

# **Improving strategic commissioning in the culture and sport sector**

## **Guidance paper 1**

### **Needs Assessment**

**This is the first of three detailed guidance papers to support 'Understanding commissioning: a practical guide for the culture and sport sector'.**

# Needs Assessment

Needs Assessment is the foundation of the commissioning process.

The Needs Assessment will form the basis from which outcomes are identified, services are planned, resources committed and progress measured.

This section introduces the processes involved in Needs Assessment both for commissioners of culture and sport services and stakeholders including the community and potential providers. It covers:

- Introduction and Policy context
- Definition of Needs Assessment
- Methodology
- Main components of Needs Assessment
  - National and local strategic context
  - Quantitative analysis
  - Qualitative analysis
  - Analysis of existing provision
  - Gap analysis
  - Priority setting

## 1. Introduction and Policy context

Ideally and logically, the Needs Assessment for an area will be led by the Local Strategic Partnership and will inform all of the strategic commissioning for the area. Culture and Sport will be key participants in this, with the overall analysis and assessment including culture and sport for its own specific benefits as well as a contributor to other outcomes. Commissioners of culture and sport may also want to undertake supplementary assessments for more specific or localised circumstances, such as the play needs in a particular estate, recording and promoting local heritage or considering the development and use of a park. The needs assessment process is the same whatever the scale or scope. However, the more that can be done in partnership through the LSP, the better the opportunities for a shared understanding of needs and a shared commitment to outcomes and impact.

This is consistent with the direction of policy development over the last decade.

The Local Government Act 2000 gave local authorities the power and the duty to promote and improve the economic, social and environmental **well-being** of their area, working in partnership with other agencies. The Act not only placed a duty on Local Authorities, with partners, to prepare a Community Strategy but also for upper-tier authorities and Primary Care Trusts to prepare a Joint Strategic needs Assessment (JSNA). Guidance and legislation over this last decade have focussed on increased engagement with citizens and

community involvement in decision making across all public services with the underlying tenet of improving well-being.

The Lyons Inquiry, 2007, promoted '**place-shaping** – the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens'. In addition to building and shaping local identity, one of the components of place-shaping was identified as 'understanding local needs and preferences and making sure the right services are provided to local people'.

Alongside well-being and place-shaping, **value for money** (VFM) has been a key theme with an emphasis on greater efficiency linked to better outcomes. Lyons concluded that 'it is essential that public expenditure is allocated to best meet the needs and preferences of the community – delivering the right priorities rather than just doing them as cheaply as possible'.

The complex nature of many challenges and the different routes or pathways to addressing problems has led to the promotion of working in **partnership** and for agencies to seek the **links and inter-relationships** between their objectives, to address the different needs of individuals and communities in a creative and 'joined-up' way.

**Measuring performance** and **Inspection** regimes have mirrored these developments, with refinements of the Local Area Agreements (LAA) to include greater emphasis on resident perceptions and outcomes, and the move to the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) which focuses primarily on the prospects for better outcomes locally rather than the internal workings of individual organisations.

In this context, Needs Assessment is the fundamental foundation which underpins the way public authorities make decisions about services and resources. The logical link between Needs and Outcomes and Impacts is summarised below:

**Needs** - profile of the community, demographic trends, inequalities, experiences and expectations, supply and demand, gaps and priorities

**Inputs** – resources required to address needs

**Activities** – delivering services and activities to meet the priorities

**Outputs** – direct products which occur as a result of the programme of activities

**Outcomes** – specific changes which will occur for those taking part – either in the short or long term

**Impacts** – long-term changes for communities

## 2. Definition

Needs Assessment is a systematic process that identifies current and future cultural, sporting and well-being needs of the community.

It identifies the 'big picture' in terms of the needs and inequalities of the local population and identifies groups whose needs are not met or who experience poor outcomes.

It leads to the identification and agreement of priorities that will improve outcomes and reduce inequalities and informs service planning and commissioning strategies.

*(Note: adapted from Dept of Health JSNA and CLG Housing/social care/health resource)*

### Unpacking the definition

**systematic process** - This is a business process. It requires the gathering, analysis and assessment of data, information and evidence to inform priorities. It will be planned and managed with partners and will actively engage communities, providers, service users and non-users.

**current and future** - Short-term needs of three to five years will inform the Local Area Agreement and related business plans. Information on trends and trajectories will inform the longer-term future of five to ten years, strategic plans and strategic commissioning.

**culture, sport and well-being needs** - The assessment will include both the needs directly in relation to specific culture and sport opportunities and services, and broader needs which might be met through culture and sport activities, for example in relation to health, educational attainment, community cohesion or community safety. In both cases, the developmental needs of individuals to which culture can contribute include the need for new experiences, physical and mental health, self expression, participation, making a positive contribution, social interaction and play, relaxation and enjoyment, creativity, information and learning, personal development and challenge, gaining new skills and the need to belong. For communities, the needs also include building cohesion, shared community spaces, vibrant city or town centres, pride in local history and heritage and sustainable places to live and work.

**the community** – Local authorities will be predominantly concerned with their 'community of place' - their geographical community of local residents. Within that, there will be 'needs in common', and specialised needs for specific groups and communities of interest or individuals. Broader needs of those who work or visit the area, including children who travel in to schools and temporary residents may need to be included. Tourists may also be key visitors with implications for the local economy and environment. Working across local authority boundaries with neighbouring districts or boroughs may make sense if the local geography and patterns of movement and other

associations suggest that collaboration in the analysis is desirable. Where the services or facilities involve a larger catchment area, such as for a theatre, gallery or country park, then a sub-regional or regional analysis will be necessary. Defining the scope of 'the community' will be necessary at the outset. Thinking outside the defined geographic boundaries to explore needs will also open up potential opportunities for commissioning with neighbours.

**big picture** - The data should tell the story of the area, its people and the longer term future. It will include some 'horizon scanning' giving consideration to the impact of external events and major local developments.

**inequalities** – The analysis will draw out key issues in relation to the six 'equality strands' of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age and religion or belief. In addition, inequality is about 'closing the gap' between those whose circumstances mean that they have poorer life chances and are less able to access opportunities and those who are more able to do so. Frequently, but not exclusively, this is 'neighbourhood based', and the analysis will identify spatial as well as social aspects of deprivation and disadvantage.

**needs not met, poor outcomes** – Particularly through the examination of evidence in relation to current provision, there will be a picture of 'what works' and what fails to reach certain sections of the community. This will come through quantitative analysis but also through qualitative research into people's experiences and 'stories'. A 'well-used' facility or service may not necessarily be inclusive or accessible to everyone.

**identification and agreement of priorities** – There will be a clear decision making process based on the analysis and assessment made of the priorities.

**improve outcomes and reduce inequalities** – The Needs Assessment will be the baseline from which future outcomes and impacts will be measured – both for local management purposes and for external inspection.

**informs service planning and commissioning** – The Needs Assessment will be the foundation for service planning, the commissioning of services and their design and delivery. It is a continuous process where the analysis and assessment are updated and refined. It is the basis of commissioning for outcomes and the basis for measurement of those outcomes.

### 3. Methodology

Four fundamental aspects of the method underpinning the production of a Needs Assessment include:

**Leadership:** It is important that there is clear and visible leadership to the process. Political leadership is vital, through the cabinet lead on the LSP and the cabinet lead for culture and sport, but also engaging all members in an appreciation of the importance of this stage. At officer level this may typically

lie with the Corporate or Service Director, representing the work corporately and externally, with Heads of Service and service managers undertaking the work on a day-to-day basis. The leadership should be clear and up front, not buried or an afterthought.

**A project management approach:** Using a structured method, with built in accountability and controls is important. In practice, Needs Assessment is sometimes done as a 'back room' exercise by one or two policy or research staff, then passed on to the service managers to begin the work on Options Appraisal and Procurement, at which point a project board and team are established. It is essential to use those with competencies in handling and analysing data but as part of a wider team which is setting questions and lines of enquiry. In project management terms, Needs Assessment is part of the basic 'business case' for the future service and so should be developed in the context of a clear and disciplined structure to provide a firm foundation for future processes and to ensure understanding and ownership from key players.

**Engagement with the community and other stakeholders:** Communities should be involved in the Needs Assessment, as well as all parts of the Commissioning process. Carefully planned and relevant community engagement can empower people by giving them opportunities to voice their needs, enriching the picture and increasing the relevance and sustainability of the future services. Ensuring the engagement of hard to reach groups or those most distant from existing services will be a significant challenge so this requires creative thinking, planning, support and resourcing. The rewards will be significant in challenging previous assumptions and getting to the heart of what communities really need to improve outcomes and impacts for themselves.

The contributions of other statutory partners and providers from the public, private and third sectors, including practitioners, will add to the detailed understanding of community needs and to the understanding of gaps in service provision.

**Partnership:** Other partners from the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) will have data to contribute to the Needs Assessment and will also have needs and outcomes to which cultural activity can contribute, for example in relation to health, older people, children's services or community safety. Many LSPs have data and information sharing services which can provide the quantitative material and have community links and mechanisms to help with the qualitative research. Other partners will be undertaking Needs Assessments, parts which may be shared and used to avoid duplication of effort. Equally, other partners will have aspirations and expectations of cultural services as key players in local communities.

## 4. Main components of Needs Assessment

The key components of Needs Assessment are:

- National and local strategic context
- Quantitative analysis
- Qualitative analysis
- Analysis of existing provision
- Gap analysis
- Priority setting

The scope, depth and breadth of the analysis will be proportionate to the situation. These components give the main headings and potential contents of the Needs Assessment for an area. If the requirement is to look at needs in one neighbourhood or of one particular client group, then the scope and scale of the assessment will reflect this.

The components are generally sequential, though mapping of existing provision can be done at the same time as the quantitative analysis and the information used as background information to inform the stakeholder groups during the qualitative research.

### **Component One: National, Regional and Local strategic context**

This will include an overview and understanding of:

- national policies and initiatives relevant to culture and sport services and particular client groups or services where culture has an impact
- regional issues and how the region fares in relation to others in terms of its social, economic and environmental factors
- the local context for national and regional priorities and relevant locally determined priorities in the Sustainable Communities Strategy and other key corporate and partnership strategies

### **Component Two: Quantitative Analysis**

The quantitative analysis will describe the local area in demographic and socio-economic terms and place this in a national and regional context. It will describe local variations between neighbourhoods and Super Output Areas.

Much of this data is in the public domain, but sharing some data will need to be part of local Information Sharing Protocols and may not be able to be published in any detail (e.g. certain crime information) though could be shared where the protocol is in place. Other information may have been derived from local research (e.g. community cohesion surveys to determine social interaction).

Data sets on which to draw include:

### **Demography**

- **basic population numbers and projections**, analysed by age, gender, ethnicity and disability - usually drawn from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and with further analysis undertaken by Regional Observatories
- **supplementary local information** to bring the ONS statistics up to date such as:
  - PLASC – Pupil Level Annual School Census – an annual count of all children in state schools, including first language and ethnicity
  - NHS central register/Flag 4 – information derived from patient re-registration following a change of address, and a principal source of data used by the ONS to estimate internal migration
  - National Insurance Number registrations (NINo) – these are a necessary first step for employment/self-employment and for claiming benefits and tax credits. They provide a record of residential postcode, arrival and registration date, country of origin and age and inform the picture on international migration.
  - Workers Registration Scheme (WRS) – record information about migrants from the A8 (Eastern European) states
  - Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) – a record of all students in the UK including those whose country of usual residence is outside the UK
  - Electoral Register – includes nationality
  - National Asylum Support Service (NASS) – provides local data on asylum seekers currently receiving national support for accommodation or subsistence

### **Socio-Economic**

- **the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)** gives detail of deprivation overall and separates by different domains
- **Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)** and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) provide information on the overall employment rate, working age people on out-of-work benefits such as Jobseekers Allowance or Incapacity Benefit, average incomes and income distribution
- **Learning and Skills Council (LSC)** provides data on skill levels and deficits in the area, information on those 'not in education, employment or training' (NEETs)
- the Index of Deprivation also provides information on rural or urban isolation in relation to access to services

## ***Well-being factors***

There is a comprehensive range of data sets relating to other specific aspects of need, including:

- ***health*** data – covering a wide range of detail from the causes of hospital admissions, take-up of screening and preventative services, causes of early mortality, behaviours such as smoking, use of alcohol, participation in exercise, obesity, mental and sexual health.
- ***schools*** data in relation to educational attainment and progress from early years through key stages, information on truanting or exclusions
- ***crime and community safety*** information available from the council or the police's Crime analyst including locations, victims and perpetrators
- ***housing*** – including composition of dwelling stock, affordability, houses in multiple occupation, overcrowding, decency standard
- ***transport*** – car ownership, public transport patterns, traffic volume and speed, air quality
- ***community engagement*** – including participation in local elections, volunteering, density of community organisations and social networks.

## ***Culture and sport***

- ***Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)*** – Taking Part Survey, Active People data, baseline data for National indicators 8, 9, 10, 11
- ***Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)*** – Sport England and the Arts Council have Market Segmentation databases which enable predominant socio-economic groups in particular areas to be targeted with appropriate opportunities and ideas, such as transport improvements or crèche provision. Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC), the Play Council and English Heritage also hold data relevant to their area of specialism.

A facility improvement service is available from Sport England to nominated councils to assist them procure and develop new facilities. A Facilities Improvement Service Toolkit designed to support all those involved in the strategic planning of community sports facilities will be available from April 2009.

### **Component Three: Qualitative analysis**

Whilst much of the quantitative information will already exist and will 'simply' require analysing and cross-referencing, qualitative information may need to be specially instigated for the purpose of the Needs Assessment. Again, it is worth emphasising the benefits of working in partnership – to share the results of different agencies' research but potentially to share the investigations where appropriate, making the links between different aspects of need, but also sharing the resources and making the process easier for local people by avoiding duplication. Some aspects of the qualitative research, however, will be very specific and focussed towards particular issues or concerns.

There are opportunities to be creative and innovative in the qualitative process, and engage stakeholders through different participatory methods. Careful preparation and planning with a balance of structured and more open-ended opportunities for discussion will enable focus on some specific questions but leave space for new avenues and lines of enquiry. Ambitions and aspirations will be included in the qualitative analysis.

Qualitative needs analysis will include:

#### ***User and Non-User surveys***

- ***user surveys*** will provide a profile of current users and their views on the existing services and will indicate who is not using the service.
- ***non-user surveys*** will identify the profile of non-users and barriers to accessing services, which may range from lack of awareness of what is available to aspects of physical access, price/affordability, times the services are available and perception barriers - that the services 'are not for me'. Lack of time is frequently cited as a reason for not participating in cultural and sporting activities, but if this is unpacked, for example within a focus group, often people will find the time where the service is offered in a way that seems more accessible or meaningful to them.

#### ***Stakeholders***

- ***the community*** – focus groups may be organised on a geographical basis, with specific groups such as older people, people from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities, carers, young parents or people with learning difficulties, or mixed groups from across the population of an area. Groups with interests or experiences in common may feel more confident to contribute to the discussion, but mixed backgrounds may open up the debate. Focus groups require skilful facilitation, careful preparation and recording and need to include hard to reach groups and disadvantaged communities.
- ***providers*** – those currently involved in providing services will have

strong story to tell in terms of what works, barriers and difficulties and a lot of practical experience of working with the local community and with individuals. Large providers will bring a comparative perspective of how the local community needs differ from those they have experienced in delivering services elsewhere, whilst small, local providers, especially the voluntary sector and social enterprises, will have an in-depth knowledge of the characteristics of the local community and some of the particular dynamics of the area.

- **partners** – linking with strategic partners, including those involved in commissioning services in other agencies and departments in the council, will add significantly to the layers of understanding of local needs, interpret and enhance the quantitative data, and help build a holistic picture of the different issues affecting communities and individuals. It is worth thinking broadly about the range of partners involved – and building a network of contacts with other commissioners to facilitate a sharing and robustness in Needs Assessment. It will also raise the profile of the contribution of culture and sport with other commissioners.
- **practitioners** – local practitioners, including those from the third sector and user-led organisations, often have detailed knowledge of community needs. In addition to those working directly in culture and sport, those who could contribute to the Needs Assessment include youth workers, community centre staff, teachers, pre-school managers, schools improvement officers, health visitors, GPs or practice nurses, probation officers, community safety officers, housing estate managers, adult social care workers, planning and conservation officers and environmental health officers.

### **Case studies**

Collecting stories, of individuals or groups, and following through experiences will give some specific insights into needs, what produces positive outcomes and particular circumstances which lead to poor outcomes or needs being unmet.

Stories can be collected through focus groups or identified and followed up through the user and non-user research. They add a personal perspective to the picture, the real life experiences behind the data and analysis.

### **Component Four: Analysis of existing provision**

Knowing what is currently provided and the effectiveness of the range of services is the next component. This will take into account services provided by the council, other statutory partners, private sector and third sector, and is not just about dedicated buildings but also other services and shared facilities and spaces. Many Universities have facilities with public access, extended schools and children's centres provide cultural and sporting opportunities,

village and community halls have multi activities and diverse use and networks of clubs and societies engage year-round with residents of all ages and cultural backgrounds. These may not be fully documented, so it is advisable to open up the analysis to a broad spectrum of provision.

Analysing existing provision will include:

- **mapping** the current facilities and services – an audit and spatial analysis to assess overall ‘supply’, the proximity of services to different communities and a picture of the culture and sport offer in the area. This will include services provided by neighbouring councils, where residents are known to travel or could potentially travel and private and third sector run facilities.
- **comparators** - through benchmarking with the level of provision elsewhere, there will be an indication of ‘relative supply’. There are a number of sources of national benchmarking data including, for example, Sport England, the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) and CIPFA and some criteria for proximity and access which are included in national standards such as access to libraries or accredited facilities.
- **usage** – an analysis of usage, demographic breakdown and how that compares with the surrounding population. The analysis will also examine services where usage is low and where there is spare capacity as well as those in demand or oversubscribed. The information may be used to generate user profiles and audience segmentation – the Arts Council and Sport England have examples of work done nationally to analyse participation in the arts and sports and user types.
- **evidence of effectiveness** – collecting those indicators and evidence to show which services have been effective and which have been less satisfactory in producing positive outcomes. The analysis will also include cost effectiveness.
- **an Equalities Impact Assessment of current provision** – normally an Equalities Impact Assessment would be done on a policy or strategy, but the principle can be applied to the mapping to summarise impacts for different communities.

### **Component Five: Gap analysis**

The gap analysis will examine the balance of supply and demand or need – the existing provision against the quantitative and qualitative needs analysis. It is important that the gap analysis also takes account of future scenarios, linked to the analysis of population trends, such as an aging or more diverse population and risks associated with other social and economic trends, such

as increasing obesity or declining economic activity amongst particular groups.

The main elements of this component are:

- Measuring the **balance between supply and demand/need** and seeking to quantify this either in quantitative terms or in a description of unmet needs. Overprovision or under-usage will also be identified and quantified.
- An analysis of **potential providers and partners who are not part of the culture and sport commissioning landscape**, such as parts of health, education or third sectors
- An analysis of **groups or areas who are not engaged** in culture and sport activities
- An understanding of **future scenarios**. This will include aspects of supply, such as a reduction through the potential loss of a service or facility or an increase through new developments and opportunities, including opportunities for collaboration. Future scenarios will also include demographic and socio-economic trends and how these will affect needs and demands.
- The analysis may also throw up some **unanswered questions and unknown factors** which may require further research and investigation or further engagement with stakeholders.
- A **summary of the main issues** in terms of the needs in relation to future services, barriers and risks

### **Component Six: Priority setting**

This component will identify the needs and desired outcomes and formally decide on the priorities.

It is at this point that *analysis* based on information and evidence becomes an *assessment* which brings in an element of judgement and wider context to the process.

A key part of that judgement and context will be political and the choices that elected members want to consider based on robust information and evidence.

The priority setting will guide future services and resource deployment. For this reason, this critical phase will require an explicit and transparent process for identifying priorities, testing and agreeing them.

The main elements are:

- **Presentation of a summary** of the strategic context, quantitative and qualitative analysis, existing supply and gap analysis and a summary of the main needs for future services
- **Recommended priorities** and desired outcomes
- **Potential implications** for altering supply, different ways of delivering or collaborating – to be developed through the Options Appraisal process but important to include at this stage for transparency and clarity
- **Feedback to stakeholders** to test out the resonance of the Assessment and priorities
- **Decision on the priorities** – a formal process will be essential.

The Needs Assessment will then lead in logically to the Options Appraisal, Business Case and Procurement processes and is the foundation for future setting of outcomes and evaluation.

See also separate library of case study material.

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