should be deployed more consistently

Recommendations

- The service should improve communication with staff at Linlithgow Burgh Halls, with a view to improving staff morale.
- Management should seek to improve its knowledge, understanding and profitability levels by ensuring that suitable commercial and entrepreneurial skills are introduced to the service.
- A review of the staff overtime rates should be carried out to ascertain whether any anomalies can be resolved to ensure that staff believe that they are being treated equitably.

Rating: GOOD

4 PARTNERS & OTHER RESOURCES

The service:

- Manages partnerships to add value for the customer
- Manages finances to deliver quality services sustainably
- Uses information and knowledge to support and enhance service delivery
- Uses assets (land, buildings, vehicles and equipment) to optimum effect

The Service works with a range of partners. Some are sources of funding for many of the Service activities, whilst others are organisations or facilities funded to assist the Service in delivering its outcomes.

Included in the partners the Service considers 'key' partners are; Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, National Youth Choir of Scotland, NHS Lothian, Regal Community Theatre, and Firefly Arts Ltd.

Effectiveness and value provided by funded partners is scrutinised regularly. The Service and its partners all recognise they are working within tight budget constraints. There is some evidence of tensions and pressures within some partner organisations. These centred around uncertainty of continuity and level of funding which restricts longer term planning, overlap or duplication of offerings, and comparative level of funding.

The Service has a net Revenue Budget of £767,730. Over half of this is invested in various aspects of its Community Arts Programme, ensuring that everyone in West Lothian has the opportunity to experience the social, economic, educational, environmental, health and creative benefits of the Arts. Significant (net) amounts allow the provision of high quality facilities and arts programmes for the people of West Lothian at Howden Park Centre (£223,823) and Linlithgow Burgh Halls (£110,147). There have been difficulties with the previous catering lessee at Linlithgow Burgh Halls, and changes have been made recently in the operation of Howden Park Centre Bistro. The Service is developing business plans which will identify opportunities to diversify the business and increase income generating opportunities and profitability, including at both venues.

Staff within the Service have a range of backgrounds and experience and draw on this to support service delivery. Where relevant, staff liaise with their counterparts in similar services and commercial enterprises throughout Scotland (and beyond) to keep their information and knowledge base 'current.'

The Service has two high quality facilities at Howden Park Centre and at Linlithgow Burgh Halls. The Service recognises that both facilities have yet to reach their optimal capacity. They are considering the option of engaging an external Business Consultant to explore the opportunities to expand their operations at these venues¹.

Some limitations were noted at Linlithgow Burgh Halls, such as lack of ventilation or air conditioning when windows have to be closed because of (music) noise affecting local residents when any evening function is taking place, poor acoustics for speeches or performances in the high roofed refurbished rooms, and lack of, or limited, public car parking.

It was noted that some of the tourist information and interaction facilities were not in operation, and had not been for some time.

Recommendations

- The Service should engage constructively with partners to avoid duplication or overlap and ensure added value for customers.
- The Service should explore increasing partnership links with commercial and business enterprises, and with tourism based enterprises and organisations.
- The Service should continue in its efforts to maximise profitability from its very good facilities to ensure long term sustainability.

Rating: ADEQUATE

¹ At the feedback session on 25 April 2014 the service confirmed to the Team that they have since engaged a professional to undertake this work.

5 SERVICE PROCESSES

The service:

- Designs processes to meet the needs of customers
- Ensures processes are efficient and effective
- Delivers services to customers in the way they want
- Reviews the efficiency and effectiveness of processes
- Uses customer feedback as part of the review process

Community Arts services are delivered by both engagement activities and transactional activities. The Service has a compact team with roles assigned to deliver various aspects of this across the Service, including at its two venues.

The Service's main activities are:

- Provide high quality arts venues
- Provide high quality facilities for the arts
- Provide a diverse programme of arts activities for different customer groups
- Work in partnership to extend arts provision
- Work in partnership to reduce inequalities
- Support and develop the voluntary arts sector
- Provide arts grants
- Promote the arts

The Service has devised and utilises a range of processes and tools to deliver all aspects of its function. These include:

- Box office sales
- Marketing and publicity ranging from venue programmes to wedding facilities and bistro offerings
- Grants administration
- Liaison with partners and other stakeholders

The Service endeavours to ensure that processes are efficient and effective and uses a number of performance indicators to check on efficiency levels. It produces a budget annually, develops business plans, and sets a range of business and income targets to ensure sustainability and cost effectiveness. It has used workshops and action plans to identify waste and simplify processes.

It was noted that catering services at Linlithgow Burgh Halls were previously delivered by a lessee but that cafe provision there was now operated by the Service. This facility is competing with a number of established local outlets and

there was evidence that there is still considerable opportunity to increase the usage by the public.

Both the Bar and Bistro at Howden Park Centre and the cafe at Linlithgow Burgh Halls aim to provide a range of high quality food and beverage options which are value for money. The CLI found evidence that these aims are not being met consistently.

It was unclear how the financial management process works, in particular relating to Howden Park Centre bar and bistro.

The Service endeavours to actively engage customers in the delivery and re-design of its services to ensure that they are accessible, and focussed on their needs, by:

- Annually extracting information from the Council's 'Quality of Life Survey'
- Inviting customers and participants to complete questionnaires
- Seeking the opinions of focus groups
- Inviting Howden Park Centre audience members to complete an online survey or contribute in focus groups

The CLI Inspection Team felt that the number of customer questionnaires returned was, at times, statistically too small to give consistent, meaningful data.

The Service appears to receive only a small number of complaints in each quarter and these are recorded in the Council's 'Covalent' system.

Managers review processes and activities informally on an ongoing basis and formally on an annual basis, sometimes more frequently. There are monthly team meetings and, as can be expected in a small team, frequent, including daily, informal meetings and conversations amongst staff. This allows changes to be communicated easily and speedily. Staff email and notice boards are also used to inform staff of changes to service processes.

Staff receive some information about the need to be customer focussed, and further develop their skills in this through experience and contact with other experienced staff. There was limited evidence of systematic development of training in customer skills.

Overall the areas of good practice outweigh those that were judged to be adequate, or in one case weak.

Recommendations

- The Service should be more systematic in gathering data about customer satisfaction with processes and should consider how it collects more meaningful data about 'potential,' as opposed to existing, customer needs.
- The Service should ensure that all staff are systematically trained, and kept up to date, with the need to be customer focussed.
- The Service should continue to explore ways of increasing the use and cost effectiveness of the catering provisions at both Howden Park Centre and Linlithgow Burgh Halls.

Rating: GOOD

6 CUSTOMER RESULTS

The service:

- Are measuring the right thing(s) in relation to customer results and what is important to the customer
- Can show positive and sustained good performance over a period of three or more years
- Have set and met challenging targets
- Compare their own performance against performance leaders in other councils or organisations
- Can explain any dips in their performance or positive changes

The reported customer satisfaction score for year 2012/13 was 97% against a target of 96%.

The Service collects customer results through feedback forms and there are different forms depending on the activities being used by the customer. Data being collected is in line with the Council wide data collection requirements and the forms have been reviewed and updated over time. The results are aligned to other indicators including the SOA.

For the returns received the overall satisfaction is high and meeting or exceeding the targets set over most quarters. Quarterly returns were collated and communicated upwards.

The logic behind the target setting rationale could be explained more clearly. Return rates are small therefore one slightly dissatisfied customer can have a major impact on the final results.

The Service was able to explain all the variations presented and there was no evidence of any major areas of dissatisfaction.

The Service is reviewing how it can increase the amount of customer feedback it receives. However there was less focus on finding out from other organisations if they had found different or innovative solutions to getting customer feedback. There was little evidence of any comments being used (if they do indeed exist) from the bigger Council surveys or from the Citizens Panel on why people may not be using Arts venues.

The targets were not segmented despite there being different types of surveys and the results were not presented over three trend point years. This makes it

difficult to track satisfaction with some of the targeted groups and then make specific improvements based on their own feedback.

Targets are not projected into the future so the monitoring of any growing problem in sustainability of venues and programmes for the benefit of citizens of West Lothian is not obvious. Decisions cannot then be made on hard data.

There is evidence that too much staff time is taken up by collecting, collating and analysing surveys, and by the mechanism for dealing with customer complaints. This has a negative effect on staff morale.

Recommendations

- The way surveys are conducted should be reviewed and a new approach to gathering customer feedback should be developed that would give more meaningful statistics whilst recognising the reporting needs for WLAM, Customer excellence, etc. Some surveys should be streamlined to make them easier for customers to use.
- Questions asked in the surveys must be capable of being used in a meaningful way.
- The way results are collated should be improved in line with WLAM best practice by introducing trending over three years, segmentation according to the key processes or activities, key customer and stakeholder groups, and venues and arts programmes.
- The alignment of the key activities to increase attendances at venues and targeting hard to reach communities should be more explicit in the way results are being collated to keep a focus on existing and emerging gaps in achievements against agreed aims.
- The Service should reduce the number of indicators it is measuring and streamline how customer complaints are dealt with.

Rating: ADEQUATE

7 KEY PERFORMANCE RESULTS

The service:

- Are measuring the right thing(s) in relation to the key activities and the long-term outcomes
- Can show positive and sustained good performance over a period of three or more years
- Have set and met challenging targets
- Compare their own performance against performance leaders in other councils or organisations
- Can explain any dips in their performance or positive changes

The Service has two key indicators which are related to occupancy of rooms at both Howden Park Centre and Linlithgow Burgh Halls and these are, in turn, aligned to the SOA. There were no key indicators for the costs of running the venues, including catering services and not benchmarked against similar outlets where cafe facilities are offered.

Wedding hire could be compared internally as well as locally to see how competitive this particular service is or indeed if it is a viable long term service offering.

There are many other indicators being collated and monitored which appear disproportionate to the scale of this Service in terms of budget and staffing as a percentage of the overall Council budget.

There are some areas where the targets are not being met and there are plans in place to address this.

The 2012/13 management report included numbers of attendees for 2012/13 along with numbers participating in the Arts. However the Team were unable to compare these numbers in the context of overall targets that were to be achieved.

There were no obvious comparisons being made between non funded and funded venues to see if there are opportunities to learn different ways of working. However there are plans to buy in expertise to look at making venues more commercially viable.

Targets are not segmented and again, like customer results, this makes targeted improvements more difficult, which could lead to inefficiencies.

The Service felt it was difficult to benchmark themselves against others, particularly Local Authorities, as no one else has the same set up as WLC.

The Service could explain any peaks and troughs in results.

Recommendations

- The amount of reporting should be reviewed so there is more time available for key people to focus attention on improving relationships between partners, hard to reach customers, and potential customers, improving the income and long term sustainability of the services.
- The current performance indicators should be reviewed to concentrate on key metrics which really help the commercial and long term sustainability of our venues.
- The results should be improved to be in line with WLAM best practice.

Rating: WEAK