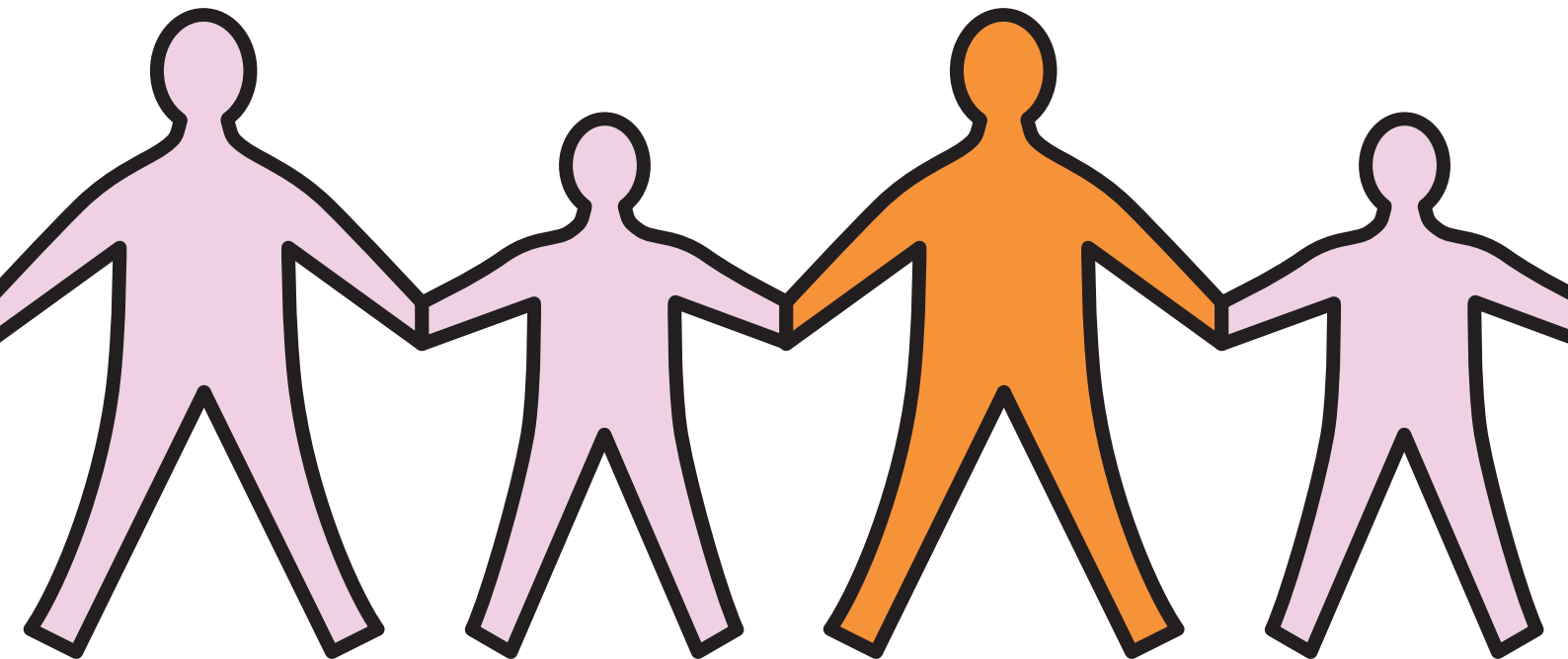




helping people and communities

working together to improve culture and sport services evaluation of the cultural improvement pilots





summary

Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA)

The IDeA works for local government improvement so councils can serve people and places better.

We use experienced councillors and senior officers, known as peers, who support and challenge councils to improve themselves.

We enable councils to share good practice through the national Beacons scheme and regional local government networks. The best ideas are put on the IDeA Knowledge website.

Our Leadership Academy programmes help councillors become better leaders so they can balance the diverse demands of people living in the same community.

The IDeA also promotes the development of local government's management and workforce. We advise councils on improving customer service and value for money. And we help councils work through local partnerships to tackle difficult problems such as crime and poor public health.

The IDeA is a member of the LGA group, comprising of four partner organisations who work together to support, promote and improve local government. It is owned by the Local Government Association and belongs to local government.

www.idea.gov.uk

Martyn Allison
martyn.allison@idea.gov.uk

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introduction

As part of the improvement strategy for culture and sport, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Sport England, Arts Council England and Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) jointly funded eight short-term pilot projects to work with local government to develop ideas and techniques that would support improvement in the culture and sport sector and capture and disseminate the learning from them. All the pilots were designed, planned and delivered at a regional level by a co-operative group of regional agencies taking a broad range of approaches. The projects were able to demonstrate real successes and detailed evaluation of each of the pilots found a number of key learning points relevant to the wider culture and sport sector.

The pilots were looking to innovate in the pursuit of improvement. Everyone involved was keen to try new ideas and approaches in an effort to support and extend the contribution culture and sport makes to individuals and communities. Although each pilot faced its own barriers and difficulties, there were clear achievements and strong evidence that the schemes had begun to build awareness of the culture and sport sector across local government.

Seven key learning points, listed and explored in this document, emerged from the eight pilot projects, however, the evaluation process also demonstrated a range of intangible benefits. These included improved relationships among partners involved with the projects, improved communication and team building across the groups, and a willingness among regional agencies to reassess their support for culture and sport within local government.

The evaluation also confirmed some simple truths: that driving improvement via a multi-agency project with limited resources requires a lot of hard work; that engaging and involving stakeholders from the earliest point in the process is crucial to success; that partnership working requires effort, resources and trust; and that commitment, determination and tenacity are required if new ideas are to change minds and behaviour. However, the projects also demonstrated that confident and committed leaders could have an impact, that a clear focus with clear, shared objectives and effective project management could drive a project to succeed, and that sector-led improvement can have a major impact.

A great deal of faith, effort and commitment from a great many people and organisations went into the eight pilot projects. In addition to seven key learning points, they produced some excellent stories of how concerted action can effect change and how by working together we can improve culture and sport services.

Overall the benefits of the project have been:-

- It helped strengthened the regional improvement networks.
- It helped achieve greater collaborative working between the NDPBs and local government and with the emerging RIEPs leading to four networks obtaining or being offered funding support from them (East Midlands, London, South West & West Midlands.)
- It led to the creation of a number of tools and support material that are now being rolled out and made available for use nationally.

The full evaluation report can be found on IDEa Knowledge:

www.idea.gov.uk/cultureandsportpilots

the key learning points

- **Build relationships within and beyond the team**
Identifies the need for team building, strong leadership and the use of different approaches
- **Involve key stakeholders appropriately**
Ensure stakeholders are identified and asked to contribute early, ensure they have the right skills, and ensure stakeholders have the right level of seniority
- **Learn, share and be flexible**
Use expert support and practical toolkits, learn from others and share your own learning in return
- **Sector-led improvement is valuable but challenging**
Identifies the effort required to build partnerships
- **Understand your customer and purpose**
Understand their needs and encourage realistic expectations.
- **Use project and programme management techniques for the best chance of success**
Use established processes to manage the integration of culture and sport into service delivery
- **There are challenges still to come**
The need to develop better national support for culture and sport, quality of data and the challenges of cross-agency working.

Case studies:

North West

The North West Improvement Network took public value, defined as ‘equity and fairness in the delivery of public services’, as its theme. The project built upon the outcomes of a seminar hosted by the Manchester Business School that had explored public perceptions of trust, legitimacy, efficiency and organisational capability in public services. The network agreed that these concepts could be used to help plan and measure the delivery of culture and sport services in the region. They set out to develop practical methods by which they could help local authorities understand and measure their own priorities. They also sought to help elected members become advocates for culture and sport in their own authorities.

The aim of the project was to improve the delivery of sports, leisure and cultural services through the creation and demonstration of public value. The network’s approach was to try to identify how public value in the delivery of sport and cultural services could be measured, to build the capacity of elected members and senior managers to champion sport and recreation as exemplars of public value, and create a model of public value that stakeholders could adopt and demonstrate. The project also sought to serve as a public value improvement pilot that could be deployed across the culture and sport sector outside the region. Working with the Manchester Business School, the project held two focus groups comprising elected members and senior managers to establish a set of measures for public value. Action learning sets were also used to explore how a focus on public value might improve services in the context of local area agreements.

While work on effective measures for public value

in culture and sport services was ongoing at the time of evaluation, the project had achieved its other objectives. A key output of the project has been the development of a process by which measures can be developed and adopted by the stakeholders involved, together with guidelines for what they might include in relation to trust, legitimacy and the concept of a ‘balanced scorecard’. The project also produced a set of measures based on the focus group findings to serve as a guide for those who wish to undertake the process developed in the pilot.

The factors identified as central to the pilot project’s success were strong leadership of the project from a small but vocal steering group, the input of an active, experienced and reliable lead contractor, and the selection and engagement of individuals to participate in the focus groups and workshops. The key learning points included: the value of applying a theoretical framework to public service; the benefits of engaging senior managers and elected members in the debate about the value of culture and sport; the effective role played by elected members in championing culture and sport services; the value of a recognised measure of public value to organisations seeking trust and legitimacy in the delivery of public services; and the value of a clear brief and simple project plan at the outset.

Details of the action learning sets and materials from this pilot will be disseminated through events, online resources including www.northwestcultureobservatory.co.uk, and input to other projects in the North West region.

Yorkshire and Humber

The Yorkshire and Humber project set out to help local authorities provide leadership in the pursuit of sustainable improvements in the quality and delivery of culture and sport services. Drawing on the message of the local government white paper, which recognised the role of culture and sport in generating “significant economic, commercial and social benefits”, and the capacity of the Local Government Improvement and Innovation Partnership, the project proposed the development of an ‘accelerated improvement consortium’ for culture and sport.

The project group looked first at diagnosis and then at delivery through four workshops. The group’s key objectives were to improve the leadership skills and knowledge of elected members holding cultural portfolios, develop a sustainable improvement network among these members, assist the positioning of culture and sport as central to local government services, and enhance the understanding of the importance and value of culture and sport among elected members. A portfolio holders group was established and a virtual network is being explored. A significant number of local authorities took part in the project and were keen to make use of each other’s experiences.

Effective programme management and a partnership approach were among the factors that contributed to the project’s success. Having an elected member as chair provided credibility with the group’s intended audience, and the high quality of speakers at the four workshops proved particularly effective at engaging participants. The involvement of local authorities and a number of other regional groups proved useful, as did the Local Government Yorkshire and Humber

partnership (LGYH). Developing a programme in conjunction with those participating in the project ensured that the project was practically relevant and the pilot also illustrated the importance of timing, both in relation to local government elections and to the time available to elected members to attend events.

Evaluation of the Yorkshire and Humber project found that a cross-cutting approach to culture and sport can often be more effective than a sector-based approach, but it also showed that project leaders have to be prepared to help some participants recognise the relevance of cross-cultural examples to their own circumstances. Strong local government networks committed to sporting and cultural partnerships across the region were key to this project’s success, as was the depth of knowledge and experience available within the region’s high-performing local authorities and cultural organisations.

Among the key messages for stakeholders, has have been the need to adopt a partnership approach on the delivery of cultural and sporting outcomes, and the need to accept that partnerships take time and effort to develop. The project’s work has continued through the Yorkshire and Humber Portfolio Holders Network, which is connected to the wider improvement partnership of the LGYH. The steering group is seeking additional funding to guarantee consistently high quality events, which will ensure the group’s activities become an unmissable feature of the regional diary.

East Midlands

In the East Midlands the pilot project was part of a wider three-year programme to promote and support the ability of culture and sport services to deliver shared priorities and programmes. Delivered by the Cultural Improvement Partnership East Midlands (CIPEM), the project included work to raise awareness of the potential impact of culture and sport services and the sharing of best practice.

Active engagement of elected members in the pursuit of 'good' or 'excellent' CPA ratings was one of the project's key objectives. The project hoped that culture and sports contribution to corporate priorities and quality-of-life issues could be better understood by participants, leading to a greater engagement with the Towards An Excellent Service (TAES) tool and the wider improvement journey. The project also hoped to promote a better understanding of the local government white paper for culture and sport services and the impact of culture and sport on the local service agenda.

With the overall programme still ongoing at the time of evaluation, CIPEM felt that these objectives had been achieved. Workshops to support the positioning of sport and cultural services within the local area agreement (LAA) process were being planned, a website serving as a portal for cultural resources within the region had been set up and demand for the guidance notes made available online had been high. Workshop pilots had proved successful and had been rolled out to other county areas within the region. These pilots also produced a number of elected member champions.

Clear leadership and task ownership were key factors in the pilot's success. Elected member input

to the design and content of the training sessions helped to ensure a good attendance at events, while high-quality speakers ensured a positive experience for those involved. Workshops delivered on a sub-regional basis made attendance easier and also provided the opportunity to connect with local issues. The project group were pleased to find an encouraging number of officers supporting elected members at the sessions.

It was interesting to note that a significant number of elected members felt that they lacked influence over the content of LAAs, prompting CIPEM to acknowledge a need for continuing support for culture portfolio holders. Other key learning points included the need for further opportunities for peer support and the discussion of key issues among members. There was a similar need for support among newly elected members, together with continuing support for senior officers and key regional cultural agencies. CIPEM also stressed the value of high-level support locally, the effectiveness of personal contact and the need for strong national support for the programme's objectives.

CIPEM is rolling out member briefings as part of its three-year programme and is planning to use the CIPEM website to establish a regional community of practice. Details of the programme are available at www.cipem.org.uk

West Midlands

The West Midlands project set out to promote effective procurement practices to voluntary sector groups commissioning community facilities. In line with the recommendations of the local government white paper and the Quirk Review, the project also sought to include best practice advice on community management and ownership of assets, a theme that was recognised as directly relevant to sustainable community strategies.

The project incorporated the guidance being tested with representatives of community groups and local government, to support the development of a web based resource that

voluntary and community groups might use to assess their individual projects. There is an aspiration to develop case studies from usage of the guidance, thereby enabling on-going development and currency of the resource.

A delay to the start of the project meant that few details of progress were available at the time of evaluation. However, work on the interactive resource for voluntary and community organisations has now been completed in cd rom format and will be disseminated shortly, pending discussions on national distribution.



South East

This project tackled the need for capacity building among cultural champions in local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and sought to encourage a strategic approach to improvement using culture and sport as a tool. Cultural agencies in the South East, operating under the banner of the Cultural Regional Improvement Group (CRIG) and the Regional Improvement Partnership, jointly managed this project with Progress through Partnership (PtP), the South East capacity-building initiative for LSPs, as delivery contractors.

The aims and objectives of the project were to raise the capacity of the culture and sport sector to support improvement within local government, to equip champions with an understanding of local policy drivers and to provide them with tools for influencing local debates, primarily working at LSP level. It was hoped that champions would be able to recognise and capitalise upon their key role in identifying and setting strategies to deliver local services in support of community outcomes. The project focused on the contribution that sport and culture can make to delivering outcomes against national priorities, such as building stronger and safer communities, strengthening the economy, meeting the needs of children and young people, and health and older people. It targeted existing and potential cultural champions on LSPs, (a number of whom were local authority councillors), as key influencers and decision-makers in the chain of local government, linking the local authority and the local community.

The project successfully established the complexity of the environment within which any cultural champions have to work and also demonstrated that a single champion is too simplistic a model; a range of champions and environmental factors are

required. The factors contributing to the project's success included working sub-regionally, working in partnership with an established cultural network (the Thames Valley Cultural Forum), linking to other relevant projects and using established contacts with existing local authority officer champions in the region to provide case experience.

The project demonstrated that things work best where there are strong advocates to push the agenda and strong networks to cut through the bureaucracy. It also showed the necessity of a more sophisticated approach over the longer term to the development of cultural champions, particularly with regard to the term 'culture' as an umbrella for collaborative working. The importance of complementary practical products, such as the LAA Toolkit was noted, as was the importance of building a strategic alliance with partner agencies. The project also showed the need for collaborative planning over a one- to three-year period by the agencies, authorities and Government Office to address local issues. This agency/local authority grouping, now chaired by the Government Office, acts as the operational vehicle for collaborative working on culture and sport in the improvement agenda, and has in effect absorbed the CRIG.

A web-based community of practice has been implemented for culture and sport within the region via the Partnership through Progress and seminars, under the title of Realising Culture's Potential, are being developed to explore the local cultural agenda.

London

Having been established a year before the pilot began, the London Regional Cultural Improvement Group (LRCIG) was able to begin the project with a clear view of issues for London. It also had good working relationships among a network of cultural and government agencies. The establishment of the Cultural Agencies Strategic Planning Group meant that the network of cultural and government agencies had established relationships at several levels.

From this starting point the pilot was quickly able to establish clear objectives and plans for delivery. The project had two major strands: the improvement of information on the performance and impact of culture and sport services across London and capacity building within the sector. Key tasks were to include identifying key performance indicators and the analysis of performance management frameworks or improvement tools being used by London boroughs. Capacity building was to target skills shortages among junior and middle management in the culture and sport services sector. A pilot programme of master-classes would deliver the improvement message.

ECOTEC were commissioned to identify and analyse performance information. Their report, presented at a dedicated conference in September 2007, provided a detailed summary of existing data, the areas in which London performs well and the areas in which improvements were required (this report is available via www.capitalambition.gov.uk). The report was a vital precursor to the project's wider planned programme and will be used to drive further development within the region. The master-class series was delivered within the targeted time scale,

resulting in positive evaluation and lessons for future learning. These events facilitated practical learning and networking, as well as giving the project a visibility across London.

Effective management by the project steering group, including work on funding and the specification for the research, was central to the project's achievement of its original aims. The small team took clearly defined roles and met regularly to manage budgets and time scales. High-quality consultancy support from ECOTEC proved invaluable; so too did the consultation regarding the subject matter for the master-classes and the affordable pricing policy. The collaborative development of the master-classes also emerged as one of the key learning points from the project. The project illustrated the need for the development of cultural data within the sector, providing information that could show sport and culture's contribution to local authorities' key priorities. An outcomes framework for performance management is vital but will require considerable investment.

The achievements of this pilot project were presented at an event in September 2007 and funding has been agreed for a year-long secondment for a post of London cultural improvement manager. This role will lead the continuation of the project and its work to sustain the concept of culture and sport within local authority agreements.

South West

The South West pilot project set out to build understanding and awareness of cultural services across local government in the region. Working with a wide range of agencies, the project was devised to improve relationships between local authorities and regional agencies, provide a focus for discussion of how national, regional and local objectives might enable culture and sport to contribute to shared priorities, and explore how authorities and agencies could support the improvement agenda. Work focused on the region's nine unitary authorities with the aim of providing learning points that would be transferable to other authorities.

The work of the pilot project continues but by the time of evaluation the project had been successful in developing new relationships and understandings between the participating authorities and agencies. Communications and marketing materials were developed, including a brochure to raise awareness of the role and importance of cultural services, and the project has provided a focal point for a more structured approach to the discussion of service planning. A number of briefings and workshops have been hosted by agencies, providing valuable opportunities to discuss how culture and sport contributes to shared priorities and the role of local area agreements.

The commitment to the project of those involved was an important factor in the pilot's success. Cultural and sporting leaders in local authorities accepted offers of support to raise awareness of the contribution and value of culture and sporting services. The positive relationships between agencies and local authorities' cultural leads, helped establish the space for discussion, while the

tailoring of briefings and workshops to the specific needs and circumstances of the participants, maximised the impact of these discussion opportunities.

One of the primary learning points to emerge was that strong relationships only grow through shared work over time. The project showed not only that building relationships requires significant investment but also that the rewards are worth the effort. The project demonstrated that if agencies in the cultural and sporting sector want to make a difference, they have to be able to allocate sufficient capacity to make it happen; while shared learning is a great benefit, it has to be encouraged and facilitated by agencies within the sector. Engagement in this process will always depend upon the circumstances of those being targeted, and it should not be forgotten that multi-agency sessions require extensive preparation and data sharing to keep all specialist sectors involved. While the project stakeholders felt that clear priorities and measures from the Department of Culture Media and Sport regarding a 'cultural and sporting entitlement' would be of great help to local authorities looking to develop their local priorities, they also recognised the need for authorities to take on board the messages regarding the power of culture and sport to change lives and shape places.

The project has delivered a real 'proof of concept': that collaborative working between agencies can deliver real improvement support to local authorities. With working relationships continuing to develop, the project group is planning further activities in the future.

East of England

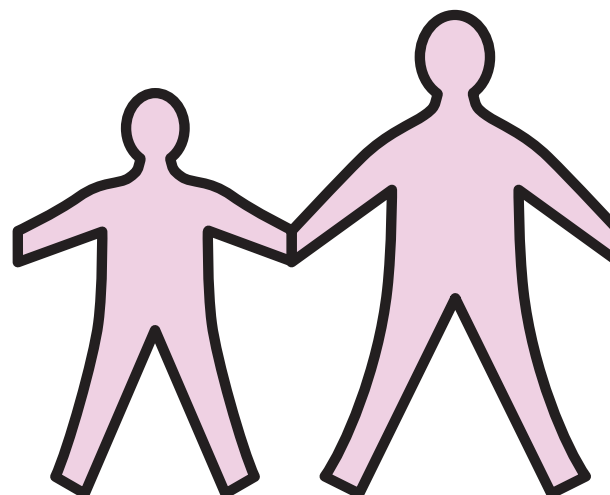
In the East of England a small project team helped local authorities manage their own performance and improvement, generating interest in the concepts of excellence and continuous improvement via the Towards an Excellent Service (TAES) self-assessment and validation tool. Working with consultant support, the project focused on building skills within the sector for self-assessment, peer validation and improvement planning. Networks and champions got the TAES tool tested through peer-to-peer challenge between authorities, and opened the way for the development of a sport and cultural improvement network across Essex.

Despite a tight time scale, all immediate objectives of the project were achieved within the time scale. These included: securing understanding of and commitment to the values and habits of continuous improvement and self-improvement; establishing the principles and techniques of non-directive coaching; an agreed method of sharing best practice; improvement plans for each participating authority; a best practice benchmarking methodology; and a sustainable TAES peer challenge system. Ten local authorities and a county sports partnership were involved, with authorities encouraged and supported by an improvement champion in each county.

A clear vision for the project coupled with strong project leadership proved essential to the project's success. The focus was on service performance via the TAES framework but the individual participants were highly committed to the success of the project, developing and building excellent working relationships. External support brought a fresh perspective

and ensured that the project team was focused on outcomes.

The key learning points from the project were related to working regionally, the involvement of stakeholders and the driving of improvement. Constant and consistent communication between participants is essential, particularly in a sector in which capacity is already stretched. The creation of a regional improvement network to provide ongoing advice and support is also essential if improvement is to be embedded within the day-to-day management process. The success of self-assessment and peer challenge will depend upon finding the balance of value, resources and rewards within the processes. Securing consistent senior management buy-in across authorities, with appropriate training for a senior manager and TAES 'organiser' in each authority, would put in place the skills and knowledge necessary for success.





While the project demonstrated the benefits of the peer challenge model as an alternative to external validation and peer review, it also showed the need to balance performance assessment, improvement planning and implementation. Shared learning and established relationships were notable outcomes of the peer challenge process but the pilot also demonstrated that an approach to the most complex of subject matters can create engaging and motivational learning experiences.

Learning from the pilot is being taken forward, developing the model and tools for future use. The next step for the project is the development of an improvement network for Essex with integration to the implementation of cultural improvement strategies at regional and local levels, including alignment to local area agreement priorities.

IDeA

Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London EC 1M 5LG

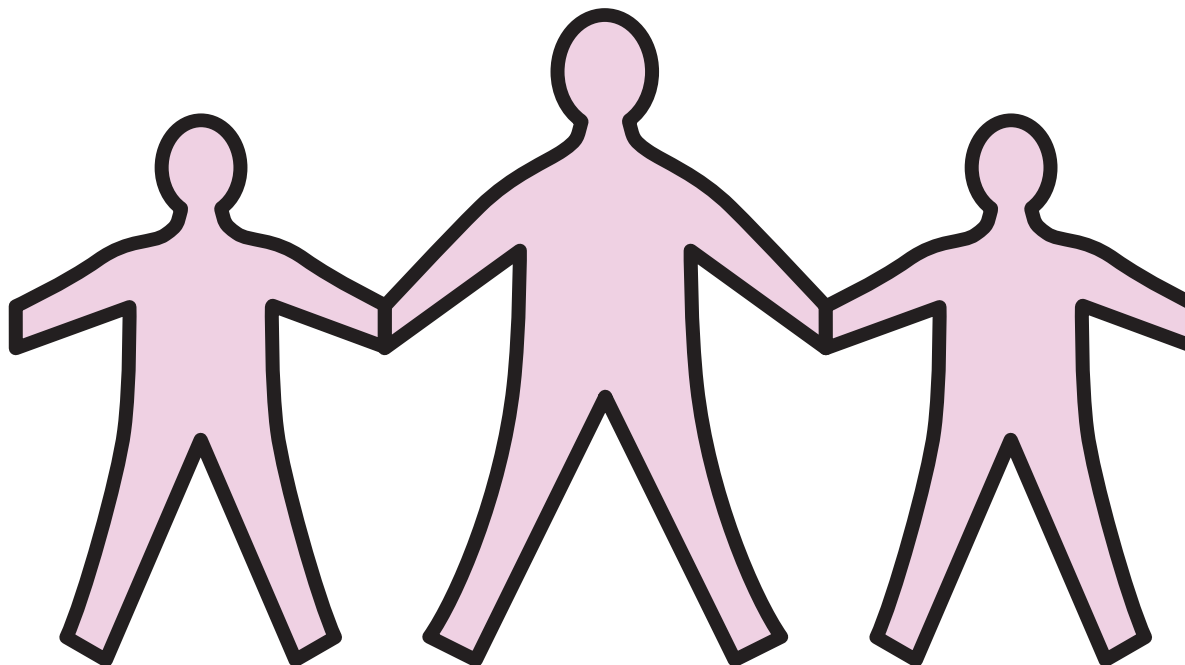
telephone 020 7296 6600
facsimile 020 7296 6666
email info@idea.gov.uk

www.idea.gov.uk



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