

ANGUS COUNCIL

RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMITTEE – 21 NOVEMBER 2002
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 10 DECEMBER 2002

SCOTLAND'S MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES – AN ACTION PLAN

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF LEISURE SERVICES

ABSTRACT

This report seeks members' endorsement of the response to the Scottish Executive's consultation on Scotland's Museums and Galleries – An Action Plan. The response is appended.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee endorses the response attached in the appendix.

2. BACKGROUND

In August 2002 the Scottish Executive published a National Cultural Strategy entitled "Creating Our Future, Minding Our Past", (Report 1009/00).

One of the outcomes of this strategy was the carrying out of a National Audit of Museums, which in turn identified the need for a framework for museums in Scotland, and an action plan.

The Chief Executive set up a short-life working group of officials from the Chief Executive's, Education, Finance, Information Technology and Leisure Services Departments, chaired by the Cultural Services Manager.

The appendix to this report summarises the response to the Scottish Executive's Consultation Paper.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no Financial Implications associated with this report.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

There are no Human Rights associated with this report.

5. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration, the Director of Finance, the Director of Education and the Director of Information Technology have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

JOHN R ZIMNY
DIRECTOR OF LEISURE SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.

Angus Council

A response to the Scottish Executive's Consultation exercise on

An Action Plan or Framework for Scotland's Museums and Galleries

Roles and Structures

- One of the most obvious needs, especially now that there is a Scottish Parliament, is for there to be a recognition within the Scottish Executive that there is a Museums and Heritage sector.
- The National Cultural Strategy almost begs for this to be created, thus permitting not only the various national organisations funded by the Scottish Executive to work more closely together, but also for the local authorities to relate to. The recent publication of draft guidance to local authorities is a case in point. Similar guidance from the Scottish Executive to the national organisations should also be given in order to deliver a National Cultural Strategy.
- The areas of Sport, the Arts and Film now have such bodies, and it is our view that an umbrella organisation covering museums and heritage is a must. While the National Museums of Scotland, National Galleries of Scotland and the Scottish Museums Council are obvious organisations which would fit into such a body, it is also important to include such nationally funded organisations as Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, and even independents receiving national funds such as the National Trust for Scotland.

The Historic Scotland not only administers much of Scotland's built heritage, but also collections of artifacts at these sites, while the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland manages the National Monuments Record and records most of this heritage through photography and illustration.

- Scotland's Museums and Heritage desperately needs to be seen as an entity which works together and moves in the same direction, whomsoever may be managing them, whether the Scottish Executive or Scotland's local authorities or local societies.
- Within such an umbrella organisation, the role of the present Scottish Museums Council will have to change, or rather fit within a clearer structure.

The National Museums and Galleries will continue to employ specialist curators who will manage the national collections, but their expertise should be made available to the local authority and independent museums who cannot be expected to employ such experts.

Presently Scottish Museums Council staff provide advice to local museum staff on conservation, fund-raising etc, and are well equipped to continue with this role.

The present membership role of Scottish Museums Council may have to be addressed, but there would remain a need for all Scotland's museums, including the nationals to meet to discuss common problems.

- Such a national organisation for Museums and Heritage would not only encourage "joined-up thinking" but would be able to think strategically about the sector, policy development and indeed standards development.

Here the role of Re:source north of the border would be effectively taken over, thus obviating a clear anomaly at present. The Museums Registration Scheme is an admirable scheme, but it does need a Scottish dimension and requires to be driven from Edinburgh, not London.

- The scope for partnership between the national and non-national museums is immense. The national audit has shown that Scotland's museum collections are not

simply in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and a major part is played by local authority and independent museums and heritage centres.

- The audit shows that a network already exists, a network which could, if encouraged, deliver a national strategy. By working together, we have a national museum service, reaching all Scotland's population, which would provide a national infrastructure of museums and heritage sites visited by tourists.
- What is urgently needed, however, is a national documentation system in order that the public actually knows the collections in public care. Such a system would greatly assist with joint exhibitions, joint publications, joint research projects and would greatly benefit Scotland's residents and tourists.

Funding

- There is no other subject at present which would receive such unanimous agreement as the need for funding. All public museums and heritage organisations, whether national or local have had several years of financial hardship, and all are desperate to turn the corner.
- Sustainability is undoubtedly the goal, and while it may well be that some museums perhaps do not have a future role, there are others which do fulfill an important place in Scotland's history, and would be missed were they to fold.
- Pure Darwinian forces will not leave Scotland with a balanced provision in the Museums and Heritage Sector. There does require to be a strategic overview, produced by a Museums and Heritage Council as proposed in the previous section.

Overlap and duplication could then be selectively weeded out, and the resources available then more strategically divided. The present ad-hoc funding arrangements do not encourage this, and the future of the Strategic Change Fund has a huge part to play in producing a more viable museums and heritage sector in Scotland.

- Local authorities do require to be freed of certain restrictions in order that they can compete on a level playing field with other tourist attractions, and the inability to charge museum admission or undertake destination-marketing are merely two examples of legislation which requires to be addressed.
- Most museum organisations have become adept at seeking and securing external funding. It is for the most part, however, short-term, project-based and peripheral. What is needed is quite the reverse – longer term and core funding. Here again a strategic plan with strategic change funding would be able to deliver. Such a strategy would also encourage partnerships, between local authorities jointly delivering a service for adjacent areas, for local authorities and independents within an area, and indeed between nationals and locals.

The contribution to wider agendas

- Museums are keen to play their part in wider-community learning but what is needed is encouragement at a strategic level.

A similar national promotion such as the People's Network in libraries would go a long way to achieving a learning network in Scotland's museums.

Education departments are being encouraged to create Cultural Co-Ordinators, but museums are receiving no encouragement to create Education Co-Ordinators!

The national audit shows that only 117 FTE posts in museums in Scotland have responsibility for education. Here a strategic approach could go a long way to improving this imbalance.

- In terms of social justice and equality, museums still have some way to go. Again the national audit reveals that 25% of Scotland's population does not visit museums.

A strategic approach can encourage museums to produce exhibitions and events programmes which go out of their way to attract those parts of society excluded by the mainstream museum activities.

It is important that in the pursuit of excellence, or in the evaluation of museums in terms of the importance of their collections, that what is not lost sight of is that museums are for people. They tell the story of the communities in which they are based and they can demonstrate community pride which can go a long way to help with regeneration and economic activity.

It is important the museums embrace community planning, and consider a customer-focused approach, rather than a top-down approach, which ignores the desires of the public. After all most local museums exist because the community wanted them. Community regeneration and tourism are important areas in which museums can make considerable contributions.

The network of community museums needs to be made much more of at a national level. At present the Area Tourist Boards are responsible for destination marketing and local authorities contribute significantly to their financial resources.

Museums, however, both those administered by the local authorities and the independents are expected to pay again in order to receive any kind of promotion from these boards, yet they provide almost half of the heritage visitor attractions in Scotland. Without this infrastructure, what would tourism be?

What is needed is recognition at Scottish Executive level of the part museums play in bringing visitors and therefore much-needed tourism income. The Area Tourist Board structure is presently being reviewed and Scotland's museums must be assisted by any such review.

There is no strategic overview of signposting visitors to these attractions, no financial incentives to improving visitor standards, no real marketing of the sector with its widespread network which reaches every part of Scotland.

A major overhaul is required which clearly recognizes the major part that museums and heritage play in tourism, Scotland's largest industry. After all it is Scotland's heritage and landscape that brings visitors not its climate! Marketing which addresses these strengths rather than sunbathers on sandy beaches will, in the long run, improve our visitor figures.

- The national audit has shown that over half the staff in Scotland's museums are volunteers. This important contribution by the voluntary sector is not recognized at

national level. The valuable skills, which retired people and others within the community bring to the sector, not only assist with the delivery of the museum service, but provide for people to make a contribution to the community – active citizenship.

Many older members of the community only realize that there is an important role for museums when they themselves retire. While this is to be encouraged, it does require resources – for training and support. Again at a strategic level, this are requires encouragement.

Professional Issues

- The need for a strategic approach to the curatorial expertise required to manage collections has been made. The national museums, galleries and Scottish Museums Council staff need to be “pooled” in order to deliver national standards and a national approach. This included conservation and security advice, presently given by a number of agencies.

The need for a national documentation system has also been made which would benefit not only the institutions, but the public. While definitions of museums vary, there are two areas in which there is common agreement – museums are for the public, and they hold collections. It seems fairly basic to expect therefore that the public have a right to know what these collections are.

- The role of Information Technology in assisting with such a national documentation system alone would be of enormous significance. While Information Technology can be of use in a range of ways in the museums sector, including multimedia in displays and interpretation, the single greatest prize must be a national documentation system. There is undoubtedly a huge backlog in documentation, but huge strides have been made by SCRAN, which should be built upon.

This has been achieved by the library sector, and the public reap the benefits of searching databases to identify the books they are looking for and follow this up with inter-library loans.

Is it unreasonable to expect any less of the museums sector?

- The development of a framework of standards is essential, and again a strategic approach is required. Again the libraries sector has a clutch of such standards and points the way.

As previously mentioned, Re:source the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, administers the Museums Registration Scheme, and this should be continued with work on Performance Indicators to create a framework of museum standards for Scotland.