



Response from the Scottish Museums Council to the Accounts Commission's consultation on the 2004 Direction for Statutory Performance Indicators for comparing the performance of Scottish councils 2005-6

The Scottish Museums Council (SMC) is the representative body and membership organisation for Scotland's non-national museums and galleries. We are acknowledged by the Scottish Executive as its main adviser on local museums and the main channel of Executive support for this sector.

SMC combines strategic leadership for the sector with the provision of professional information, advisory and support services to members. We have over 200 members who in turn manage over 330 museums. They include all 32 local authorities, university regimental and independent museums ranging in size from small voluntary trusts to large metropolitan services attracting in excess of one million visitors a year.

SMC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals for the Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) as set out in the 2004 Direction, and specifically to comment on the proposed deletion of Indicator 3 under Cultural and Community Services, which measures the performance of museum services.

Our response is informed by consultation with local authority member representatives. We convened a discussion meeting on 17th August, which was attended by museum service representatives from 9 councils. We have had comments from several local authorities in response to our original call to the meeting and also in response to the circulation of our draft response. In total, 15 councils have supported our recommendations.

SMC appreciates the Commission's aim to reduce the number of SPIs as other indicators of performance come into the audited domain. In principle, we welcome the broadening of performance monitoring through Best Value and public reporting under Community Planning, and see both these mechanisms will better enable local authority museums to demonstrate what they contribute to council services and to their impact on the local community. However, we consider there is a strong case to retain the SPI at least for the 2005-6 reporting period in order to keep it in existence until after the Cultural Review has reported in June 2005.

The 2004 Direction states that it is those indicators that are not subject to national policy concern that are to be reduced. We consider that the existence of the review, which was announced by the First Minister in his St Andrew's Day speech last November shows that culture is of the highest concern to national policy at the present time.

Moreover, we think that there is a policy case for retention at the more detailed level of the Cultural Review, which has at its core the premise that every citizen should have equity of access to cultural activity, and that this requires definition of a series of rights

and entitlements. Cultural entitlement requires delivery of the range of services that must include those that museums uniquely offer. Amongst the museums that SMC consulted it was felt strongly that because museums are not statutory services, the presence of the SPI is especially important in ensuring they continue to be part of the range, whether directly delivered by councils, or through the support councils give to independent museums.

The 2004 Direction states that SPIs must show change over time, and we understand that the withdrawal of the Museum Service SPI is primarily because it shows little change over time. However, continued compliance with Registration in the period in which these SPIs have been in effect means museums did have to perform better to meet the requirements of the second phase of Registration. The new revised standard will be launched this autumn and, because it will require more specific reporting to demonstrate compliance, will effectively mean a further improvement. The Direction also states that SPIs must refer to national rather than local targets or standards. Registration continues to be the UK-national standard for minimum museum service provision.

Considering all the above, SMC would argue that there is no reason to delete the SPI for museum services.

SMC appreciates that SPIs should focus on outputs and outcomes of services, and are aware that Registration, by integrating the range of museum activity, does not clearly demonstrate specific measurable outcomes. However, local authority museums do collect statistical information that could be used to do this. The issue for them is that there is no national definition or endorsement at the current time. Participants in the discussion felt that a SPI based on participation or usage would be a good and realistic output-based indicator. This is endorsed by research being undertaken by SMC as part of wider research on Cultural Entitlement to inform the Cultural Review. We believe that defining entitlement is likely to require output/outcome focused measures that have the national recognition that a new SPI would require.

Should it be possible to replace the existing museum service SPI after the Cultural Review then we would suggest that an indicator which measures participation in, or usage of museums and galleries activities and services, would achieve all the Accounts Commission's requirements as a simplified indicator that is outcome-focused and demonstrates change. It should also be noted that attendance at museums and galleries is one of CIPFA's measures in the proposed Scottish local authorities cultural statistics reporting due to commence shortly.

We have not yet got a final agreement on exact wording or running order, but a SPI containing the following three elements has found favour:

- The number of visits to and usage of museums and galleries per 1,000 population, and
- The number of visits and usage that are in person per 1,000 population, and
- The number of pupils participating in school activities delivered by museums and galleries

We have asked for comment from museum representatives on whether it will be feasible to collect the information and report it for auditing purposes and have a very favourable response. Assuming there is agreement to proceed then SMC would be able to provide Audit Scotland with the necessary detailed definitions of terms.

To summarise, SMC considers that with a Cultural Review currently under way it is the wrong time to review the SPI for museum services, and asks the Accounts Commission to delay any decision on its withdrawal until after the review, which would mean in the 2005 Direction at the earliest. Registration has been a popular indicator with the sector, which sees the absence of change in the statistics as concealing general improvement because of the phasing within Registration. After the review, if a SPI that is more explicitly outcome focused is required, we propose that one based on participation would fulfil the Accounts Commission's requirements.

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