



Museum Issues

briefing notes on current topics

No 8/1998

Best Value for Museums: A Corporate Approach

1. Introduction

All local authorities in Scotland have a statutory duty to ensure adequate cultural facilities for the inhabitants of their area (see s.14 (1) Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982). However, there is a surprising lack of formal guidance or external evaluation of museum services: there are no formal performance indicators published by either the Accounts Commission or the Audit Commission and the Accounts Commission management guidelines have minimal references to museums. Published figures from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants show that local authorities annual expenditure on museums varies from over £20 to less than £1 per inhabitant but there has been little analysis of how this difference translates into comparative experience for museum users.

1. For many local authorities, assessment for Best Value is therefore the first real opportunity to review the museum service and in particular to benchmark the service against best practice.
2. These recommendations have been developed by the Scottish Museums Council as the strategic agency for non-national museums in Scotland. The SMC Working Party, drawn from local authority professional staff, consulted with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, with the Accounts Commission and the Museums Training Institute, the National Training Organisation for the sector. As a first step, the Working Party has developed indicators which are recommended as primary benchmarks, appropriate for inclusion in self-assessment and progress reports on implementation plans. Following the first self-assessments by councils, SMC intends to revise the guidelines to be available for inclusion in the Prototype Public Performance Reports for June of 1999. At that stage, SMC will also issue more detailed recommendations for individual museum services, drawing on still developing best practice.

2. Best Value: In Theory

1. **The first joint Task Force report published in July 1997 sets out key principles and defines the essential elements of Best Value. These are common to all services across councils.**

Key principles:

- accountability
- transparency
- continuous improvement
- ownership.

Essential elements:

- sound governance
- performance measurements and monitoring
- continuous improvement
- long-term planning and budgeting.

2. **The second report of July 1998 confirms the key principles and key elements. Although the Task Force felt it was still not appropriate to attempt a strict definition of Best Value, key elements which would define a Council which is delivering Best Value are identified as:**

- an established performance management framework to deliver continuous improvement for all services
- a clear commitment to the “4 C’s” ie Challenge, Compare, Consult, Compete
- a rigorous approach to analysing service delivery mechanisms/processes – this means demonstrating that the council has seriously considered innovative alternative ways of delivering each service, including competition
- consistency with the 4 key principles of Best Value.

3. Best Value: In Practice

1. Museums have a duty to preserve the cultural heritage not only for current consumers but also for future citizens. Strategic management which links strategic aims, operational objectives and resource decisions is very welcome but authorities should take account of the fact that museums long-term objectives extend beyond a 3-year planning cycle.
2. Social objectives are notoriously difficult to evaluate and far more work needs to be done to develop appropriate indicators and means of evaluating impact. Few local authority museums in England are yet subject to Best Value and work by Scottish local authorities will have a wider UK and international importance. Lessons learnt from developing and discarding inappropriate indicators will be as valuable as those learnt from development of successful indicators.
3. The SMC recommendations rely where possible on existing schemes, particularly those which are externally validated. This framework should enable a local authority to demonstrate relative quality of performance. However, Best Value does not as yet address the issue of whether cultural facilities, however well managed, can be objectively assessed as adequate for the inhabitants of the area. If the new constitutional framework sees a greater emphasis on local authorities role as “enabling” authorities and less reliance on direct provision, it is all the more important to have clarification of what is meant by “ensuring” and “adequacy”. Such clarification is beyond the scope of these first recommendations but SMC will be addressing these issues with CoSLA and the new parliament in consideration of the evolving role of local authorities.

4. Best Value: How to Get There

The Working Party considered a range of possible models, recognising that the choice of model was in most cases a corporate decision, not one for the museum service alone. The following were considered the most relevant.

4.1 Accounts Commission Guidelines

The most relevant publication is *The Challenge of Charging* (Bulletin March 1998), which sets out a structured process for managing charges within the corporate framework of a council.

- The recommendations include consideration of the policy objectives of charging: the possible range of identified objectives include reducing council subsidy, maximising revenue, optimising use of the service and ensuring equality of access.
- The Bulletin draws attention to the existing legislation which prohibits local authorities from charging for admission to core collection, and this statutory prohibition must be borne in mind when assessing net costs in the context of Best Value.

4.2 Business Excellence Model

A number of local authorities are using the Business Model (Appendix Diagram 1) usually as an aid to planning. Diagram 2 shows how BEM might be interpreted by museum services. In doing so, the following should be considered:

- The BEM is strong on process but does not necessarily help in formulating aims and objectives: the model assumes that these are already in place. In fact, many local authorities are still developing corporate objectives and/or considering how the museum service can meet those objectives. SMC recommends use of SMC Museum Issues *Guidelines for Strategic Planning: Writing a Heritage Strategy* in

connection with Leadership module and publications such as SMC Museum Issues *Education Policy* in connection with the Policy & Strategy module.

- All local authorities are looking to develop effective partnerships with the private sector and many authorities already have effective partnerships in place through support for a network of independent museums. This support should be clearly identified at the outset of the assessment process, as it may have a significant bearing both on resource management and results modules.
- Established performance indicators for museums include Registration and the Visitor Attraction Grading Scheme. These are relevant to the process module and particularly useful in that they are externally validated.
- While it may be relatively easy for commercial business to distinguish between results and social impact, it is more difficult for council museum services to determine exactly where “Impact on Society” ends and “Results” begins. Indeed it may be that these two modules are almost identical, for instance where the identified corporate objectives of the council include addressing of social exclusion and improving the quality of life for inhabitants of their area, but with care BEM can be customised to distinguish between social impact and intended results.
- It is equally difficult to distinguish between customer satisfaction and results, although current customer satisfaction is not the only consideration for museum services. Longer term issues of future public benefit are also significant.

4.3 MTI Benchmarking

MTI as the National Training Organisation for the heritage sector is developing a Benchmarking Guide.



- This is a useful assessment guide which concentrates upon process and results.
- It is probably more useful for the proposed next stage of the Best Value for museums, that is the in-depth performance indicators for museums, than for devising indicators which are appropriate at corporate level.

4.4 SMC Recommendations

The SMC Working Party has devised indicators which are recommended to local authorities as primary benchmarks (see page 6). While it is not essential for all local authorities to adopt all these indicators, it is expected that local authorities will consider the issues raised. In devising indicators, we have made the following assumptions:

- Existing benchmarks should be used wherever possible, particularly where they are externally validated. The most relevant are Registration (a scheme already endorsed by CoSLA) and the Visitor Attraction Grading Scheme.
- Aspirational benchmarks which facilitate continuous improvement should be encouraged. The principal recommendation here is the adoption of an education policy.
- Local authorities should have at least one benchmark which demonstrates support for the independent sector. Rather than set a % limit in terms of the individual museums budget, SMC recommends the local authority should indicate support as a % of its own museum budget including contribution in kind eg staff time. This can be read in conjunction with the recommendation that the local authority should identify the museum budget as a % of overall budget.
- "Users" includes not only visitors but enquiries by phone, fax, e-mail, web site.
- Where possible, performance indicators are stated as ratios which will make inter-authority comparisons more meaningful.

- As with all local authority services, but particularly those which have not been exposed to CCT in the past, more detailed management information will be required than has been previously available. It may be argued that some of the suggested performance indicators are management information rather than indicators of outcome but this information is not yet generally available and is a valuable and necessary first step towards Best Value.

5. Best Value: The Next Stage

- There is a great deal of confusion in current terminology and methodologies. Over the next 12 months, SMC will be working with relevant organisations such as the Accounts Commission and CoSLA to try to agree a working thesaurus and matrix which would enable various models to be co-ordinated. A successful precedent exists in the Scottish Quality Management System.
- Over the longer term, SMC will work with other agencies to develop more appropriate evaluation techniques for museums. This is also one of the recommendations of the National Strategy for museums which is circulated for consultation simultaneously with these guidelines.
- SMC will continue to collate and disseminate examples of good practice.
- These guidelines will be reviewed in the spring of 1999, with a view to revising the corporate indicators and to recommending in-depth performance indicators. Meanwhile, SMC welcomes comments on these guidelines and in particular will be asking members to identify how useful these indicators have proved in practice and what difficulties have been encountered in applying the indicators.

CORPORATE AIMS		TOOLS/STRATEGIES	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Strategic			
1.	Ensuring provision of adequate cultural facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural audit SMC "Guidelines for Strategic Planning: Writing a Heritage Strategy" CIPFA figures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authority has undertaken a cultural audit by fixed date £ support for museums as a % of total l.a. budget £ per head of population
2.	Serving the needs of the community now and in the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forward plan Surveys MGC Registration scheme (especially collections/disposal policies), disaster planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authority has a forward plan for the museum service % users within target groups Adoption of MA Code of Ethics
3.	Support for public/private sector partnerships	Support for independent museums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % support for independent museums as total of all museum expenditure
Care of collections			
1.	Collections are cared for	MGC Registration scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % museums supported which are registered under MGC scheme % museums supported which have succeeded in renewing registration
Services, including Education and Access			
1.	Customers are cared for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visitor Attraction Grading Scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % museums supported which are registered under VAGS % museums supported which have improved their performance % user complaints
2.	Demonstrating commitment to Education	Adopt/implement education policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % museums supported which have adopted an education policy School visits as % previous year Other educational activities as % previous year
3.	Demonstrating a commitment to access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys Visitor/enquiry figures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hours open Hours open free User numbers (including outreach) Loans made (all as % of previous year) Planning for needs of disabled visitors
Funding and Accountability			
1.	£ per user	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CoSLA/SMC survey Visitor/enquiry figures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> £ income per user £ expenditure per user Ratio income/expenditure per user



Diagram 1

THE BUSINESS EXCELLENCE MODEL

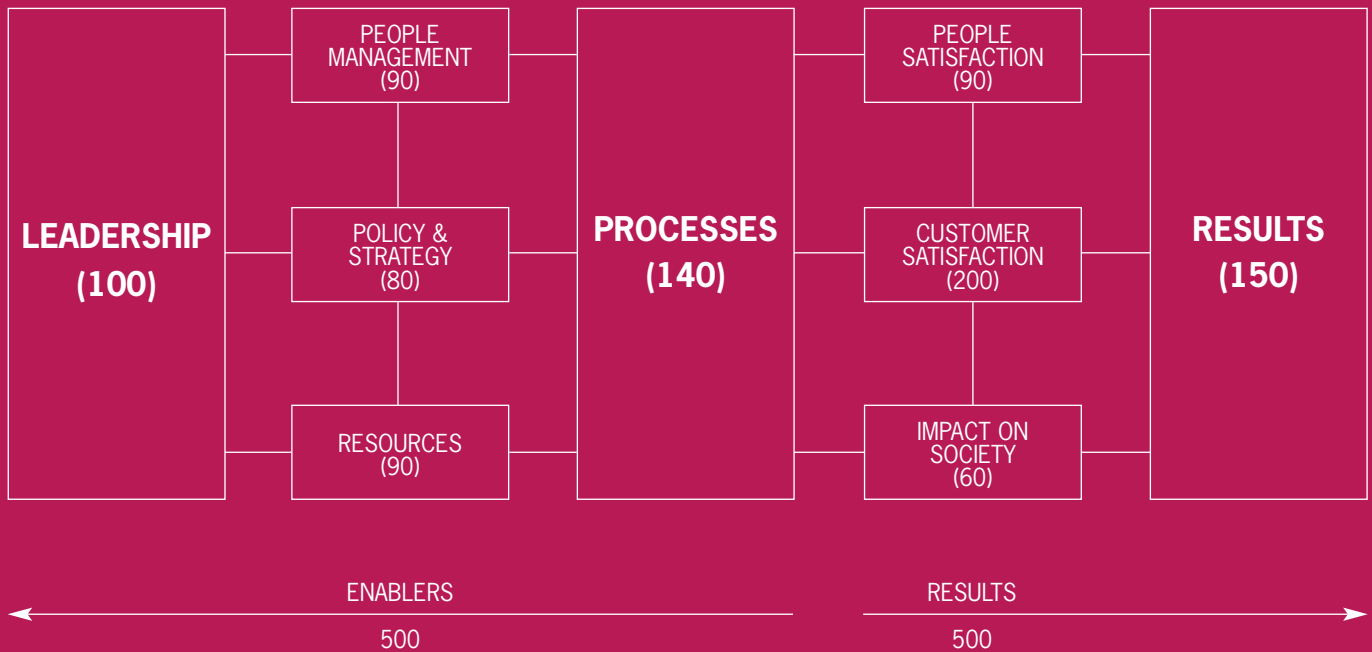
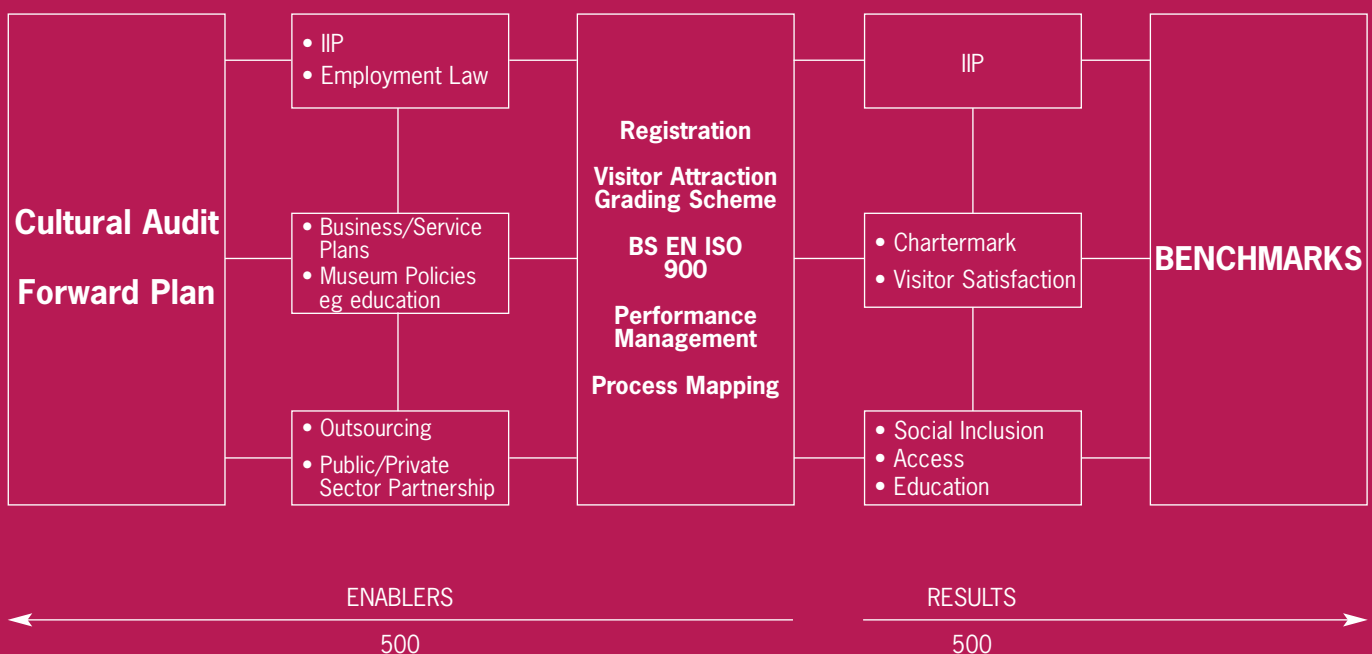


Diagram 2

THE BUSINESS EXCELLENCE MODEL AND MUSEUMS



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