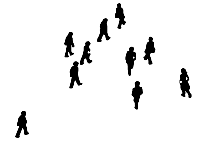


**SCOTTISH  
MUSEUMS  
COUNCIL**



# **Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 - Power to Advance Well-being Guidance**

**Scottish Executive**

**Submission by the Scottish Museums Council**

20 June 2003

## Introduction

The Scottish Museums Council [SMC] is the membership organisation for non national museums and galleries in Scotland, fulfilling 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. This includes all 32 local authorities (who collectively operate 140 museums), universities, regimental and independent museums. SMC combines strategic leadership with the sector with the provision of professional information, advisory and support services to members.

The current Museums Association definition of a museum is:

*Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artifacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.*

The term museum is used generically to refer to galleries as well as museums.

## The Well-being Guidance

The introduction of the well-being component to the Local Government Scotland Act 2003 provides a solid framework for improving the quality of life of individuals and communities in Scotland. Given this SMC particularly welcomes the opportunity to help shape the guidelines and to outline the contribution museums and galleries make to well-being. The responsibility for implementing these guidelines does not simply rest with local authorities but is shared by other partners working to improve our social, cultural, economic and environmental prospects. Heritage has a great deal to offer in this respect.

*Recommendation*      Emphasise the responsibility national Agencies like SMC have to engage with the well-being agenda, for example by providing leadership on appropriate themes such as cultural entitlements and rights of access.

The Community Planning guidance the Executive has produced is accompanied by detailed advice notes which act as an aid to implementing the guidance. Similar implementation challenges face local authorities and partners in relation to well-being. The development of similar advice notes relating to well-being would be useful. Rather than limit advice to local authorities it would also be helpful to broaden the scope of such a document to cater for the needs of partner sectors and agencies. The concept of well-being as an operational principle does need to be adopted more widely across the voluntary and public sector public generally. Unfortunately the current guidance does not address this broad information and training need. The danger is that the intimate relationship between Best Value, well-being and Community Planning is unlikely to be widely appreciated beyond local government. There is the potential for further confusion when one also takes the SIP infrastructure into account. As well as providing more detailed advice, therefore, it would also be helpful to support the specific needs of individual sectors. Local authorities work closely with others and these interactions would be greatly aided if all partners were far better informed .

- Recommendation*      Produce well-being advice notes to complement the Guidance Notes.
- Recommendation*      Provide targeted support, information and networking opportunities to enable heritage and cultural agencies to fully implement the well-being agenda.
- Recommendation*      Encourage local authorities to work with national heritage agencies such as SMC and Historic Scotland to develop the above support mechanisms.

## **Defining well-being**

SMC supports the broad definition of well-being upheld within the act and the guidance notes. The examples given are helpful, although the grouping under the three main headings is slightly odd at times – putting housing as a social rather than an environmental factor alongside the built environment, for example. Additionally, the term art is very specific and does not include the heritage sector which consists of museums and galleries, historic buildings, ancient and historical monuments, archives, National Trust and natural heritage provision.

- Recommendation*      Replace the term ‘arts or leisure facilities’ with ‘culture, heritage or leisure facilities’ (p. 6).

The discussion of well-being could helpfully be fleshed out a bit in order to make clearer the connection between the concept and application in practice. The lack of practical examples and guidance could also be addressed. This would help to introduce imaginative ways of engaging with quality of life projects.

- Recommendation*      Include examples of innovative partnership projects which contribute to quality of life across the range of possible applications (these could also be included in separate advice notes on well-being – see below).

## **Ensuring equality of standards**

As stated in the guidance (p. 7), local authorities have considerable discretion in how they exercise the power to advance well being. While this freedom allows for necessary flexibility and interpretation on a local level, there is also the potential for individual local authorities to neglect their duties with respect to certain aspects of the well-being agenda, such as heritage. Without the protection of minimum entitlements, standards and expectations are likely to vary across Scotland, leading to inevitable inequality within and across certain regions and in relation to particular themes. SMC’s role in relation to standards development and public performance reporting is explored more fully in our response to the Best Value Guidance.

The ability to develop “a broader and more innovative role” (p. 8) is in large part dependent upon consistent identification of and partnership with diverse sectors such as museums and galleries. Without a statutory incentive to involve and support such partners or the assertion of a minimum expectation to do so, the opportunity to provide imaginative and innovative service solutions could be lost. SMC would, therefore, very much welcome the opportunity to discuss the development of a minimum cultural entitlement – a similar scheme has been in existence in Holland for

a number of years – with the Best Value Task Force [BVTF] and the Scottish Executive culture department.

*Recommendation* BVTF to work with partner sectors and national agencies to develop and institute base line entitlements in relation to the different aspects of the well being agenda – SMC has, for example, championed the development of a minimum cultural entitlement.<sup>1</sup>

## **Linking-up**

The guidance rightly highlights the importance of different agencies working together to provide improved public services. Cross-fertilisation and the sharing of skills and resources will improve local authorities' ability to meet escalating public expectations. Strong traditions of co-operative working exist within the museums sector, with many of Scotland's 160 independent museums working closely with local authority museum services to provide opportunities for local people. SMC fulfils a national strategic role, providing advice, guidance and grants to assist these interactions. Our considerable knowledge of both the local authority and independent museum infrastructures could be well utilised to support the further development of these relationships through the Community Planning and well-being framework. As yet this knowledge is not being drawn upon and no commitment has been made to do so within the guidance.

*Recommendation* Pay specific attention to defining the role of national agencies, such as SMC, in supporting local authorities to implement the well-being guidance – this could take the form of dedicated guidance notes and/or an integrated section within the current guidance notes.

*Recommendation* Place a responsibility on local authorities to consult with and involve partner agencies when planning and implementing actions in relation to well being.

## **Continuous Improvement**

The emphasis given to continuous improvement is laudable. It would be helpful, however, to consolidate continuous improvement through the exercise of rigorous evaluation mechanisms. As our response to the Best Value Guidance indicates, the whole issue of public performance reporting in the cultural sector is significantly under developed.<sup>2</sup> The COSLA/Scottish Arts Council local authority expenditure questionnaire is currently being revised and expanded, led by the Scottish Executive culture unit and it would be useful to ensure these kinds of information gathering/assessment initiatives complement and take account of the well-being guidance.<sup>3</sup> This would help to avoid confusion and duplication across different evidence based schemes.

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<sup>1</sup> From National Audit to National Framework: SMC's response to the Scottish Executive's Action Plan Consultation, Scottish Museums Council, Edinburgh, 2002, Appendix 1: 7. and *Ten Priorities for a New Parliament: The Future of the Past*, Scottish Museums Council, Edinburgh: 2003: 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Best Value Guidance*, Scottish Museums Council, Edinburgh: 2003: 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Local Authority Expenditure on Arts, Libraries & Museums 2001/2002, COSLA and Scottish Arts Council, Edinburgh 2003.

*Recommendation* The BVTF designs a clear framework for evaluating performance in relation to the well-being guidance, ensuring this framework complements existing data gathering and public performance reporting mechanisms within the different partner sectors/agencies.

SMC can provide assistance in relation to existing public performance reporting within the museums sector. We would welcome further discussion about this.

### **Advancing well-being in practice**

In the absence of examples (p. 9-10) it is difficult to tell exactly what advancing well-being will involve in practice or how it differs from or relates to other agendas such as social justice or regeneration. Although specific examples are laid out in section 20(2) of the act, it would be helpful to provide instances in the guidance document. As stated above, the production of more detailed advice notes (as with Community Planning) would help to indicate how local authorities and partners are expected to engage with the process in practical terms.

*Recommendation* Provide examples of well-being initiatives and structures across a range of different agencies and sectors.

While the legislation provides local authorities with the power to advance well-being and to incur expenditure relating to this (p. 11), it is not clear whether this power also carries with it the responsibility to support organisations which can demonstrate that they actively contribute to the well-being of their area. The relationship between powers, direct services and overall responsibilities take us into a much wider debate about local authorities role and this may be addressed as part of the review of cultural sector governance promised by the **Partnership for a Better Scotland Agreement**.

*Recommendation* Consider whether the power to advance well-being also entails responsibility to support organisations which contribute to this agenda.

### **Who should benefit**

SMC welcomes the allocation of the power to work with specific communities in order to advance well-being (p. 13). Museums and galleries clearly have a great deal to offer in relation to promoting learning, enjoyment, personal and skills development, improving the social and built environment and increasing access to Scotland's heritage. Equality of access to such opportunities should be made available to all people and the ability to work intensively with particular communities is an important means to achieving this. SMC would be happy to provide examples of social inclusion work within the heritage sector and of the wider contribution museums and galleries make to improving the life chances and experiences of Scottish citizens.

### **Conclusion**

As it currently stands the guidance provides a précis of the relevant sections of the Local Government Scotland Act 2003. As such it is not as effective as the guidance provided by the Scottish Executive on Community Planning. It would be useful, for

example to address the involvement of partner agencies as the document is specifically aimed at local authorities. There is also a tendency to slip into a legal style which could potentially inhibit some readers. More accessible means of communicating the same information would be helpful. The opportunities for partner agencies to engage in promoting well-being are also not immediately apparent within the document and, in the absence of additional advice notes, there is a danger this aspect of the Community Planning legislation could be neglected by potential partners.

The heritage and cultural sectors should be leading partners in the drive to promote quality of life and SMC would welcome any further opportunities to contribute to guiding and promoting this important agenda.