



# Museum Issues

briefing notes on current topics

1997/6

## Guidelines for Strategic Planning: Writing a Heritage Strategy

These guidelines have been prepared by the Scottish Museums Council to assist local authorities in their strategic planning process. All local authorities in Scotland are members of the Council, the membership organisation for all non-national museums and the main channel for central government funding to those museums. SMC strongly recommends that all local authorities should develop heritage strategies for their area.

The guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive and SMC expects that each authority will decide its own priorities and determine its planning process accordingly. However, the guidelines are intended to highlight the key areas and relevant issues which SMC feels should be considered as part of the planning process, and are intended as

working documents for those involved in the development and approval of council strategies.

The guidelines can be read in conjunction with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities / Scottish Arts Council *Guidance on Arts Plans*, which addresses many of the same issues. The COSLA / SAC guidelines specifically omit sections on museums and libraries while recommending the merits of a holistic approach which embraces the arts, museums and libraries within the context of a wider cultural services or leisure and recreation planning process.

SMC welcomes comments on the guidelines and particularly welcomes suggestions for improvement.

## 1 National Context

- All local authorities are members of SMC, the membership organisation of non-national museums in Scotland and the main channel for central government funding to museums. SMC is in the process of drawing up a national strategy which will focus on national requirements, such as the need for protection of core collections, as well as drawing on local strategies.
- There will be major changes to Lottery distribution over the next 3 years. The Heritage Lottery Fund will be exercising new powers which increase the range of eligible projects and has already signalled a move away from expenditure on large capital projects. The creation of new funds means that, for the heritage sector, the policies of new distributors will become at least as important as HLF. The government has signalled that, over time, it is intended that there will be an increased emphasis on "people rather than buildings".
- Under new government proposals, all Lottery distributors will be required to draw up strategic plans which reflect identified needs. The government is also considering ways of "taking decision making closer to the grass roots". If local authorities are to play a part in the formulation of policy and decision making, realistic identification of local needs and development of an appropriate local strategy will be critical.
- The Government has clearly signalled the importance it attaches to education and to access to the information society and all council services are likely to be re-examined in light of those priorities. This is likely to accelerate a trend already obvious within the museum sector as museums emphasise their role as educational providers and will have significant implications for existing services and service delivery.
- The Office of Telecommunications (OFTEL) is already considering the BT proposal for networking schools. SMC strongly advocates that the principle of electronic networking should be extended to points of public access such as museums as part of the National Grid for learning. Not only does the curriculum encourage use of out-of-classroom resources but museums also play an important role in the developing field of life-long and self-directed learning. Further development of information strategies, national and local, will have significant implications for museums.
- SMC is a founder member of the Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (SCRAN), one of the most significant museum projects within Scotland. A partnership between the National Museums of Scotland, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and SMC, SCRAN has received funding from the Millennium Commission to create a multimedia database which provides access to a digital resource base of Scotland's material culture and history. SCRAN is already recognised internationally as a model for national provision, and as setting sector standards. Other sectors, e.g. libraries, are expected to follow the SCRAN model and devise systems which will be fully compatible with SCRAN standards and data. Local authorities are already significant contributors to SCRAN and all local authorities will have access to SCRAN material.
- New government priorities for local government include the introduction of a system of Best Value. Unlike Compulsory Competitive Tendering which it is intended to replace, the Best Value Regime (BVR) will apply across all services and will have significant implications for museums services which have been relatively unaffected by CCT. The introduction of BVR takes place against a background of tight financial settlements for the foreseeable future.

- COSLA advocates that local authorities should have a duty of community planning which looks at the needs of the community in the round and requires an ongoing dialogue with all agencies working within the authority. Government has commissioned a joint working party with COSLA to develop the concept of community planning. “The ultimate objective of this is to facilitate co-operation and co-ordination between local authorities and other public agencies, as well as with the private sector and voluntary bodies, in meeting the needs of the communities they serve. The developments of this policy will help to strengthen the link between councils and their communities and their responsiveness to community needs.” The museums and heritage sector has strong community links at all levels but there is the opportunity for these to be more formally recognised and for the role of the independent museums as well as local authority museums to be recognised in the community planning process.

**Key issue:**

- How does the heritage strategy relate to national strategies?

## 2 Culture or Heritage?

- Recommendation 62 of the Charter for the Arts, published in 1993, suggests that local authorities “develop arts and museum policies which are based on a holistic approach to cultural policy involving strong interdepartmental co-operation and, where appropriate, inter-authority co-operation.”
- At the time of local authority re-organisation in 1996, the national cultural agencies argued for the creation of cultural services departments or divisions. Many authorities have adopted this approach although there is no uniformity. Whatever the organisational structure, there are clear advantages in developing a broad cultural

strategy which embraces libraries and the performing arts as well as museums and the built heritage.

- Within the broad cultural grouping, most authorities are developing more tightly focused heritage strategies and arts strategies which are complementary. For arts strategies, SMC recommends the COSLA / SAC guidelines already referred to. A heritage strategy would be expected to include consideration of:

- Museums;
- Historic Scotland;
- National Trust for Scotland;
- Heritage centres;
- Archaeology;
- Historic archives;
- and
- Historical societies.

**Key issue:**

- What is the starting point for this strategy?

## 3 The Case for a Heritage Strategy

- Local authorities in Scotland have a statutory duty to ensure that there is an adequate provision of facilities for cultural activities for inhabitants of their area (s 14(1) Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982)
- SMC would argue that, in order to satisfy themselves that they are fulfilling their statutory function, all authorities should be monitoring provision of facilities in their area and drafting a heritage strategy which addresses the adequacy of existing provision in a rapidly changing environment.
- Most funding bodies, including the Heritage Lottery Fund, require applicants to demonstrate that a particular funding application is firmly embedded in the

authority's own strategy. Once the new powers given to the Heritage Lottery Fund come into effect, and the funds for the sixth "good cause" and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts are established, competition for funding will become more intense and applicants' strategic planning will become still more important.

- In addition, the Lottery distributors will be required to draw up strategic plans reflecting identified needs. Lottery funding is "seen as part of regional and local strategies to bring about economic, cultural and social regeneration and takes account of sustainable development".
- Sustainability will be the key to development over the next decade, whether in the drive to attract capital funding, the requirement to demonstrate Best Value for the expenditure of public funds or the planning of new initiatives for individual venues or organisations. Assessment of whether or not a development is sustainable should include a realistic assessment of the impact which new developments will have on existing provision, and how that will affect the assumptions inherent in the heritage strategy. Sustainability will also be a continuing issue for maintenance of existing services as all councils look at new models of service delivery.

#### Key issues:

- Is there a genuine commitment to the strategy?
- Are working assumptions sufficiently clear e.g. relevant national strategies, expected demographic changes, changes in education and leisure markets?
- Is the council willing to prioritise and assuming so, who will make these critical decisions?

## 4 An integrated Approach

Local government reorganisation and the creation of new unitary authorities has provided the opportunity for a more integrated approach to planning and services. A well thought out heritage strategy will be relevant not only to cultural services, but to all of the following council strategies and / or policies:

- Heritage;
- Arts and culture;
- Education;
- Leisure;
- Tourism;
- Planning and environment;
- Information;
- Economic development;
- Community participation;
- Community planning; and
- Best Value.

#### Key issues:

- Do existing policies recognise the importance of museums and heritage?
- Does internal advocacy need to be a part of the strategy?
- How can the heritage strategy contribute to the council's corporate objectives?

## 5 Methodology

There are a number of options:

- A service review which proceeds through a series of open discussions before drafting a strategy. This is the approach adopted by Fife Council: participants included councillors, officers from museums, arts, libraries and corporate policy and the Director and Assistant Director of SMC who discussed a series of issues relating to museums before agreeing on the need for a heritage strategy which would then go out to wide public consultation, via innovative "Citizen's Juries".

- A small team within the Council drafts a strategy which then goes out for consultation to members and to the public. This has the advantage of being firmly focused and may be appropriate if the Council is working to a particularly tight deadline. This is the approach being adopted by South Lanarkshire.
- A consultant is engaged to prepare a strategy. This is less likely now than in the 1980's but may still be appropriate e.g. where a council has no direct museum provision and the strategy seeks to co-ordinate the views of a range of independent organisations.

#### Key issues:

- What are the council's own corporate objectives?
- Does the team have an audit of existing provision?
- Should departments such as education, leisure, social services and planning be involved?
- What form will public consultation take?

## 6 Writing the Strategy: Priority Issues

### The Role of the Museum

A museum is defined as "an institution which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit". The comprehensive nature of the museum mission is important, and flexible to changing circumstances.

Museums can help to deliver many of a local authority's corporate objectives including:

- provision of cultural facilities;
- provision of tourism facilities;

- education;
- economic regeneration; and
- community participation.

#### Key issues:

- What are the council's priorities over the planning period?
- What are the priorities for the council's museums?

### Independent Trusts

Over 50% of SMC members are independent trusts ranging from the larger industrial museums such as the Scottish Mining Museum, Scottish Maritime Museum and Scottish Fisheries Museum to small community museums in the Highlands and Islands. Most receive support from local authorities through a combination of grant aid and curatorial support.

Independent museums have a vital part to play within a council's heritage strategy. Not only are they so obviously community based, but they can provide valuable channels for the council to maintain an active communications and outreach policy. As points of public access and information, they can assist the council in implementing a policy of decentralisation and community planning.

#### Key issues:

- What support will the council offer independent museums?
- What are the criteria for support?
- What is the council's information and outreach policy?

### The Importance of Built Heritage and Archaeology

Many museums are important historic buildings in their own right and due consideration should be paid to the desirability of maintaining



historic links. However, older buildings are usually difficult and expensive to adapt to modern expectations and requirements and the creation of a new museum within a historic building may not be the most appropriate use of the building.

Other heritage sites are vitally important in presenting a true picture of the heritage of an area. These may include historic houses and sites maintained by Historic Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland as well as the museums of the National Galleries of Scotland and National Museums of Scotland. There is improving liaison with these organisations at national level but councils could usefully consider whether to set up more formal discussions and co-ordination with these organisations at a local level.

Archaeological provision is an important aspect of the heritage strategy, with particular implications in the area of planning and development

#### Key issues:

- What is the significance of Historic Scotland and National Trust for Scotland within the area?
- Who has responsibility for maintaining the National Monuments Record?
- What archaeological provision is available and what is the place of archaeology within the strategy?

#### Natural Heritage

There is a good argument that a heritage strategy should include the natural heritage and not simply be restricted to material culture. Common themes include longer term perspectives and emphasis on interpretation and access. Environmentalists have been successful in educating the public to understand the concept of sustainability and the need to balance unlimited access with conservation for the longer term.

However, an environmental strategy would include much that is not directly relevant to museums and it may be more feasible to develop separate policies but highlight area of common interest. Following on the conclusion of SMC's Environmental Initiative for museums, partly funded by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), SMC and SNH will shortly be concluding a formal Accord which commits staff of each organisation to take formal cognisance of the policies of the other and councils may find it helpful to develop that same approach.

#### Key issues:

- Should a heritage strategy include natural heritage?
- Are there plans for a common interpretative strategy?

#### Registration Scheme

The Museums & Galleries Commission's Registration Scheme is the benchmark of standards for museums and galleries throughout the UK. In Scotland, the scheme is administered by the Scottish Museums Council which in this instance acts as an agent for MGC. The scheme was launched in 1988, and a second phase will begin in 1998, requiring all museums to re-register. The registration scheme is formally endorsed by COSLA.

The scheme is voluntary, but most museums are keen to join as Registration acts as a guarantee of minimum professional standards for funding bodies and sponsors. Also, although it is intended primarily as a measurement of standards, it has had a significant effect in raising standards.

#### Key issues:

- Has the council made a commitment to obtaining and maintaining Registration status for its museums?
- Who has responsibility within the council for museum standards?



## Collections Management

The term “Collections Management” used in the museum context encompasses a wide range of tasks and responsibilities required to maintain and interpret collections in the public domain in the long-term.

These include, as a minimum:

- an Acquisition and Disposal Policy formally adopted by the museum’s governing body;
- details of documentation, with strategies for eliminating any backlogs;
- current and planned strategies for preventive and remedial conservation of the collections;
- access to collections by the public and researchers; and
- security and insurance arrangements.

### Key issues:

- Has the council considered the issues which together comprise a professional level of collections management?
- What staff provision will be required to manage the collections?

## Information and Access

Dissemination of information and provision of access to museum collections is an increasingly important aspect of public accountability for museums. Traditionally, museums have concentrated on the presentation of information in the form of physical access through long-term displays, temporary exhibitions and loans. Aspects of access currently being developed more fully include books, catalogues, and electronic communication allowing a more comprehensive interpretation of collections to provide a richer educational experience.

Advances in information technology and more sophisticated approaches to information management will have a significant impact on use of museum services. Museums in Scotland are at the forefront of new technology through the development of the

SCRAN network and SMC encourages all museums to participate in the SCRAN project as contributors and as users.

Museums will be affected by developments in legislation e.g. increased copyright protection for databases which will have an impact throughout the authority. The application of a corporate approach to IT throughout the local authority may therefore have significant benefits.

### Key issues:

- How will the council make best use of museum IT applications, e.g. as an educational tool?
- What is the council policy regarding participation in SCRAN?
- How does the council’s IT policy impact upon museums?
- What are the links with other information providers e.g. libraries?

## Education

Museums can help local authorities fulfil their statutory educational obligations by providing support for the curriculum both inside schools and on site. However, there is also an increasing recognition of the fact that education should be a life-long process and museums can provide an ideal focus for the development of life-long and self-directed learning. The development of IT and the possibilities for electronic networking are of particular interest to museum educationalists and the important part which museums can play both in terms of infrastructure and the provision of content is highlighted in the recently published proposals for the National Grid for Learning.

Education in museums has recently been the subject of a UK-wide study by David Anderson, commissioned by the Department of National Heritage. The resulting report, *A Common*

*Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom* (1997), identified the need for investment in training and resources in this important area.

#### Key issues:

- Has the council fully considered or adopted strategies to make the best use of the educational potential of the collections?
- What liaison is there between the museum and the Education Service in the council?

#### Local History Societies

Throughout the UK, but most particularly in Scotland, many small museums are run by local history societies and other community groups. These societies have a wealth of personal knowledge of a specific area, its industries, architecture and social patterns. Collectively, the information in their archives acts as a major repository of the nation's history and their importance should not be underestimated. Many of these societies benefit from professional support from their local authority's Museums Officer, with whose long-term advice they can join the national Registration scheme despite employing no professional staff.

#### Key issues:

- What is the significance of local history societies and their archives within the area?
- Who has responsibility within the council for liaison with them?
- Could professional support from the council enhance cultural provision in the area?

#### Presentation and Customer Care

Today's customers include not just existing and potential visitors, but people who interface with the museum in any form (including those from other sections of the local authority). Modern customers rightly expect high standards of customer care and

museums need to ensure that this oft-neglected area is receiving due attention. One route is to subscribe to one of the existing systems. The Scottish Tourist Board has in recent years strongly promoted two schemes - "Welcome Host" and the follow-up "Scotland's Best". Both are short, straightforward customer care training programmes, designed to ensure that staff (all staff, not just those recognised as being "front-of-house") understand the value of good customer care to the success of the organisation and how to apply its principles. Both programmes are enjoyable, and are good team builders and motivators. Museums could also consider applying for inclusion in the Scottish Tourist Board's Visitor Attraction Grading Scheme, a recognised quality assurance scheme which Area Tourist Boards may in future adopt as a condition of membership, and which SMC advocates as complementary to Museum Registration.

#### Key issues:

- What resources are allocated to improve customer care levels?
- What existing scheme best suits local circumstances?

#### Independent Charitable Trusts or Companies

In light of difficult financial settlements for 1997-8 and the foreseeable future, local authorities are examining the extent of direct provision in all services. Some are considering whether it is a feasible and cost effective option to transfer ownership or management into a separate charitable trust or company limited by guarantee. In February 1997, SMC issued guidelines for local authorities considering the trust option, which looked at the main advantages and disadvantages of transfer to a separate body.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering had only limited application to museum services but Best Value Regime is expected to be more



relevant as it applies to all services (see also section on Best Value Regime).

**Key issues:**

- Has the council considered the issues covered in SMC Guidelines?
- What are the implications of Best Value Regime for the creation of separate trusts or companies?

**Best Value Regime**

Compulsory Competitive Tendering has been suspended but the Government is committed to introduction of a Best Value Regime which, unlike CCT, will extend to all council services. Councils are required to deliver through performance plans linked to 3 year budgets. They are required to demonstrate achievement towards this by the end of 1999.

Given the difficult financial settlements, there will be an inclination to treat BVR as simply an exercise in cost cutting. However, the opportunity is there to focus on quality and service. SMC will be working with COSLA to ensure that issues of quality, access and service are recognised as an integral part of the concept of Best Value.

**Key issues:**

- What performance indicators/ criteria will the council be adopting in assessing Best Value?
- Does the council have means of calculating the current cost of the museum service?
- Does the council have the means of assessing direct and indirect benefits of the museums service?
- Will the council require detailed revenue funding agreements with independent museums and who will be responsible for these?

**Charging**

There has been a tradition in Scotland of free access to local authority museums. Indeed s32 Public Libraries Consolidation Scotland Act 1887 prohibits local authorities from levying admission charges to museums and libraries established under the Act or to which the Act relates. SMC is firmly committed to the principle of free access to public collections and there is no doubt that admission charges significantly disadvantage or single out some of the most vulnerable sections of the community.

Many councils are exploring other ways of earning income including exploiting intellectual property rights and charging for detailed enquiries. How does this sit with the move to emphasise museums' roles as educational providers and points of public information and access?

**Key issues:**

- Is the council committed to a general policy of free access?
- What is the council policy on charging for services such as public enquiries?
- How will the museum service benefit from earned income?

**Resources Generally**

Some of the new authorities are faced with a significant imbalance of provision within their area and redressing any imbalance may have significant implications for staffing and resources. Meeting the requirements of Registration Phase 2 may also have resource implications if, for instance, there is a significant documentation backlog or staffing is simply stretched too thinly to provide an appropriate service.

SMC recommends that all local authorities, whether or not they operate a museum, should have at least one recognised Museum Development Officer with a specific remit to

develop museum policy. Responsibilities would include registration and curatorial advice to independent museums, developing joint education projects with education providers including schools, developing partnerships with other heritage organisations and providing advice and assistance for applications to the Lottery and other funding sources.

Local authority budgets are under severe strain and current assumptions are that there will be no increase in funding in real terms. Access to external funding is critical and changes to lottery funding will have a significant impact on museum services as distributors adopt a more strategic approach and move away from purely capital projects.

#### Key issues:

- What resources are available?
- What resources are required?
- What are the council's priorities?
- How will the council access external funding?

#### Sustainability

The last decade has seen an increase in the numbers of visitors to museums and heritage sites. Predictions for the next 5 years vary but, in general, visitor numbers are expected to increase slightly. However, Scotland is a relatively small and seasonal market and there is a limit to the number of new museums and heritage centres which the market will support, even allowing for any predicted increase in visitor numbers.

There is an increasing recognition from the national agencies that investment may be far better directed to improving the quality of existing facilities than investing in new ventures which are unlikely to attract

significant visitor numbers without marked impact on existing facilities. If this displacement effect is significant, it can produce two non-sustainable facilities instead of one viable option.

#### Key issues:

- What are existing and future markets for new attractions?
- Who evaluates new proposals?
- Is there an acceptable margin of displacement?
- What is the council's policy towards rationalisation?

#### Community Participation

Museums already fulfil a vital role within the community, acting as a focus for community activity and involvement, but this role is sometimes overlooked. A heritage strategy might address the question of how this role can be articulated and developed, and what implications this has for the development of the concept of community planning.

There is also a demand for increasing involvement by the public in what have in the past been viewed as matters of professional judgement, including acquisitions, disposal and appropriate display.

#### Key issues:

- How can museums further develop community participation?
- What are the mechanisms to ensure an appropriate balance between professional judgement and community participation?

## 7 Implementing the Strategy

There is little point in expending time and effort in writing a strategy if no attempt is made to implement it, including implementing any scaling down and rationalisation of activity as well as undertaking new developments. Devolution will clearly have a significant impact upon local authorities in their relationship with central government on the one hand and national agencies and independent organisations on the other. However, even before this, significant changes for central and local government suggest that any strategies should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.

A strategy may also be affected by particular events e.g. success or failure of a Lottery bid.

### Key issues:

- How will the strategy be implemented?
- What events should trigger a review of the strategy?



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## Acknowledgements

Much of this paper is based on the work of the Fife discussion groups and SMC is grateful to Fife Council for the opportunity to draw upon that experience.

SMC is also grateful to the staff of South Lanarkshire Museums for their comments on the draft guidelines.

