

**SCOTTISH
MUSEUMS
COUNCIL**



The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003

Duty to Secure Best Value Guidance

Scottish Executive

Response by Scottish Museums Council

July 2003

1 Introduction

SMC is the membership organisation for non-national museums and galleries in Scotland, and fulfils many of the functions of a national agency. Our overall purpose is to improve the quality of museum and gallery provision in Scotland for the public benefit and we are recognised by the Scottish Executive as the main source of advice to the Executive and the main channel for Executive funding to Scotland's non-national museums. We have over 200 members who in turn manage over 320 museums. This includes all 32 local authorities (who collectively operate 140 museums), universities, regimental and independent museums. SMC combines strategic leadership for the sector with the provision of professional information, advisory and support services to members.

2 The Principle of Best Value

We very much welcome the principle of Best Value, and the fact that the guidance is strategic and descriptive rather than operational and prescriptive. It is clearly unrealistic for guidance such as this to venture into a level of detail which would specify museum operations either as separate services or relating to the cross cutting themes of joint working, equalities and sustainable development.

3 Public Performance Reporting

Nevertheless, as the community planning guidelines make explicit, the contribution of culture and leisure has not yet been recognised in the community planning process. That same danger arises in a consideration of Best Value. This is particularly apparent in the section on accountability. It is clearly right that authorities should be using public performance reporting so that stakeholders are told what quality of service is being delivered and what they can expect in the future. The difficulty is that at present the whole concept of public performance reporting in the cultural sector is significantly under developed.

The only statutory performance indicators are that local authorities should indicate how many museums are registered under the museums and galleries Registration scheme (which we administer in Scotland). As your colleagues in the Scottish Executive culture unit are aware, the scheme is being reviewed but we would not claim that the Registration scheme fully meets local authority or stakeholder needs in terms of public performance reporting.

SMC has therefore been reviewing and taking the lead in developing a broader approach to public performance reporting for museums. We very much welcome the emphasis in the Best Value guidelines on reporting trend and comparative information, and on reporting performance against targets or benchmarks to help stakeholders assess how performance is changing. Last year, SMC published the *National Audit of Museums and Galleries* commissioned by the Scottish Executive. This included not only a wealth of information about collections, buildings and services but also provided a standards framework which incorporated levels up to and including excellence and would allow benchmark reporting. Our approach to

reporting, including a drive to continuous improvement, is consistent with the Public Library Standards developed by SLIC and Cosla, and we believe this approach to museum sector standards should be developed as the underpinning to any overarching performance management framework for cultural services.

We would particularly welcome a discussion with the Best Value Task Force as to the principles and guidance they suggest should be developed in respect of both mechanism and content of public performance reporting in this area, and the link with the concept of cultural entitlement (which embraces an entitlement to quality). See also our responses to the Community Planning Guidance and Power to Advance Well Being.

4 Performance Management

It may be helpful to know that we have just published a report by independent consultants, Jura consultants, on Performance Management in Museums. The report provides a clear picture of standards and performance management schemes operational in the UK from a museum perspective. It takes as a starting point the recent Scottish Executive review of organisational schemes *Promoting Excellence in Scotland*. In addition to comparing current standards and schemes relevant to museums at both organisational and museum specific levels, the Jura report also considers the tools available to assist assessment and/or compliance. A clear matrix demonstrates where the various schemes overlap and where there are gaps in provision and we see this as the basis for further discussion with the Executive and Cosla as to how public performance reporting in this area should be developed.

The full text of the report is available on the SMC website at www.scottishmuseums.org.uk.

5 Option appraisal

From time to time, local authorities in Scotland have considered the option of placing museum services into a separate trust but as far as we are aware there have been no local authority museums in Scotland which have yet moved to Trust status and very few in England. Some theatres (e.g. Edinburgh), ice rinks etc have been transferred, but no museums in Scotland. Shetland will be transferring its museum service to the Shetland Amenity Trust, but this is an existing Trust which already has responsibility for heritage, interpretation and archaeology, and the transfer is tied into the HLF Award for a major new museum and archive.

As a follow up to the National Cultural Strategy, the Scottish Executive and Cosla produced joint guidelines for local authorities but while these refers to the Trust option, the guidelines are mostly directed at planning and direct service delivery. SMC published guidelines on local authorities and charitable trusts in 1997: so far as we are aware there have been no changes to most of the relevant legislation, but obviously what has changed is the introduction of Best Value. Forthcoming changes to charity law may also be relevant. The guidelines therefore need updating or replacing and we are particularly interested to see whether the forthcoming BVTF advisory note on configuration and administration of trading operations covers this

aspect. If not, then we would welcome discussion with the BVTF whether this might be the subject of another BVTF advisory note or how the SMC guidelines might be updated.

6 Cross cutting: Community Planning

We attach a copy of our response to the Community Planning Guidelines and the Power to Advance Well Being

We would be very pleased to provide further information as required and would hope to discuss these issues with the BVTF in due course.