

# Culture inspections, Best Value, and Improvement

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# Overview

- A short history of audit and inspection
- Strengths and weaknesses of the Best Value approach
- Current position with regard to Culture in local authority assessments

# A quick history lesson

- Audit Commission today –
  - Came about in 1998 : Thatcher and Heseltine
  - extended the existing powers of the Commission
  - responsible for ensuring that public money is spent **economically**, **efficiently** and **effectively**, to achieve high quality local and national services for the public
  - an independent watchdog, provides information on the quality of public services.
  - as a driving force for improvement in those services, provides practical recommendations and spreads best practice
  - as an independent auditor, monitors spending to ensure that public services are good value for money.

## More history

- Two essential functions – audit and inspection
  - Oversight of local audit undertaken by District Audit
  - Current position from 1998 but over 100 years of audit history
  - Audit = compliance not improvement
- Inspection –
  - 1999 Local Government Act (aka "Best Value")
  - came into effect 1 April 2000
  - is integral the Government's modernising agenda
  - the Act requires local authorities to make arrangements for continuous improvement in service delivery
  - all services should be reviewed over 5 years
  - focus on Challenge / Compare / Consult / Compete

## Where from ?

- The Local Govt. Act 1989 (Section 208B), as amended, sets out the six principles that councils must observe - services provided by a council must:
  - meet the quality and cost standards
  - be responsive to the needs of the community
  - be accessible to those members of the community for whom the service is intended
  - achieve continuous improvement in the provision of services for its community
  - develop a program of regular consultation with its community in relation to the services it provides
  - report regularly to its community on its achievements in relation to the above principles

# Inspection today

- Best Value legislation –
  - still exists and councils required to continuously improve
  - but Best Value reviews not talked about – are they done?
  - and the 4 C's are rarely mentioned
- Inspection practice -
  - focus more on principles rather than process
  - continuous improvement is still a driver
  - no single reliance on Best Value Reviews and inspections
  - move from small single service inspections to sector wide
  - corporate assessments have increased in significance

# Best Value – strengths and weaknesses

- Strengths : Best Value has :
  - concentrated minds
  - shone a light on poor service and poor performers
  - made councils more aware
  - resulted in organisational change and modernisation
  - become a journey not a single set of processes
  - identified what works and what makes for success
  - established a baseline of organisational best practice
  - created a critical mass of “improvement people”
  - evolved in a short time to become more comprehensive

# Best Value – strengths and weaknesses

- Weaknesses – Best Value has :
  - relied on following BVR
  - not been “worst first” .....
  - become a burden and “taken over” councils
  - become expensive and resource consuming
  - not looked across councils but in service silos
  - led to cynicism and disillusionment in some councils
  - not, in itself, led to improvement
  - become an industry in its own right

# Evolution

- 2000 Best Value regime comes in – everyone learns the rules
- 2001 and 2002 – a wealth of service inspections
- 2002 Comprehensive Performance Assessment : the “new way”
  - Corporate assessment (inspection)
  - Data sets
  - Inspection scores
- 2003 and 2004 – new inspection methodologies – new rules
- 2003 and 2004 CPA for District Councils
- 2005 new CPA approach for single tier and county councils
- 2008 and beyond ..... ?
- Inspection not driving improvement :
  - Data, annual assessment, and CPA is

# Culture and current approaches

- Inspections :
  - cross service not single services
  - no longer determined by BVR
  - “freedoms and flexibilities”:
  - far fewer: no inspections in Excellent councils
  - very few in Good councils
- CPA :
  - a service block for culture
  - progress from 3 PI’s and a scored Plan in 2002
  - data driven : numerical PI’s not inspection judgements
  - a significant data shortage
  - a sector that doesn't easily measure itself
  - emerging focus on accessibility / participation / vfm



## Culture and current approaches

- An expanded CPA service block for culture but :
  - Still playing “catch up” with other sectors
  - Developing PI’s for the sector
  - Impact, benefit and “value” PI’s
- Self assessments :
  - Towards An Excellent Service
  - Inspiring Learning For All
- Realisation of cultural sector impact
- Huge challenge to demonstrate impact
- Greater critical mass and sign up

# Culture and current proposals

- Current proposals for performance management :
  - 2005 includes PI's covering :
    - Footpaths
    - Libraries
    - Public satisfaction with cultural services
- 2006 : as 2005 plus :
  - 5 year olds = 2 hours per week school sport
  - Adults 3 x 30 mins moderate exercise a week
  - Participation in LA sport and recreation
  - Access to sporting facilities drive / walk time
  - Volunteering in sport and recreation
  - Conservation Area management
  - Efficiency / utilisation measures

# Culture and current approaches

- Developing performance measures for :
  - Arts
  - Children's play
  - Tourism
  - Museums
  - Heritage
  - Public green space

# Culture and current approaches

- Outstanding challenges and issues :
  - Quality of performance data
  - Reliable and consistent collection
  - Validity and verification
  - Comparability between councils and types of councils
  - Measuring the right things – impact and value, not process
  - Lack of previous investment in performance measurement



## Contact

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