

Evaluation of the London Local Authority Museum Improvement Programme

Final Report

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1.0 Introduction and methodology

- 1.1 The London Local Authority Museum Improvement Programme has been developed to enable and assist local authority owned museums to improve their capacity and profile. It is set in the context of the national improvement agenda for culture and sport identified in *'A Passion for Excellence – An improvement strategy for culture and sport'* and forms part of the wider work programme of the London Cultural Improvement Group. It aims to address capacity weaknesses and enable museums to better articulate the value of their work to key Council objectives, thereby strengthening their position and reducing their vulnerability to cuts and closures.
- 1.2 This paper reports on the evaluation of the London Local Authority Museum Improvement Programme. It has been commissioned by Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) London to establish if the goals of the Improvement Programme have been achieved and to inform the future planning and resourcing of improvement work for Local Authority museums in London.
- 1.3 As required in the project brief, the evaluation answers the following questions:
- to what extent have the goals of the Improvement Programme been achieved?
 - to what extent do people believe that self-assessment and peer led challenge were a valuable tool for learning, personal development and improvement?
 - to what extent do people believe that the improvement plans will lead to value-adding changes?
 - to what extent do people believe they have the skills to implement the identified improvements?
 - what could the network do to improve the future improvement programme?
- 1.4 The goals of the Improvement Programme are listed in full in Appendix A.
- 1.5 The evaluation report has been informed by information from the following sources:
- the project brief and background materials;
 - verbal feedback from the project team¹ and from Steve Wood, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) approved trainer;
 - a questionnaire distributed to the participating museum services by the project team on the training elements of the programme;
 - facilitated group discussions and/or telephone interviews by Yew Consulting with representatives from the participating museum services and their managers.

¹ Ben Travers, Museum Development Manager & Tina Morton, Improvement and Innovation Officer, MLA London

2.0 The Improvement Programme

2.1 Twelve museum services completed the improvement programme:

- Brent Museum, London Borough of Brent
- Bromley Museum, London Borough of Bromley
- Bruce Castle Museum, London Borough of Haringey
- Cuming Museum, London Borough of Southwark
- Greenwich Heritage Centre, London Borough of Greenwich
- Hackney Museum, London Borough of Hackney
- Hall Place, Danson House and Erith Museum, Bexley Heritage Trust
- Honeywood Heritage Centre, Little Holland House and Whitehall, London Borough of Sutton
- Kingston Museum, London Borough of Kingston
- Orleans House Gallery, London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames
- Redbridge Museum, London Borough of Redbridge
- William Morris Gallery and Vestry House Museum, London Borough of Waltham Forest.

2.2 Two other museum services started the programme. At the time of this evaluation Valence House Museum in Barking and Dagenham had undertaken a self assessment but had not completed the peer review process or produced an improvement plan. They therefore felt it was too early to be able to contribute to this evaluation.

2.3 Hounslow's museums service started the programme but withdrew at an early stage. The project team report that their reasons for withdrawal from the scheme relate to a change in their externally contracted culture service provider and a lack of staff capacity to participate in the programme.

2.4 The twelve participating services have:

- completed a self assessment of their service, including 360° review, using the 'Culture and Sport Improvement Toolkit' (CSIT) benchmark;
- participated in peer led challenge, both for their own service and in support of another service;
- developed a written improvement plan;
- submitted bids to the Improvement Fund provided by the London Museums Hub to implement specific improvements identified in their improvement plans.

2.5 Throughout the programme support has been provided to the participating services in the form of a formal training programme and local improvement networking events led by MLA London and the IDeA approved trainer.

3.0 Evaluation findings

- 3.1 This evaluation has been informed by the project questionnaire; group discussions or telephone interviews with the lead museums officers responsible for the improvement programme in each authority; interviews with service managers in each authority and verbal feedback from the MLA project team and the IDeA approved trainer. Key findings are set out below.

The project team questionnaire

- 3.2 A questionnaire was distributed by the MLA project team to all of the participating museums services relating to engagement in the programme and the training provided. Ten responses were received although not all questions were answered by all respondents and so total responses vary. The scale for responding to each question varied and so is also shown below.

Motivations and feelings about starting the programme

Scale: 1 - I felt obliged to attend to 5 - I was motivated by the objectives of the project

- 3.3 4 participants when starting the programme were motivated by the objectives of the programme, 3 rated their feelings at the mid point on the scale and 3 rated them at the lower end of the scale towards feeling obliged to attend.

Scale: 1 – It was a complete waste of time to 5 - Highly motivated about being involved in the programme.

- 3.4 After completing the training 9 participants felt highly motivated about being involved in the programme and 1 rated their feelings at the lower end of the scale towards it was a complete waste of time.

Effectiveness of the trainer and content of the training

Scale: 1 - Poor to 5 – Excellent

- 3.5 9 rated the effectiveness of the IDeA approved trainer as excellent or very good. 1 respondent rated effectiveness at the mid point between poor and excellent.
- 3.6 2 rated the content of the introductory event as excellent or very good, with 3 rating it at the mid point.
- 3.7 7 rated the content of the peer led challenge workshop as excellent or very good, with 2 rating it at the mid point.
- 3.8 8 rated the content of the improvement planning workshop as excellent or very good, with 1 rating it at the mid point.

Effectiveness of the resources

Scale: 1 – Not effective to 5 – Very effective

- 3.9 5 rated the effectiveness of the training resources in supporting their learning and participation in the programme as effective. 3 rated them at the mid point and 1 rated them towards the lower end of effectiveness.

Effectiveness of the training in developing skills and knowledge

Scale: 1- Not effective to 5 – Very effective

- 3.10 7 participants felt that the training provided them with adequate skills and knowledge to undertake self assessment, with 1 rating the adequacy of the training at the mid point. All 8 felt that the training provided them with the skills and knowledge to explain self assessment to their colleagues.
- 3.11 4 participants felt that the training provided them with adequate skills and knowledge to undertake 360 degree review, with 4 rating the adequacy of the training at the mid point. 5 participants felt that the training provided them with the skills and knowledge to explain 360 degree review to their colleagues with 3 rating the adequacy of the training at the mid point.
- 3.12 8 participants felt that the training provided them with adequate skills and knowledge to undertake peer led challenge, with 1 rating the training at the lower end of the scale towards inadequate. 7 participants felt that the training provided them with the skills and knowledge to explain peer led challenge to their colleagues, with 1 rating the adequacy of the training at the mid point and 1 rating it at the lower end of the scale towards inadequate.
- 3.13 8 participants felt that the training provided them with adequate skills and knowledge to undertake improvement planning, with 1 rating the adequacy of the training at the mid point. 8 participants felt that the training provided them with the skills and knowledge to explain improvement planning to their colleagues, with 1 rating it at the lower end of the scale towards inadequate.

Impact on the individual

Scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree

- 3.14 7 participants agreed or strongly agreed that they 'feel confident in implementing the improvement tools', 1 was neutral and 1 disagreed.
- 3.15 8 participants agreed or strongly agreed that they 'feel motivated to implement the improvement tools', 1 was neutral.
- 3.16 8 participants agreed or strongly agreed that 'participating in the programme has enhanced my personal development', 1 was neutral.
- 3.17 8 participants agreed or strongly agreed that 'participating in the programme has enhanced my professional development', 1 was neutral.

The discussion groups and telephone interview with museums officers

- 3.18 Two separate discussion groups were held with a total of 12 museums officers, representing 11 of the participating museum services.

Impact on improving the museums service

Scale: No improvement to significant improvement

- 3.19 All except one participant felt that there had been some improvement to their service as a result of having been involved in the museums improvement programme. However all

participants scored the extent of improvement at the lower end of the scale, between no improvement and the mid way point.

- 3.20 All participants believe that in a year's time their service will have improved, assuming their improvement plan is implemented. 8 out of 12 scored towards the upper end of the scale, between the mid way point and significant improvement.

Impact on raising the profile of the museums service

Scale: No impact to significant impact

- 3.21 All except one participant felt that being involved in the museums improvement programme had had a positive impact on raising the profile of the museums service within their organisation. However the extent to which the profile has been raised so far was felt to be limited, with all participants except 1 scoring at the lower end of the impact scale.

- 3.22 All participants believe that being involved in the Museums Improvement Programme will result in a higher profile for the service in a year's time, although the anticipated extent of impact is variable. 5 participants scored the impact from the mid point towards significant impact and 7 between the mid point and no impact.

Impact on increasing understanding about the contribution of the museums service to corporate priorities

Scale: No impact to significant impact

- 3.23 All except one participant felt that being involved in the museums improvement programme had enhanced understanding about the contribution that the museums service can make to corporate priorities within their organisation. However, as with the profile raising, the extent to which understanding has been raised so far was felt to be limited, with all participants except 1 scoring at the lower end of the impact scale.

- 3.24 All participants believe that being involved in the Museums Improvement Programme will result in enhanced understanding about the contribution that the museums service can make to corporate priorities in a year's time, although the anticipated extent of the impact is variable. 4 participants scored the impact from the mid point towards significant impact and 8 between the mid point and no impact.

Feelings about continuous improvement

- 3.25 The majority of participants' feelings about continuous improvement had either remained constant or positively changed since getting involved in the programme. Comments included that being involved in the programme had:

- reinforced or confirmed existing levels of understanding about service improvement;
- increased understanding of the importance of continuous improvement;
- increased understanding of museums service improvement within the wider local authority context;
- reassured them/increased their optimism that improvement can be delivered.

- 3.26 A small number of participants commented that they had found being involved in the programme of continuous improvement very time intensive.

Knowledge and understanding

- 3.27 A number of participants stated that their involvement in the programme had given them new knowledge and improved their understanding of some matters. This included a better understanding of:
- their Council/organisation as a whole;
 - cultural service improvement, of what makes a good service and how you evidence that;
 - the value of the museums service;
 - the role that a critical friend and/or external review can play in service improvement;
 - evaluation processes.

Skill development

- 3.28 The majority of participants agreed that their involvement in the programme had given them new skills or strengthened their existing skills. This included:
- a greater ability to present strengths and weaknesses;
 - increased confidence in talking about strategic development;
 - the ability to undertake peer review;
 - improved interviewing;
 - improved communication skills and confidence to promote the service;
 - improved organisational skills;
 - more disciplined action planning.
- 3.29 A few felt that their skills and confidence levels have not changed since starting the programme.
- 3.30 With respect to the future the majority of participants felt that they had the necessary skills and confidence to deliver their improvement plan. However there was recognition that others with the right skills will also need to be drawn in if all of the improvements are to be delivered.

Improvement Planning

- 3.31 9 out of 12 participants have a 1 year Improvement Plan. 1 participant had a 2 year plan and 2 had a 3 year plan.
- 3.32 The majority of participants had shared their improvement plan with others in their organisation – in particular other team members within the museums service. A small number had shared it with their head of service and at a corporate level with senior directors or elected members.
- 3.33 The majority indicated that the improvement plan would link into future service plans or strategic plans. 8 out of the 12 were confident that they would report on progress in delivering the improvement plan, either within their own service area or as part of wider corporate reporting procedures. However most had not yet put reporting procedures in place.

- 3.34 A mixed response was given as to whether or not the Improvement Plan addressed the key issues that will have the most impact on improving the service. All felt that the improvement plan addressed at least some of the most important issues. However some acknowledged that they have in some instances selected those that they think are most deliverable, or most likely to attract funding.
- 3.35 There was a view that some issues, particularly those that have wider corporate implications, require further time to be able to be included as part of an improvement plan. Some felt however that the review process and collection of evidence has at least enabled conversations about such issues to start.
- 3.36 One comment made was that the nature of the improvement planning process, with clear start and finish dates, meant that the issues it reflects tend to be project based issues.

Future challenges

- 3.37 Key challenges to delivering the improvement plan were particularly seen to be:
- the available capacity/time of the participants and their colleagues;
 - financial resources;
 - maintaining the momentum;
 - successfully motivating/persuading others to get involved and to take responsibility for delivering the improvements;
 - unplanned external factors that may impact on planned delivery;
 - the priorities of others within the organisation not matching their own;
 - delivering within the timescales set out.

Does the improvement tool work for the museums sector?

Scale: No to Yes

- 3.38 All of the participants in the group discussions had some reservations about the use of the CSIT for the Museums Sector particularly relating to its lack of tailoring to museums and use of unfamiliar terminology. However only one stated that they did not feel that it works at all as an improvement tool.
- 3.39 One participating museum service was not represented in the group discussions but participated in a telephone interview. Their feedback broadly reflected the findings from the discussion group, although overall was less positive. Key points included:
- a view that more than one person needs to take responsibility and receive training about the museums improvement programme. The individual concerned had felt quite isolated as the one person responsible for seeing it through and had seen it as something of a 'weight on her shoulders';
 - the process of taking time out to look at the service and getting people together was seen as valuable, as was the peer led challenge;
 - the involvement of senior managers and the portfolio holder in the peer led challenge were seen as having a positive impact;
 - the improvement plan was viewed as covering the key priorities for improvement and covers a 3 year period. Its fit with wider cultural service planning was not yet clear though and it was seen as to early in the process to establish if there was real ownership;

- the individual concerned did not feel that the process had given them new skills or strengthened their existing skills, but did feel that it has increased understanding and awareness of wider issues among the wider museums service team;
- a concern was expressed that having reviewed the museums separately from the wider cultural service, which was now starting its own review, could leave the museums service isolated;
- being part of a museum's network and being able to talk to other museums service managers was seen as a positive outcome of being involved.

The interviews with senior managers

- 3.40 Telephone interviews took place with senior managers in each of the participating authorities. These ranged from heads of service to assistant director or equivalent. In two of the authorities two tiers of management were interviewed.
- 3.41 The managers to be interviewed were identified in consultation with the lead individuals from the participating museum services and in discussion with MLA London and the Cultural Improvement Group Manager.
- 3.42 Each interview focused on the extent to which the managers were aware of or had been actively involved in the improvement programme and the perceived benefits and impact of the programme.

Involvement with the Museums Improvement Programme

- 3.43 All except one of the managers were aware of the Museum Improvement Programme and had been involved in some way. The degree of involvement varied considerably, with the least involvement among those who were not directly managing the museum service or who had come into post part way through the process.
- 3.44 Involvement of the managers in the programme was primarily through completion of a questionnaire for the self assessment, being interviewed for the peer led challenge, receiving progress updates and seeing and/or commenting on the improvement plan.

Impact on improving the museums service

- 3.45 All of the managers interviewed believe the museums service will improve over the next 12 months. Some felt that service improvement had already started, although they were not always able to attribute improvement specifically to the improvement programme, commenting that it had been a part of a number of actions taking place to improve services.
- 3.46 The personal development of the staff leading the programme and the strengthening of relationships within the museums service or wider cultural services team were seen by a number of the managers as benefits that had already taken place.

Impact on understanding of the need for continuous improvement

- 3.47 The perceived impact on the understanding within the museums service of the need for service improvement varied. Many senior managers felt that the understanding was already there, hence their participation in the programme, and this was simply reinforced. A small number did feel it had improved understanding, particular by clarifying the priorities for improvement.

Impact on raising the profile of the museums service and impact on increasing understanding about the contribution of the museums service to corporate priorities

- 3.48 The majority view of managers was that there was little evidence to date that being involved in the improvement programme had raised the profile of the museums service or increased understanding beyond the service itself of its contribution to corporate priorities. Several stated that the profile of the museum service was already high and therefore it was not an issue that needed to be addressed.
- 3.49 Among those that did feel the profile of the service had improved, this was often seen as part of a bigger picture of activity that had happened, rather than being directly attributable to the improvement programme.
- 3.50 One authority commented that it actually did not want to raise its profile through the improvement programme at that time, as exposing weaknesses at the time of a budget review was seen as presenting the threat of possible budget cuts.
- 3.51 Some examples of activity that had taken place through the improvement programme, such as briefings or interviews with senior managers or the cultural portfolio holder, would seem to indicate that some profile raising activity may have taken place but its impact is not yet known.
- 3.52 Several managers commented that the understanding within the museums service team, or within the wider cultural services team, of the contribution that museums make to corporate priorities had increased.

Contribution to wider cultural service improvement planning activity

- 3.53 Most authorities had been involved with, had just started or were about to start wider improvement planning across the cultural service using the CSIT.
- 3.54 All those just starting or about to embark on improvement work saw the lessons learnt from the museums process as informing the wider approach. Some museums managers are sitting on management teams overseeing the review or are acting in the role of critical friend.

Awareness of the improvement plan, its connection with service planning and requirements to report on progress

- 3.55 The majority of senior managers were aware of the improvement plan and were confident that it addressed key areas that would result in service improvement.
- 3.56 The majority stated that it would be, or had already, fed into the wider cultural service or business plan. Some also indicated that key actions would feature in the annual work plans for individual staff. Inclusion in service or work plans would also result in progress in delivering the action plan being reviewed on a regular basis.
- 3.57 A small number mentioned that the improvement plan, or key actions within it, would inform a wider cultural strategy and the sustainable community plan.

Other issues

- 3.58 Feedback was also provided on a variety of other issues by one or more managers including:
- Planning the process and using the toolkit:
 - some authorities recognise that they underestimated what was involved in undertaking the review and the time that staff would need to allocate to it. If doing it again they would factor it in to staff work plans so that they have more time to plan and implement the review, and to engage a wider audience in the self assessment;
 - some commented that the language used in the toolkit at times did not seem to be relevant to the museums service and that it was not clear what some of the questions meant. This resulted in time having to be spent just reaching agreement on definitions;
 - the self assessment questionnaires were perceived by several authorities as overly long and not appropriate for some tiers of more senior management, which resulted in them not being completed;
 - the peer led challenge was generally perceived as being of value, although the issue of the need to match authorities of a comparable level was commented on in order that both authorities fully benefit;
 - the timing of the process was seen as helpful, with the improvement plans now able to feed into the service plan for the forthcoming year;
 - one authority felt that having taken part in the improvement programme meant that the service was positioned well in relation to the forthcoming Comprehensive Area Assessment;
 - one authority felt that it had not been beneficial to do the museums service separately from the wider cultural review. Concerns related to duplication and the possible exclusion of museums from wider cultural service planning;
 - the funding to help deliver improvements was seen as beneficial, both incentivising the museums to get involved but also in enabling them to be able to deliver key improvements that would otherwise not be funded.

Overall comments

- 3.59 The majority were very positive about the value to the service of having being involved in the improvement programme. Positive feedback from managers included:

“the entire process has been of value and was worth doing”

“we already knew we had weaknesses, but this helped us focus”

“it was hard, but energizing”

“it can be difficult to take time out and stop and think, particularly for museums - it was useful”

“the peer review was interesting and different to what we expected, it picked up other things to our own self assessment”

“the process provided space for people to say things they don’t normally tell you and for new ideas to come out”

“very useful and valuable”

“it was a really good experience. It has been tough and we have had to face some hard truths, but now we have the opportunity to develop”

Feedback from the project team and trainer

- 3.60 Feedback from the project team who have been working with the authorities throughout the process and who have reviewed the improvement plans and funding applications included:
- that all twelve authorities had submitted improvement plans and funding applications containing actions that address weaknesses identified in their self assessments;
 - improvement plans included projects that will result in both tangible improvements to the service provided e.g. front-of-house staff skills development as well as improvements to processes e.g. gathering data about users/non-users for a new audience development strategy;
 - improvement projects include collaborative initiatives across a number of Local Authorities such as:
 - audience development;
 - non user engagement;
 - data analysis;
 - training and workforce development;
 - a majority of museum services involved in the programme gained an increased awareness of wider council objectives and the place/role the museum can have within the council framework. Use of more corporate language within the self assessment documents contributed to this and made museums question how the self assessment areas relate to their service.
- 3.61 Feedback was also sought from the IDeA approved consultant who ran the introductory session and the peer led challenge and improvement planning training sessions. Overall the trainer commented on how impressed he had been with the developing knowledge and understanding of the CSIT of the participants, in particular those who attended all three sessions and saw the programme through to completion. In his view the improvement plans that were discussed at the final session will add value to services.
- 3.62 The trainer felt that whilst the majority of people attending the training sessions were engaged and appeared to value the training, which is backed up by the questionnaire responses, a small number particularly at the peer led challenge training did not.
- 3.63 A small number of suggested areas for review or improvement were proposed:
- ensuring that in future the venues are suitable for the type of training or session taking place. Whilst it was good to be able to hold the sessions in a museum environment, on occasion the venues did not lend themselves to being a training venue;
 - the initial briefing session and introductory session to self assessment may be better as separate sessions. Quite a lot of people who attended the initial session that introduced the improvement programme were not the people who ended up leading the improvement programme process. This meant that some of the lead museums officers missed the self assessment training. This will have made it more difficult for

them to fully engage in the programme and meant people attending the peer led challenge training had different levels of understanding of the CSIT and the assessment process;

- recognising the need to find ways of better engaging (both during the training and after the training) the small number of people who do not respond well to the type of training provided, in particular the role play in the peer led challenge session, or who face particular challenges in going through the process.

4.0 Conclusions and recommendations

- 4.1 In this section we draw together our conclusions against each of the evaluation questions, with key sources of evidence highlighted, and set out our recommendations for further improvements to the programme.
- 4.2 The voluntary nature of participation in the various data collection methods used for evaluation purposes - a self completion questionnaire, participation in group discussions and telephone interviews – meant that not all of the participating museums services or managers provided feedback on every area covered by the evaluation. Therefore wherever possible evidence from a combination of sources has been used to enable conclusions to be reached.
- 4.3 It should be noted that this is not a large dataset on which to base conclusions and the authorities involved put themselves forward voluntarily to participate in the pilot. It is therefore likely that the sample contains an above average number of authorities who already have a positive attitude towards continuous improvement and recognise the value of such a process. However, the findings are felt to be indicative of the impact of the museums improvement programme and provide useful information to inform future planning.
- 4.4 At the time of this evaluation the museum services involved had only just concluded the process and submitted their improvement plans and funding applications. This has meant that it has not been possible to determine the longer term impact that involvement in the programme has had on the services.

Have the goals of the Improvement Programme been achieved?

- 4.5 There are 13 goals for the Improvement Programme as set out in Appendix A. The evidence available to date indicates that 8 have been achieved. For a further 5 it is too early in the implementation of the improvement plan and follow up activity to be able to state if they have or will be achieved.
- 4.6 To avoid repetition our conclusions have been grouped under key themes.

Understanding of/commitment to continuous improvement (Goal 1)

- 4.7 **Understanding of the need for continuous improvement and a commitment to the values of continuous improvement and excellence has been demonstrated by the authorities:**
- 12 authorities have completed the full improvement programme;
 - levels of motivation towards being involved in the programme among museums officers responding to the questionnaire increased between the point of starting and completion of the programme;
 - the majority of museums officers confirmed that involvement in the programme had either strengthened or consolidated their own understanding of the importance of continuous improvement;
 - many authority managers indicated that levels of awareness and understanding about continuous improvement had either been reinforced or raised across the museums service;

- where wider cultural services reviews are taking place learning from the museums improvement programme is being shared.

4.8 However, it is too early to be able to identify if the involvement of the authorities in the programme will result in a long term commitment to continuous improvement activity.

CSIT benchmark and self assessment (Goals 2+5)

4.9 **Understanding of the CSIT benchmarks and of the concept, process and techniques of self assessment has been demonstrated by the authorities and self assessments completed:**

- the majority of the museums officers felt that after receiving training they had adequate skills and knowledge to undertake self assessment and to explain it to their colleagues;
- each authority completed a self assessment of their service;
- although the actual self assessments have not been reviewed as part of this evaluation, feedback from the authorities and the project team indicates that they identified strengths and areas for improvement which informed their improvement planning.

4.10 There were however significant variations in the way in which the self assessments were carried out and how many people from within and outside of the service were actively involved.

Peer led challenge (Goals 3+6)

4.11 **Understanding of the concept, process and techniques of peer led challenge has been demonstrated by the authorities and peer led challenge has been completed:**

- the majority of museums officers felt that after receiving training they had adequate skills and knowledge to undertake peer led challenge and to explain it to their colleagues;
- all of the authorities have undertaken a peer led challenge in another authority, and had a peer led challenge of their own service;
- at least half of the senior managers, unprompted, stated that peer led challenge was a valuable part of the process.

Improvement planning (Goals 4, 7+8)

4.12 **Understanding of the concept, process and techniques of improvement planning and best practice benchmarking has been demonstrated by the authorities and improvement plans and funding bids have been submitted:**

- all of the authorities have completed improvement plans and submitted them to the project team. Although completed to varying levels of detail they identify priority actions to improve services with defined outputs, responsibilities and timeframes;
- senior managers in all the authorities have confirmed a commitment to seeing the improvement plans delivered, with a majority stating that actions from improvement plans have been or will be included within the 2009-10 service or business plans;
- all of the authorities have submitted funding bids to the improvement fund to support the implementation of key actions within the improvement plan.

Improvement networks, collaborative working and sharing knowledge (Goals 4, 9+10)

- 4.13 **It is too early in the delivery of the improvement programme and the development of the museums improvement network to be able to confirm if the authorities will sustain their engagement with an improvement network or to state that agreed methods are in place to share best practice and knowledge across the organisations within the network. It is also too early for joint improvement projects and learning and development events to have taken place.** However:

- all of the authorities have attended at least some of the improvement network training and meetings as part of the programme. A number of participants commented on the value of being part of such a network and it is proposed that an improvement network for museums services will continue;
- in addition, a number of potential joint improvement projects across authorities have been identified as part of improvement plans and funding bids, although these have not yet been confirmed or implemented.

Improvement planning cycle (Goal 11)

- 4.14 **It has not been possible to identify at this stage the likely review and improvement cycle for each museums service:**

- the majority of authorities had only just finished their review at the time of this evaluation and had not yet begun to implement their improvement plan;
- there was recognition among museums officers that service review should take place on a regular basis, but it was too early for them to be clear about what that might mean in their particular service. Timescales for the improvement plan varied from 1 -3 years across authorities.

Wider learning and personal development (Goal 12)

- 4.15 See paragraph 4.16.

Profile of the museums service and understanding of its contribution to corporate priorities (Goal 13)

- 4.16 **It is too early in the delivery of the improvement programme to be able to confirm if the goal of increasing the profile of the museums service within the Council and enhancing understanding within the Council and the LSP of the impact of the service on wider goals has been achieved:**

- the majority of museums officers felt their had been some, but limited, impact to date on profile or understanding and many senior managers stated it was either too early to say or that it was not possible to attribute an increase in profile and understanding solely to the improvement programme;
- the majority of museums officers did feel that the profile of the service and understanding of its wider impact would improve once their improvement plan was implemented.

Have self-assessment and peer led challenge been valuable tools for learning, personal development and improvement?

4.17 The self assessment and peer led challenge have been valuable tools for learning, personal development and improvement:

- the majority of museums officers agreed that participating in the programme had enhanced their personal and professional development;
- the majority of participants in the discussion groups agreed that their involvement in the programme had given them new skills or strengthened their existing skills;
- the consultant who delivered the training felt that those who stayed with the programme and attended the training sessions had improved their knowledge and understanding of continuous improvement and of the CSIT;
- senior managers frequently identified the personal development and increased understanding of the museums officers and other members of staff within the museums team as a benefit of the programme;
- peer led challenge was identified by a number of managers as a useful element of the process that added value.

Will the improvement plans lead to value-adding changes?

4.18 It is too early in the implementation of the improvement plans to be able to confirm if they will lead to value adding changes, although the participating museums services believe that improvement will take place:

- all of the museums officers believe that in a year's time their service will have improved if they implement their improvement plan;
- senior managers stated that they believe the museums services will improve, although in some instances this is expected as a result of implementing a number of actions not just the improvement plan;
- the project team who reviewed the improvement plans, and the consultant who ran the improvement planning session, believe that the improvement plans will add value to services.

Do service providers have the skills to implement the identified improvements?

4.19 Service providers feel they have the necessary skill to implement the identified improvements or have identified a need to bring in other people with an appropriate skill set:

- the majority of museums officers felt that they had the necessary skills and confidence to deliver the improvement plan, or recognised a need to source skills from elsewhere.

What could the network do to improve the future improvement programme?

4.20 The following recommendations are based on the feedback provided:

Briefing

- Separate the briefing session about the improvement programme from the first training session on self assessment for those participating in the programme.

- Strengthen key messages at the briefing about the timeline and capacity commitment required to fully benefit from the programme. This includes recognising the need to allocate time within the lead officer's work programme to plan and manage the improvement programme and allowing a sufficiently long timeline to be able to engage people from outside of the service and at a corporate level in the self assessment and peer led challenge process.

Training

- Include as either a strong recommendation or a requirement of participating in the programme that two people from each participating service attend the training.
- Consider whether as part of the initial training there is a need to clarify some of the language of the toolkit for managers not familiar with a more corporate approach.
- Ensure that the venues being used for the training are suitable.

Self Assessment

- Review and clarify areas of ambiguity in the self assessment questions.
- Consider developing a shorter more focused self assessment questionnaire for senior managers.
- Explore how additional support may be provided for officers facing particular difficulties during the programme or with limited support or capacity in their authority.

Peer Led Challenge

- Where high performing authorities are matched with lower performing authorities explore further how maximum benefit from the peer led challenge can still be obtained by both partners. For example by involving officers from more than one authority or from another high performing organisation as part of the peer led challenge team.

Improvement Planning

- Explore how further emphasis can be made within the guidance and the training on:
 - including actions within the improvement plan that have a direct benefit to the end user, rather than being just about the service or process;
 - the development of longer term (2-3 year) action plans.
- Consider further the relationship between the improvement plans and any improvement funding available so that the funding does not lead to an over emphasis on 'project based' solutions.

Further Evaluation

- In order to be able to fully evaluate the impact of being involved in the museum's improvement programme and whether all of the goals have been achieved, undertake further evaluation after year 1 of the improvement plans being implemented.

Appendix A

Goals of the Improvement Programme

By the end of January 2009, we aim to have achieved the following:

1. Clear understanding of - and commitment to - the values and habits of continuous improvement and excellence amongst the participating organisations
2. Clear understanding of the CSIT Benchmark and the concept, process and techniques of Self-Assessment amongst participating organisations
3. Clear understanding of the concepts, process and techniques of Peer-Led Challenge amongst representatives from each participating organisation
4. Clear understanding of the concepts, process and techniques of improvement planning, best practice benchmarking and working within an Improvement Network amongst the participating museum services
5. Completed Self-Assessments for each participating organisation, which identify clear, comprehensive and incisive strengths and areas for improvement
6. Completed Peer-Led Challenges for each participating organisation, which help to make the Self-Assessment findings accurate and valuable, provide a learning opportunity for both parties and help to develop the relationship
7. Improvement plans for each participating museum service, comprising improvement projects with clear outputs, responsibilities and timeframes, and commitment to these projects amongst the management teams
8. Funding bids to the Improvement Fund received for training and development to assist organisations to implement the improvements
9. Joint improvement projects and learning & development events
10. Agreed methods of sharing best practice and knowledge across the organisations within the network
11. An agreed review and improvement cycle for each participating museum service, including future Self-Assessment and improvement plan reviews
12. Wider learning and personal development for the people taking part in the training, Self-Assessment and improvement planning
13. Increased profile of the museum service with the Council and enhanced understanding within the Council and LSP of the impact of the service on wider goals and targets (e.g. the LAA)