

BEST VALUE REVIEW

LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES

Report by : Councillor D J Morson, Councillor R J O'Neill (Chairman), Councillor Mrs S V Schneider.

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Terms of Reference :

1. We have considered whether the Council's present expenditure on leisure and cultural services provides Best Value in those areas by examining
 - (a) the effectiveness of the services at present provided, and how far they appear to meet user expectations;
 - (b) whether these services could be provided in some other way than by the Council, and whether they should be provided at all by the Council; and
 - (c) how they might be provided better.

Introduction.

2.1 We were invited to consider and report on whether the Council is delivering Best Value in its work in the following areas : sport, leisure, the arts, museum services, and tourist and information services.

2.2 Officers have given us a very high level of support throughout our Review : in carrying out research, assembling information, answering our questions and offering advice. We would like to record our gratitude to them, and to the Committee of the Saffron Walden Museum Society who met us on a number of occasions, officers of Essex County Council who devoted a day to answering our questions and all those who attended the Challenge Event for this Review, for all their assistance in our work.

2.3 Mr David Williams and Mrs Linda Scrutton, our Critical Friends, have generously given much of their time to helping and advising us in our task. We would like to record our appreciation and thanks to them for all their help.

Background.

3.1 All of the Council's expenditure in the areas under review is discretionary. That gives the Council freedom to set its own priorities, in accordance with the particular circumstances of Uttlesford, whilst at the same time taking account of its general obligation to promote the well-being of the District, and various Government policies such as the encouragement of healthy living and lifelong learning. It also makes relevant comparison with what other Councils do in this field more difficult than where Council activities are mandatory.

3.2 The characteristic feature of Uttlesford is that it has a large area but a relatively small population. It has four principal areas of settlement, Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden, Stansted Mountfitchet and Thaxted, none of them large. The population is otherwise widely dispersed. The level of unemployment is low, as is the crime rate, and the District is regarded officially as one of the least deprived areas of England. There is a high level of voluntary activity and participation in the arts and sport, and standards are generally very high. For culture and for sport, London is within reach for all residents of the District. In the south, residents may look also to Chelmsford; in the west, to Bishop's Stortford; and in the north, they look to Cambridge. Leisure and cultural services policy falls to be made against that background.

3.3 The provision for leisure and cultural services in the Estimates for 2002/2003 is £1,208,470 (including capital charges of £245,780). This represents 13.03% of net expenditure on services. This sum is made up of

Leisure (mostly the Private Finance Initiative project)	£706,080
Museum	£247,970
Tourist Information	£134,120
Sports Development	£ 75,120
Arts Development	£ 45,180

Under the Private Finance Initiative project, the Council will be providing new or refurbished Leisure Centres in Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Stansted Mountfitchet, including swimming pools in both Great Dunmow and Saffron Walden. This project emerged from detailed consideration by the Council, but much of the Council's other activity in the areas under review is the result of historic responsibilities and accretion. In 1999, the Council approved a report commissioned from consultants on the promotion and development of leisure and cultural opportunities in Uttlesford. The recommendations in that report provided a plan for the Council's work in this area. We have considered in preparing our report the experience afforded by the implementation of that plan, and how far a revised and more focused strategy is now required.

3.4 The Council accepted responsibility for Saffron Walden Museum in 1974, and holds from the Museum Society a 99 year lease of the museum's buildings, dating from 1996.

3.5 The Council's Tourist Information activity can be regarded as largely one of economic support to those parts of the District's economy concerned with tourism in its widest sense; but the Tourist and Community Information Centres also act in addition as general information points for Council services, and publicise and promote activities going on throughout the District.

3.6 The Council's direct work in the areas of sport and the arts, except in making grants, is directed largely towards young people. Grants are made from a number of Council schemes to a range of clubs and organisations active in sport and the arts.

3.7 Except in the field of tourist promotion, where it is active and works closely with the Council's staff, Essex County Council makes no operational provision for the areas under review. Its staff devise strategies to cover the whole of Essex, but they then look to Districts or Boroughs to implement them. The Youth Services Department does undertake direct work within the District, but this relates more to the Community Strategy work of the Council.

Compare

4.1 We have looked at the range of services and the expenditure on leisure and culture of other local authorities within Essex and within the Daventry Group. Details of these are available on request. They show considerable diversity, and demonstrate how far the kind and level of activity by Councils is determined by local circumstances, and by inherited facilities for which a Council has become responsible. Expenditure by Uttlesford is generally at the low end of these comparisons. The reason for this is that the Council is not responsible for major facilities, with the exception of the Leisure Centres, and of Saffron Walden Museum, which interestingly brings Uttlesford into a high place in comparative expenditure on culture.

4.2 Our conclusion is that Uttlesford's activity in the field under review is consistent with that of other comparable authorities and is appropriate to the needs of the District.

Challenge

5.1 A well attended Challenge event was held, to which a wide range of users of the Council's leisure and cultural services were invited.

5.2 These expressed themselves well satisfied with the assistance they receive. They all said that they valued principally the help the Council gives in providing advice on grant applications to outside grant-giving bodies, including the various Lottery funds, and in helping to publicise their events.

5.3 A number of detailed suggestions for change and improvement were put forward at the Challenge event. Amongst them were the following :

- Public Relations. Improve the marketing, publicity and promotion of the Council services provided in this field.
- Information Technology. Make better use of IT in the provision of all services.
- Priorities/Target resources. Prioritise what needs to be done, and be more effective in targeting services and resources, through a pricing policy, and e.g. a Leisure Card.
- Partnerships. Although relations with partners are excellent and work carried out is effective, look at what more can be done together. Ensure that partners are consulted and involved at a strategic level about future planning of services and at a local delivery level.
- Access. Consider how the Council can minimise the impact that the rural nature of the District has on service delivery.
- Facilities. Consider how the Council can offer more strategic advice and guidance in the provision of play and recreation facilities across the District. Consider whether the Council can or should be more proactive in the development of an Arts Centre facility. Consider how the Council can address the need for more storage for the Museum.
- Youth. Consider how the Council can target services effectively towards young people? Get young people involved positively and practically in youth services.

5.4 We have taken into account in our review the views and suggestions expressed at the Challenge event. We are pleased to note that no criticisms were raised at the event by partners/users of the Council's services. It was not to be expected from the range of organisations invited that anyone would say that the Council's present services were unnecessary.

Tourist Information Centre.

6.1 We were asked to review the work of the Tourist Information Centre. This forms part of the Council's leisure and cultural activity insofar as it produces material of use to those who wish to visit properties or undertake walks in the District, and it produces the monthly publication "What's On in Uttlesford". Its work is however primarily in support of the tourism sector of the local economy, including the retail trading sector as well as the direct provision of tourist services, catering and so on.

6.2 The net provision in the Estimates for 2002-2003 for the Tourist Information Centre is £134,120. It has an equivalent full time staff of 3.59, but it also enjoys the services of a dedicated and knowledgeable team of volunteers who staff the information desks. In addition, the Community Information Centres at Thaxted and Dunmow provide tourist information (though they do not do bookings) as well as giving information on Council services. The net cost of these Information Centres in 2002-2003 is £88,540, with an equivalent full-time staff of 1.73.

6.3 The Tourist Information Centre in Saffron Walden and the Community Information Centres in Great Dunmow and Thaxted offer to the public tourist information about places and activities of interest both within the District and nationally. The Tourist Information Centre publishes an annual accommodation guide, and brochures on places of interest, walks etc. The Saffron Walden Centre offers a booking service for accommodation, again both in the District and nationally, and acts as a selling point for local cultural productions who wish it to do so, on a commission basis. It also sells maps, books and souvenirs. The commission charged for bookings is in line with national standards. Without adding to staff numbers, there may be scope for increasing the range and level of sales; and developments in IT may make it possible to offer a more comprehensive booking service, including for productions in London and elsewhere.

6.4 The Tourist Information Centre, together with the two Community Information Centres, offers good value for money in terms of its tourist promotion work as well as a high class service. These activities are in our view essentially a useful form of economic support to tourist related and retail businesses in Uttlesford.

6.5 In addition, the Centres in Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Thaxted represent the public face of the Council in both towns. They deliver to the public advice on the Council's services and, for example, sell Green Waste sacks.

6.6 The Tourist Information Centre is held in high regard by Essex County Council, and it has a good reputation from local users. Uttlesford is an area which attracts tourists, but because it is not a prime tourist venue there is the more need for local provision of information to visitors when they arrive in the District. The Centre carries out this role well. We have considered whether the Centre's work could be transferred to another body, but have concluded that its accommodation booking service, which is valued both by tourist providers and by visitors, could not be provided in any other way. The general information service provided by the three Centres to residents of the District falls outside our Review; but it is important, given the dispersed character of Uttlesford.

6.7 Users have commented to us that "What's On in Uttlesford", whilst it is an important and compendious source and is kept commendably up to date, is not particularly eye-catching or user friendly. A more attractive cover would help, but is not the whole answer. All the material is listed in date order, without distinguishing the nature of the events. Consideration should be given to producing more than one edition, with separate editions for sport, the arts and family leisure events, or alternatively listing events by categories.

6.8 Our conclusion is that the Tourist Information Centre provides an efficient and valued service, and usefully combines both a specifically tourist information and booking service and a general District Council information service.

6.9 We recommend as follows

- The commission charged by the Tourist Information Centre for bookings for accommodation is in line with that charged by other tourist offices, and we do not recommend that it should be changed.
- The Saffron Walden Centre sells maps, books and souvenirs. It should expand its retail business so far as is possible without adding to staff numbers.
- The Saffron Walden Centre already acts as agent for local cultural productions. Its agency business should be expanded if this can be done commercially, to include national theatrical and other productions and also travel bookings.
- "What's On" should be published in a more attractive and eye-catching format. Consideration should be given to publishing more than one version, so that readers can choose between sports, cultural and general leisure editions, or alternatively including different sections for these within a single publication.

Leisure Centres

7.1 The three leisure centres at Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Stansted Mountfitchet account for 53% of the Council's expenditure in the fields under review. As the policy to construct or refurbish these centres on the basis of a Private Finance Initiative project was the result of long consideration by the Council and they are still under construction, we do not believe that they are ripe for Best Value examination at the present time.

7.2 There is a comparable leisure centre at Saffron Walden County High School, but on a smaller scale. There are also private gymnasiums and dance studios and sports clubs in the District. But the private sector does not offer comprehensive leisure facilities, and the Council is not providing something which is already on offer in other ways.

7.3 The PFI Leisure Contract provides that the contractor will support the Council in carrying out its Best Value duty in relation to its leisure services. The contract refers to 1 April 2008 as the first date by which the Council can initiate a Best Value Review, but the Council may also stipulate other dates, to accord with its Best Value Performance Plan. We believe that the Council should consider the desirability of conducting a Best Value review of the operation of the Leisure Contract once the new facilities have been open for two years.

7.4 For the present, we record only our view that it will be most important to hold the contractor strictly to the terms of the contract as regards both the provision of the facilities contracted for and the operation of services at the centres from the outset. This applies as much to the specifications of the facilities and the financial operation of the contract as to the technical operating standards to be met. In order to represent the Council effectively in its dealings with the contractor, the responsible staff will need to call upon their necessary professional qualifications, strong personal qualities and interpersonal skills.

7.5 We recommend as follows

- Both the Community and Leisure Committee and the Resources Committee should consider and approve the Council's internal arrangements for monitoring the performance of the Leisure Contract.
- The Council should consider conducting a Best Value review of the operation of the Leisure Contract once the facilities have been open for two years.

Museum

8.1 The Council has managed Saffron Walden Museum since 1974, when the Museum Society could no longer assure its future. The premises of the museum, its contents, and a house at 40 Castle Street occupied by the curator belong to the Saffron Walden Museum Society. The Council holds these from the Society on a 99 year lease granted in 1996, at a peppercorn rent. The Council is responsible for the maintenance of the buildings and collections, the day-to-day running of the Museum and the employment of staff. The provision for the Museum in the 2002-2003 Estimates is £247,970 and it has an equivalent full time staff of 6.8. The Museum also benefits from assistance from unpaid volunteer staff who staff the reception desk. The Museum's reserve collection is housed in a building belonging to the Council in Newport : this is unsatisfactory in many ways, and new premises would be desirable.

8.2 The Museum was first opened in 1835, and it holds collections of more than local interest. In recent years it has received all objects from the extensive archaeological investigations on the site of Stansted Airport. It represents a major cultural asset to the District, it is a tourist attraction and it does highly regarded educational work by way of school visits and holiday programmes. The Museum provides through the curator a general advisory service to museums throughout Uttlesford.

8.3 We have considered whether the Museum might be transferred to some other patron, so relieving the Council of the cost of maintaining it. We have not been able to identify such a patron. Essex County Council, unlike some other county councils, does not itself run or support financially any museums in the county. It has also been suggested that the Museum might be transferred to a charitable trust, to which the Council would then make an annual grant, with the trust becoming responsible for running the Museum and taking advantage of

its charitable status as regards tax and applying for grants. We have looked carefully at this, but cannot recommend it. The Council can almost certainly provide such necessary supporting services as building maintenance and accounting services more economically than could a separate administration. The Museum Society (about which we have more to say, below) is already a charity, and can apply to donors and grant-giving bodies for funds for the benefit of the Museum in its own name. There could in theory be financial advantage to the Council if it could make an annual grant, fixed for a number of years, to some other body which then ran the Museum. But the Council would then also have no direct influence over the management of the Museum. In the absence of any other substantial donor to step in if the Museum needed more money than the grant, the Council would remain the inescapable backer of last resort of the Museum, but would not have the direct managerial authority to set things right.

8.4 We conclude that the best course for the Council is to retain its present relationship with the Museum, but to look to the Museum Society to make full use of its charitable status — and indeed to do more to help in the running of the Museum in a number of other ways as well. We have discussed this at length with the Museum Society Committee, and have been encouraged by their positive response. We have identified together a number of ways in which the Museum Society could make a greater financial contribution to the Museum, and also give it more help generally. The Museum Society is at present a Membership Charity. If it were to become a Company Limited by Guarantee it could undertake trading and other activities on behalf of the Museum, and make grants to the Museum out of its surplus income. Such grants might be used either for acquisitions, as at present, or towards maintenance as well as capital improvements to the Museum premises. The charges for season tickets (which are very low, and may well be susceptible of some increase) might be channelled through Society membership, where ticket holders agreed; and with the advantage of Gift Aid recovery of tax, the Society and in turn the Museum would benefit. The Society could also take over the sending of renewal notices and reminders to season ticket holders; and establish a corporate membership scheme in order to involve the local business community, in conjunction with the Museum's Corporate Hospitality initiative early in 2003.

8.5 The Museum Society could also make applications to private grant-giving bodies for specific purposes related to the Museum, whereas these would not make grants to a public authority. The Society could also seek more help from its members in giving voluntary assistance at the Museum, notably in manning the reception desk.

8.6 The focus for cooperation between the Council and the Museum Society is the Museum Management Joint Working Party. Its present terms of reference make it a body for the exchange of information. For the kind of cooperation between the Council and the Society which we envisage, new terms of reference are needed to give the Working Party the role of a coordinating body for joint actions, with decision making powers.

8.7 There is scope for increasing the Museum's retail sales. To provide a designated shop area on the ground floor, preferably serving as the entrance or, even better, the exit from the Museum would assist in this.

8.8 The Museum needs a better store for its reserve collection than the present one at Newport. We were informed that a charitable body in Saffron Walden might be able to provide premises for this. We believe that this generous offer should be pursued, as should seeking grants or assistance from the Heritage Lottery fund and other sources to build a store, and the possibility of constructing a Resource Centre at Stansted Airport which might also incorporate a store.

8.9 It has been suggested to us that the name of the museum might be changed to the Uttlesford Museum, to make it clearer that it belongs to the District as a whole, and that the collections equally cover all parts of Uttlesford. This would require discussion in the first instance with the Museum Society.

8.10 The Museum provides, through the curator, an advisory service to museums throughout Uttlesford which are not under the control of the Council. This service could usefully be extended and given a more formal character by inviting representatives of these museums to come together annually for a meeting with the Museum Management Joint Working Party.

8.11 We conclude that the Museum is an asset to the District both culturally and as a tourist attraction; that it is appropriate for the Council to continue to run the Museum; and that there should be closer cooperation with the Museum Society, under which the Society would help the Museum more both financially and in practical ways.

8.12 We recommend as follows

- The terms of reference of the Museum Management Joint Working Party should be amended, to give it an executive role as the focus for practical collaboration between the Council and the Society.
- The Museum Society should make a greater financial contribution to the running costs of the Museum, including maintenance of the building as well as contributing to capital projects and to additions to the collection.
- The Museum Society should seek to increase its membership, introduce a corporate membership scheme and make full use of its status as a charitable body to recover tax through Gift Aid on membership linked with season tickets.
- The Museum Society should be encouraged to seek grants, as a charity, from private grant-giving bodies for the benefit of the Museum.
- The Museum Society should consider ways in which its members could give more practical help to the Museum, including taking over reminders to season ticket holders.
- Charges for entry to the Museum should be reviewed, in particular for season tickets.
- A tentative offer to provide premises free of charge for the Museum's reserve collection should be followed up. Other, alternative possibilities for providing a new store should also be explored.
- The scope for increasing retail sales at the Museum, including providing a dedicated shop area, should be pursued.
- The museums in the District not under the control of the Council should be sounded out as to whether they would welcome an annual meeting with the Museum Management Joint Working Party.

Sport, Leisure and the Arts

9.1 The Council provides support to leisure, sport and the arts through the direct provision of organized activities and advice, and through its grant programme. We deal with these separately. The provision made in the Estimates for 2002-2003 for Sport, Leisure and the Arts, excluding the Leisure Centres and grants, is approximately £173,000 with a full-time staff equivalent of 3 plus the equivalent of the time of 0.75 of a further officer. This latter figure includes the proportion of time devoted to these activities by the Head of Community and Leisure.

Direct support.

9.2 The Council organizes or sponsors activities in the fields of leisure, sport and the arts, and offers advice and support to voluntary bodies active in those fields. This work is essentially the same in all three fields. These activities appear not to be the result of any clear strategy, but are the sum of activities undertaken in response to requests in the past, or taken over when other bodies abandoned them, the recommendations of the consultants in 1999, and initiatives from Essex County Council or regional bodies. That is not to say that they are not for the most part worthwhile, but they are a matter of accretion not of a single vision. In particular, the 1999 report and its recommendations have proved to be too diffuse to serve as strategic guidance, and now require sharpening up and re-formulating in a concise form in the light of experience over the past three years.

9.3 The participants in the Challenge event told us that they valued principally the assistance they receive from the Council in

- (a) making applications to grant-giving bodies, by way of advice on which bodies to approach and how to make the application; and
- (b) giving publicity to the events they hold, above all through "What's On".

9.4 This kind of assistance apart, the Council's work is very largely directed to young people. We think this is right. Clubs for adults should and do look after themselves in terms of finance and organization; and they have expert governing or coordinating bodies for their activity to which they can turn for advice and support. But there is a place for encouragement and direct assistance by public authorities to sport for young people, in the interests of health and providing worthwhile recreation activities. This is a matter of encouraging an interest in sport and organizing sport amongst young people of school age, and helping clubs to recruit and coach young people so that they will become adult members. Voluntary organizations in the arts field can also benefit from help in encouraging young people to participate in their particular activity.

9.5 Consideration of Council policy in this area, which is discretionary, has to be set beside the Council's mandatory responsibility for work in the field of 'Community Safety' to encourage young people "at risk" to lead healthy and constructive lives. In practice, activities organized primarily for one of these purposes may also contribute to the other; but we consider it important that the reasons for any activity undertaken by the Council should be clearly identified before it is embarked on. To place any activity from the outset firmly in the category of leisure/sports/arts policy, or alternatively community safety policy, can only help in the formulation of coherent and transparent policies in each case. This is not always

done at present, but we believe that better and more easily evaluated policies will result if this principle is followed. That is not to say that an activity may not serve both the sports programme and community safety policy; but in that case the activity should be designated as falling primarily into one category, and its relevance to the other should also be explicitly recognised.

9.6 An example of this problem, and of the need to specify clearly the object of each activity and the goal it is to meet, is the Young Musician of the Year event. As we understand it, this was at one time financed by Music Schools, Essex County Council and Uttlesford District Council. The other bodies withdrew, and Uttlesford took over the event. Expenditure on it is at present attributed to the Youth Initiatives Working Group, which carries out 'Community Safety' work with young people. The final of this year's Young Musician event took place within the Thaxted Festival, with a well known radio musical personality presenting the event at a cost for his fee and expenses alone of some £1,400. The event is undoubtedly popular amongst the competitors, and useful in encouraging an interest in music on the part of young people. But not amongst young people in the "at risk" category; and we question the high expenditure on the presenter for an event for young people, not least because he did not appear to attract a large audience for the final. If this event is defined as a cultural event directed at interest in music on the part of young people, it becomes easier to decide how to handle it and what to spend on it.

9.7 We have looked at the role of Essex County Council in this field, as there is clearly a potential problem of demarcation and duplication. We have already noted that the County Council largely confines itself to setting 'strategies' for lower tier authorities to implement. Where this is so, the Council should make full use of those county wide schemes it considers of value, but without feeling obliged to accept all. The principles of local autonomy and discretionary expenditure must apply. Essex Youth Service does undertake some direct work within the District, with "at risk" 13 to 19 year olds. This work with young people "at risk" falls outside our report. Grants are also made from County funds to some clubs for young people. For its part, the Council undertakes some work in schools in the field of sport, particularly in primary schools, though education is a higher tier responsibility, not that of the District. This work is nevertheless valued by the recipients, not least because the Education Authority, surprisingly, does not provide it. No charge is made for this work. Schools have, however, a budget for buying in advice, and we believe that consideration should be given to charging a modest fee for what can be regarded as help and advice to schools. The Essex Library Service also provides cultural activities for young people through its libraries, particularly during school holidays. For its part, the District Council organises complementary holiday courses and activities. We believe that it makes sense, and helps to avoid duplication to accept a lead from higher tier or regional authorities where this makes sense and meets the priorities of Uttlesford. Collaboration on these lines could usefully be incorporated into a Local Service Agreement with Essex County Council.

9.8 The Council organizes a range of holiday activities for young people in both sports and the arts. These are popular. The fees charged largely cover the direct costs (hire of premises, and part time workers to run the activities), but not the overheads or officer salary costs. These activities are useful; but given their nature and the limited number of participants or families they can cover, they should be self-financing, with provision within the budget for each activity for helping through concessions those who cannot afford the full fees.

9.9 All of the Council's direct work in the fields of leisure, sport and the arts has in fact a common character. It is concerned with

- (a) providing advice to voluntary bodies on how to seek assistance from the various National Lottery funds and other sources, and on such matters as their constitutions;
- (b) liaising with and advising bodies which wish to apply for grants from the Council;
- (c) helping with publicity for events organized by voluntary bodies;
- (d) organizing activities for young people, often as part of a larger programme initiated by Essex County Council or a regional body (examples are the Essex Youth Games, the Essex Book Festival, and the "livewriting!" workshops for young people organized through the County Council Literature Officer).

9.10 We believe accordingly that there would be advantage in examining a re-structuring of the work of that section of the Community and Leisure department which deals with them; so that these tasks are managed in a coordinated way. Appropriate professional expertise will of course remain important. This would be more efficient, and would also help with the clear focusing of leisure, sports and arts work in accordance with defined priorities to which we attach great importance.

9.11 We conclude that the Council's direct work in support of leisure, sport and the arts is valued by those who benefit from it, and is generally of good quality. But there is no general strategy to define what is done and what the priorities ought to be. Such a strategy is needed. We suggest in paragraph 11.2 below what the outline of this should be.

9.12 We recommend as follows

- A strategy statement for the Council's work in this field, its priorities and the form this work should take should be drawn up. This is the more important because the work is discretionary.
- All activities must be clearly defined, and fit clearly into the leisure and cultural strategy. That is not to say that they may not also contribute to some other Council policy, for example in the community strategy field, but each activity must fit into a defined category.
- The structure of the Community and Leisure department should be examined, with a view to providing coordinated and clearly focused management of the tasks of providing advice on grants from outside bodies, providing advice on Council grants and assisting with publicising activities, and the direct task of organizing activities for young people.
- Essex County Council or other regional or national bodies may take the initiative with sport or cultural activities. Uttlesford should respond to their lead, where this fits into our strategy. A Local Service Agreement should be negotiated with Essex County Council.
- The work of the Council should continue to be directed primarily at young people, with the aim of encouraging them to adopt a healthy life style and an interest in sport and cultural activities.
- The Council's holiday programmes for young people should pay their way in direct costs. It is important that these should be open to all, and the fees charged should provide a margin for assisting, through concessions, those who could not otherwise afford them.
- Consideration should be given to charging a fee for advice and training given by the Council's sports development officer to schools.

Grants

9.13 Grants form an important part of the Council's leisure and cultural strategy. They are the principal means of support to adult leisure and sporting activity, and the number of applications shows that they are valued by the clubs and organisations which receive them. Grants are at present made from the Council's various Grant Schemes : the Community Project Grant Scheme, the Voluntary Organisations Grant Scheme and the Ad Hoc Grants Scheme. The funds available in 2001-2002 from the schemes were as follows :

Community Project Grants Scheme	£40,000
Voluntary Organisations (3 year programme)	
Voluntary Organisations Support (one year)	£10,000
Ad Hoc Grants Scheme (including carryover)	£ 9,685

Grants made in 2001-2002 for leisure and cultural purposes from these Schemes were as follows :

Community Project Grants	
Sport and Leisure	£16,175
Arts	—
Voluntary Organisations (3 year programme)	
Thaxted Festival (annual grant to 2003-2004)	£ 4,500
Eastern Arts Association subscription (annual)	£ 2,510
Eastern Orchestral Board subscription (annual)	£ 2,000
Essex Sports/Eastern Sports Board (annual)	£ 500
Voluntary Organisations Support (one year)	
Sport and Leisure	£ 1,000
Arts	£ 500
Ad Hoc Grants	
Sport and Leisure	£ 1,015
Arts	£ 2,150
<u>Total</u>	£ 30,250

9.14 We believe it would make for greater clarity, and make the administration of grants for leisure and cultural purposes easier, to have a distinct Leisure and Cultural Grants Scheme for grants for those purposes, and to remove them from the scope of the other schemes listed above.

9.15 We also consider that clubs and organisations should look in the first instance to Parish Councils for assistance with the provision or maintenance of sports and leisure facilities. This applies particularly to construction or maintenance work. The criteria for grants applications should be amended accordingly. We note that parish precepts vary greatly throughout the District, and we see no reason why District Council Tax payers should make local grants to an organisation serving only a parish, when the Parish Council is not willing itself to help. The District Council should only consider making a grant to a local organisation where the Parish Council can satisfy it that the funds needed are beyond its capacity to raise from the Parish precept, and the facility will benefit a wider area. A number of the grants made in the last two years would not satisfy that criterion.

9.16 We also believe that any grant to a club or organisation for leisure or cultural purposes should be dependent on at least a matching contribution from the applicant. The best test of whether expenditure is really justified is whether the applicant is prepared to give it priority. The Council should not pick up schemes on which organisations would not be prepared to spend their own money.

9.17 The Council also supports sport in the community through a grant of £1,000 to the Uttlesford Community Sports Forum, whose aim is to promote youth sport throughout the District for both enabled and disabled young people. This grant comes from the Voluntary Organisations one-year support scheme. The members of the Forum represent sports clubs from the District who work together to provide training courses, seminars and special "Come & Try" sports days for young people of all abilities. The Forum has no income of its own, and relies on the Council for both finance and officer support. The Forum is in its second year and the plan is for the Forum members to take on executive roles in the future. The aim of amalgamating the Disabled Sports Forum with the Community Sports Forum was recently achieved, and their first meeting took place in October 2002.

9.18 We have considered the present practice of making grants to talented individuals for the purchase of equipment. We believe that Council expenditure should in principle be for things which benefit the community as a whole. A number of private funds, such as the Wederell Memorial Fund, exist within the District for giving assistance to sport, and we consider that these are a more appropriate source of help to individuals. We recommend that these organisations should be consulted as to their policies on helping individuals. If they can help such cases, we believe that the Council should not, thus freeing funds for use for wider purposes.

9.19 We consider that the new grants scheme should be introduced for 2003-2004. The initial amount of the scheme should be the amount actually spent on grants towards sport and the arts in 2001-2002, increased if appropriate by any upward trend so far in 2002-2003. Where a recipient has not spent a grant within the year in which it is made but has placed an order or a contract, that sum may be carried forward for not more than one year. But any unspent balance from the scheme in any year should not be carried forward. The best test of the size of a scheme is whether or not it has been taken up.

9.20 We conclude that the Council's grants schemes make a useful contribution to promoting leisure and cultural activity within the District, but that this would be better done by having a specific scheme for grants to sport and the arts. This would be simpler and more transparent to administer, as decisions would fall to be made between comparable applications. Organisations should look in the first instance to their Parish Council, and the District should make grants only to organisations offering benefits to a wider area. The District should not make grants for the construction or maintenance of premises.

9.21 We recommend as follows

- Grants for leisure and cultural purposes should be removed from the Council's present grants schemes.
- A new Leisure and Cultural Grants Scheme should be established for 2003-2004, with initial funding equivalent to the expenditure in those fields from the Voluntary Organisations Support Funding (one year) and Ad Hoc Grants Schemes in 2001-2002, increased if appropriate by any higher trend in 2002-2003. This means a Scheme for 2003-2004 of £5,000. The sum of £5,000 should accordingly be deducted from the provision made for the other grant schemes.
- When the present 3 year Voluntary Organisations Support Grants scheme ends in 2004, grants for cultural or sports purposes (such as those to the Thaxted Festival, the Eastern Arts Association, the Eastern Orchestral Board and Essex Sports/Eastern Sports Board) should be transferred to the new Scheme, with appropriate funding.
- Unspent balances from the new scheme should not be carried forward into the next year; but organisations should be given up to a year to complete a scheme for which they have been given a grant and where they have already placed an order or a contract.
- Clubs and organisations should look to Parish Councils for grants for capital expenditure or maintenance for premises or playing fields. £16,175 was given in grants for such purposes from the Projects Grants Scheme in 2001-2002. The equivalent of that sum should be removed from the Project Grants Scheme for 2003-2004.
- Grants from the new scheme should be made to organisations serving a wider area than the local community only.
- Matching funding from the applicant should be a condition for all grants.
- Grants should not be made to individuals for equipment if such help is available from private charitable funds for supporting sport and the arts. The relevant organisations within Uttlesford should be consulted on this point, and a decision taken in the light of their reply.
- The criteria and rules for grant applications should be revised to incorporate these changes.
- The funds allocated to the Young Musician competition should be removed from the provision for Youth Initiatives in the Community Safety budget, and the competition should be funded within the Arts Development budget, as a specific sub-head.

Bridge End Gardens

10.1 Bridge End Gardens in Saffron Walden represent an important leisure facility within the District. They are also important historically, as a fine and unusual example of an early Victorian town garden. They enjoy Grade II listing, and are one of the major historical tourist features of the District. We have therefore thought it right to include them in this Review.

10.2 The Council has hitherto treated Bridge End Gardens not as a leisure facility, nor as of importance from the point of view of tourism, but simply as an "open space", like a village green or a roadside verge. The result has been many years of systematic neglect and sub-standard maintenance. There has been capital expenditure to repair structures within the Gardens from time to time, but because of poor security this expenditure has been regularly negated by further vandalism.

10.3 We are pleased to note that approval should soon be given to a comprehensive scheme for the restoration of the Gardens, to bring them back to their historic character. This will not however ensure their maintenance thereafter to an acceptable standard, if they continue to be handled within the Council as an "open space". We regard it as important that responsibility and the necessary funding should be transferred to the Community and Leisure department, who would then ensure the care of the Gardens to the proper standard, with a client/contractor relationship with those sections of the Council carrying out work in the Gardens. This new arrangement should not apply to the restoration project itself; but once it is completed, the garden manager should report to the Head of Community and Leisure.

10.4 We conclude that Bridge End Gardens should be placed under the Head of Community and Leisure once the restoration project for the Gardens has been completed.

10.5 We recommend as follows

- Responsibility for Bridge End Gardens together with the necessary funding should be transferred to the Community and Leisure department once the restoration project has been completed, with the garden manager reporting to the Head of Community and Leisure.

Conclusions

11.1 We were asked at the outset of this Review to consider a number of fundamental general questions. These questions and our replies to them are set out below.

11.2 Q. What is the Council wanting to achieve in future in relation to leisure and cultural services?

- A. The objective of the Council is to play its part in the promotion of a healthy life style and the enjoyment of cultural and leisure activities by the residents of Uttlesford through
- (a) the provision of leisure facilities of a high standard;
 - (b) encouragement of voluntary clubs and organisations by way of assistance to them through grants and advice, and the promotion of their activities;
 - (c) work with young people to encourage in them an interest in, and enjoyment of sporting, leisure and cultural activities;
 - (d) the maintenance of Saffron Walden Musuem as a first class museum, offering advice to voluntary musuems and individuals in the District as well as conserving and displaying its collections;
 - (e) the promotion of tourism in Uttlesford, and the provision of information to enable both visitors and residents to enjoy the many things Uttlesford has to offer.

11.3 Q. Does the Council have a statutory obligation to provide the services? Are there any other specific obligations, eg contracts?

A. No.

11.4 Q. If not, should the Council cease to provide the services and, if so, what is the impact?
A. The Council should continue to provide the services it provides at present, with the exception of certain grants which will be better provided by Parish Councils, in full knowledge of local circumstances.

11.5 Q. If the services are to be continued are there better alternative ways to deliver the services — in-house, outsourcing, partnership, sponsorship?

A. The present management arrangements for Saffron Walden Museum are more satisfactory than management by some outside body, with the Council still providing all the finance. The Private Finance Initiative project will ensure the provision of three major new or refurbished leisure facilities. Partnership arrangements should be entered into with Essex County Council by way of a Local Service Agreement on work with young people in sport and the arts. Sponsorship can usefully augment the Council's work, but could not replace it.

12 Our conclusions on each aspect of the Council's work in the field under review are set out at the end of each section of the report, together with our recommendations.