

## **DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO: Leisure and Arts Services Committee – 18 November 2002**

**REPORT ON: Consultation – Scotland's Museums and Galleries - An Action Plan**

**REPORT BY: Director of Leisure and Arts**

**REPORT NO: 815-2002**

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To agree a response to the consultation exercise to assist the development of an Action Plan for Scotland's Museums and Galleries as requested by the Scottish Executive.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

2.1 It is recommended that members agree the attached response and remit the Director of Leisure and Arts to respond to the consultation document on this basis.

### **3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 There are no direct Financial Implications placed on the Council through the recommendations of this report.

### **4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Heritage Section of the Leisure and Arts Department offers facilities and programmes of exhibitions, events and workshops which are planned to meet the need of local audiences and tourists, which ensure local needs are met locally and that opportunities for culture, leisure and recreation are readily available to all.

### **5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Heritage Section of the Leisure and Arts Department aims to make its programme of activities accessible to all sections of the community including visitors with disabilities, the elderly and those with small children.

### **6.0 MAIN TEXT**

6.1 On 10 July 2002 the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Mike Watson MSP, launched the Report of the National Audit of Museums and Galleries. The Audit was commissioned by the Executive from the Scottish Museums Council following the National Cultural Strategy. Funding of £250,000 was provided to carry out the work. The Audit, the first of its type in Europe, represents an initial step towards further planning for the sector.

6.2 On the 6 September 2002 the Minister launched a consultation exercise for a three month period to gather responses from the sector to the National Audit and to formulate an Action Plan.

6.4 The key issues identified for consultation are Roles and Structures, Funding, Museums Contribution to Wider Agendas and Professional issues.

## **7 PROPOSED RESPONSE**

### **7.1 Roles, Structures and Funding**

- 7.1.1 The respective roles of the Scottish Executive, National Museums of Scotland (NMS), National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) and local authorities need to be defined. This definition however is linked to the role of the Scottish Museums Council (SMC) and Re:source and its role in Scotland. It could be argued that in a post devolution Scotland we are not benefiting from the in-depth consultation and work that went into the Re:source document 'Renaissance in the Regions'. Indeed the role and remit of Re:source in Scotland is in pressing need of clarification.

The Scottish Executive should play a significant role in the promotion and development of the whole sector and not just through its funding of the SMC, NMS and NGS. Currently it is not resourced to do this, which makes it difficult to build an understanding, which is a prerequisite to a functioning framework. We would therefore advocate clarification of the respective roles of NMS, NGS, SMC and any new national agency in leading policy and strategy development.

- 7.1.2 In addition to national strategy and policy development there is an argument for a more strategic local approach. One option would be to consider City Region based Cultural Partnership (covering the full range of cultural provision) which would assist in developing a coherent approach and in prioritisation. This would in turn be a basis for distribution of any new resources.

- 7.1.3 It is clear from the Audit that with 46% of nationally important collections housed with the NMS and NGS the other 54% is outwith these directly funded institutions. This gives rise to great anomalies in funding levels and raises questions on equity of care for the objects concerned. Further more the levels of interpretation and access to these objects vary widely.

Positive relations exist between the nationals and local authorities but the vastly different levels of resource available do set up problems. The conditions of loan regarding environment, security and warding are maintained at an appropriately high level by the nationals, however many local authorities and independents cannot achieve such levels given their low resource base. One of two routes could be taken to solve this. Either the nationals need funding when loaning material to provide resources to cover the full costs of such loans or the local authorities need central funding to accommodate such loans.

- 7.1.4 The most important principle to come from the Audit is that of a Distributed National Collection (DNC). Succinctly we would see the following as applying to the various roles and remits. The Executive should support the DNC as it represents the bedrock of Scottish Cultural Heritage. This it cannot do simply through supporting national museums. It therefore needs a strong central agency to distribute equitably resources through to the DNC. This should not be developed via a membership based organisation as SMC currently is.

- 7.1.5 The issue of sustainability is a difficult one with so many museums needing a secure funding base on which to build. Many institutions survive on the goodwill and generosity of local support and are forced to limp on from year to year. What is at the base of this is an unrealistic level of external funding. Museums are complex institutions with many professional responsibilities, which require to be adequately funded. Currently, much of museums limited resources is utilised 'chasing' funding to stay viable rather than developing the potential of the museum. The result of this is that huge opportunities are missed, no more so than in the field of education. It is undeniable that partnerships can benefit the sector but also the case that they take time and effort to develop and maintain and that they are ultimately limited by the capacity of the museum. This issue of capacity is central to progress. No matter how many potential partners or funding opportunities are provided, unless there is some capacity to engage with them no progress will be made.

7.1.6 The Strategic Change Fund (SCF) has presented limited opportunities to address urgent needs. It may well provide some good examples of what a small amount of additional funding can do. However, the funding available does not address the issues of long-term sustainability or increasing capacity. To have an impact it needs to be increased significantly on a long-term basis to enable capacity building around the core areas of deficiency.

## 7.2 **Contribution to Wider Agendas**

7.2.1 We are strong advocates of the role museums can play in education, social justice and equality. However the number of education officers in museums in Scotland is low and curators, conservators and administrators do not have the skills, abilities or time to engage with the National Curriculum in a productive way. The Cultural Co-Ordinator posts will start to address this problem but this may well lead to further demands on limited museum capacity rather than undertake the detailed work necessary.

7.2.2 One solution would be to establish Cultural Co-Ordinator posts in the cultural institutions. There can be no doubt that museums make key contributions to regeneration, tourism and the economy. For example Dundee Contemporary Arts has had a significant effect on the external image and profile of Dundee. It is now time for the Heritage Sector to build on this.

## 7.3 **Professional Issues**

7.3.1 Within the curatorial team a lack of capacity means that curators have to deal with multiple roles including retail development, organising, lets, Friends organisations and access improvements. These 'business areas' are all necessary to the service and business development support would assist curators in enabling full use and understanding of the potential of collections.

7.3.2 Information Technology is one of the areas upon which a focus in recent years has yielded improved business efficiency. However the full scope of this to allow public access to collection information has yet to be realised and is dependant on increasing the capability of curators to originate source information and developing the necessary expertise in house to set up, develop and maintain appropriate systems.

7.3.3 The question of standards is key to the remit and role of museums. All museums should be able to operate to a set minimum standard but those with part of the DNC or with specialist collections should be resourced to operate at an agreed standard which guarantees that the items are appropriately cared for (conserve, environment, security) accessible (open hours, visitors access) and interpreted (engagement, interaction, education).

## 8.0 **CONSULTATION**

8.1 The Chief Executive and Director of Finance, Director of Personnel and Management Services and Director of Corporate Planning have been consulted on this report and are in agreement with its contents.

## 9.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

9.1 None.

**STEVE GRIMMOND**  
**DIRECTOR OF LEISURE AND ARTS**  
**29 OCTOBER 2002**