



London Cultural Improvement Programme

Heritage Change Programme

2. The Heritage Service of the Future

2.2 Ten Characteristics of a Borough Heritage Service of the Future

Heritage Change Programme

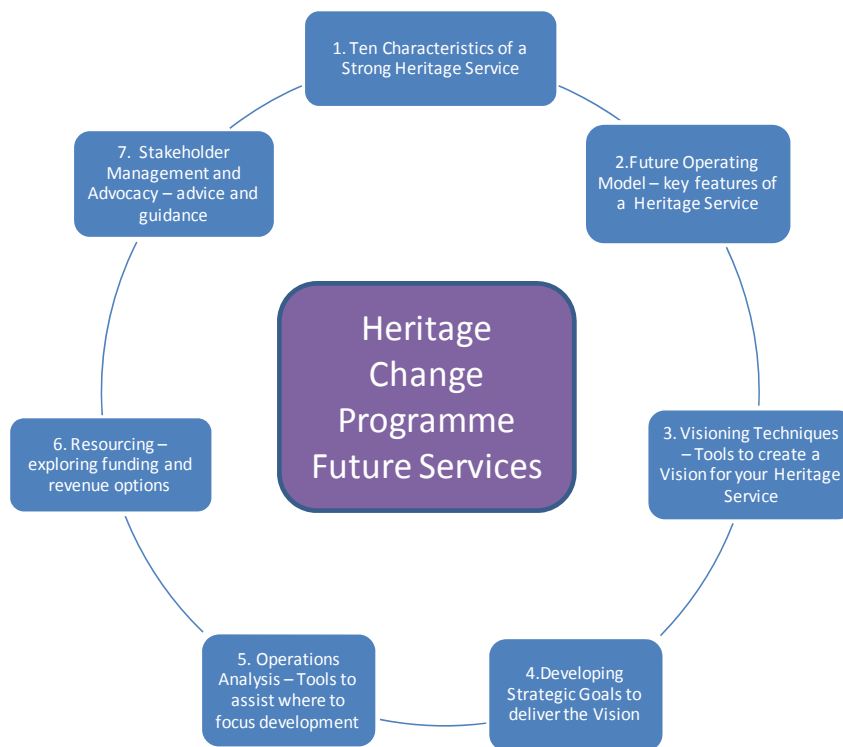
2. The Heritage Service of the Future

2.2 Ten Characteristics of a Borough Heritage Service of the Future

Introduction

This advice on the Ten Characteristics of a Heritage Service of the Future has been developed as part of the London Cultural Improvement Programme’s Heritage Change Programme (HCP). It is part of the Guidance on developing a Heritage Service of the Future, which is itself part of the wider Heritage Change Programme Support Package. This Guidance is for anyone who wants to think creatively about developing a Heritage Service, although it has been developed specifically for the London Borough Heritage Services. Figure 1 shows how ‘The Ten Characteristics’ fit into the range of resources for creating the ‘Heritage Service of the Future’.

Figure 1. Process for using the Guidance Pack



What are the Characteristics?

There are ten key characteristics that, when adopted by Borough Heritage Services, will help to provide a relevant and vibrant Heritage Service. These have been developed following detailed analysis of findings from the research that was conducted throughout the Heritage Change Programme.

The Characteristics in summary

1. Strategic
2. Sustainable
3. Innovative
4. Proactive
5. Relevant
6. Accessible
7. Collaborative
8. Borderless
9. Promoted
10. Respected

Depending on strategic decisions one characteristic may have to be balanced by another. For example, if two services were to join together (collaborative and borderless) on one site this could reduce physical accessibility for some audiences. However, this could be mitigated by increasing online access.

1. Strategic

A good Heritage Service is very focused in its operation whilst remaining aware of the wider context in which it operates. It understands the needs of its stakeholders and meets them through clear identification of mission, supporting goals and actions to reach those goals. Its strategy is carefully considered and provides the rationale for all actions by the service, its staff and its champions.

Strategic focus will include:

- Which audiences the Service will seek to serve, why and how
- How the Service will meet the needs of key stakeholders such as the Portfolio holder
- How the Service will maintain sustainability in areas such as income generation, skills capacity and collections
- What alliances – both operational and political – the Service needs to develop.

A strategic service is also an innovative service, prepared to take unusual, unique or difficult decisions.

2. Sustainable

A sustainable Heritage Service is one that has long term viability. It will endure. Sustainability is achieved through:

- A sufficient income stream
- Continued political and community support

- Strong collections which are continually developed to maintain their relevance and coherence as an information and research resource
- Sufficient skills capacity to meet service needs
- Maintain a critical mass of operation – a service which is very small may be inherently unviable

Sustainability does not mean stagnation. No service can rely on an unchanging operational model. A sustainable Heritage Service is one that develops in response to its stakeholders needs and if possible predicts and transforms ahead of those changes.

3. Innovative

Any organisation that wishes to have longevity must be innovative. Our research showed that staff want to be creative and managers want creative teams. There is both a desire and need for bold innovation. Innovation can take place in any area of the Service – use of technology, governance, services, audience and collection development, staffing, & relationships. Innovation is nurtured where:

- Individuals understand and are comfortable with the concept of innovation
- Individuals are encouraged to innovate
- Innovation is rewarded
- Managers lead with innovative behaviour

Recognise that innovation is not about change for change’s sake. It is about discovering new ways of connecting people with collections. Innovation should enhance a service and contribute to its sustainability, not just move things around or have cosmetic changes. Innovation could also be about being prepared to take unpopular decisions. Do not let fear stifle innovation.

4. Proactive

A Heritage Service of the future will be one that actively seeks out, even generates, opportunities. All too often Heritage Services are reactive. This is closely linked to innovation; it is hard to have one without the other. Proactive could mean actively seeking out new collections, nurturing champions for the service, developing new relationships. Ultimately proactive means taking responsibility – the Service seeks to control its development rather than being pushed along by its environment.

5. Relevant

A successful Heritage Service must be relevant to its stakeholders. However, this is a complex task that needs to be carefully considered. The Heritage Service must decide who its stakeholders are, their relative importance to the operation of the Service and their needs. This is a difficult process for a Heritage Service as some of its stakeholders will be users and curators of the collections hundreds of years from now. It can be difficult to argue their case against the pressures a finance director faces in managing Council budgets. Relevance varies enormously across stakeholders.

For example, a Service may be very popular with local voters and therefore to curtail that Service could be a politically difficult decision. Careful stakeholder analysis should enable a Service to build in relevance into its strategic planning and operations.

6. Accessible

If a Borough Service is not accessible then it has no purpose. Collections are there to be used. Accessibility is affected by several elements – technology, staffing and skills capacity, location, quality of collections, financial resources, management ethos, partnerships. A Borough Heritage Service should be driving to constantly increase its accessibility.

7. Collaborative

Project partnerships, joint working, shared services – collaboration can take many forms from a simple project right through to a fully shared service. Collaboration can be locally, regionally, nationally; cross-departmental; cross boundary; cross institution; cross community. The essence is that the Service enters into productive alliances which can help it develop its service. Such cooperation can bring access to new audiences, new funding, new skills and new supporters. It may end up in new ways of delivering services and even new buildings or new management structures. The small size of many London Borough Heritage Services means that collaboration may be a practical solution to long-term sustainability. Good collaboration ties in with a strategic service, innovation and working outside the Borough boundary.

8. Borderless

Borough Services have traditionally been very focused on their own locality, unsurprisingly. However, the current financial and technological environment means that for some Services looking beyond their own boundaries could bring significant benefits including economies of scale, new audiences and new partners. This will improve their sustainability. Some Borough Heritage Services will not survive on their own; therefore cross-boundary collaboration is essential for survival. Furthermore, the rise of the Internet means that both users and depositors may now have little or no geographical link to the Service. Within London many residents live in one borough, work in another and seek out specialist services right across the Capital. Looking outside the Borough boundary should not be seen purely as an enforced state but a generator of opportunities such as new relationships, possible resourcing and wider support. The Service has to maintain its local relevance (as this is where the tax-based funding, collections and many on-site users come from) but this should not tie the mindset of the Heritage Service management to that one locality.

9. Promoted

Heritage Change Programme research showed that advocacy for many Heritage Services was poor. Staff do not have the capacity and they may lack higher level support. Successful Heritage Services are those which advertise their successes to key stakeholders, have productive ongoing relationships with stakeholders and have well-placed, well informed, enthusiastic champions both internally and externally. Advocacy is about ensuring that those who can support the Service understand its value and also recognise and fulfil its needs. Further guidance is available through the London Cultural Improvement Programme’s [Marketing for the Visitor Economy Guides](http://www.visitlondon.com/about/local-tourism-resources/beginners-guides)¹.

¹ <http://www.visitlondon.com/about/local-tourism-resources/beginners-guides>

10. Respected

Ultimately a Heritage Service should be respected by its stakeholders. It is not a commodity service like a supermarket; it is not an expendable service. It is a unique resource which supports the identity of the individual, the community, the region and the nation. Loss of a Heritage Service will have ramifications only after it is too late to reverse the damage to the historical record. Respect cannot be planned for or manipulated. It is the end result of running a good service.

Where to go from here

These Characteristics have informed the other resources available through the Heritage Change Programme. You can use these or just bear the Characteristics in mind for when you are planning and developing your Heritage Service.

Further information

Accessing more Heritage Change Programme Guidance on developing the Heritage Service of the Future

The individual sections of the Guidance can be found by clicking on the relevant title below:

- [Introduction to the Heritage Service of the Future Guidance](#)
- [The Future Operating Model](#)
- [Visioning Techniques](#)
- [Developing Strategic Goals](#)
- [Operations Analysis](#)
- [A Fresh Look at Resourcing](#)
- [Stakeholder Management and Advocacy](#)

Further information about the Service of the future

For signposting to further information relevant to a Heritage Service of the Future go to

- [Routes to Further Information](#)