

Cultural Commission – Stakeholder Consultation Phase 2 Interim Response by The Scottish Library and Information Council.

Response by the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC)

Introduction

The Scottish Library and Information Council welcomes the opportunity to participate in the work of the Cultural Commission.

The Scottish Library and Information Council is the advisory body to the Scottish Executive and Scottish Ministers on library and information matters. The Council was established in 1991 to create an organisation to support and lead strategic development for all library and information services in Scotland. SLIC members include all local authority, higher education, further education organisations, NHS Trust library services as well as other specialist library and information organisations, including the National Library.

SLIC's Mission Statement:

To provide leadership and act as the primary focus, co-ordinator and promoting agent for all library and information services in Scotland, and to support their work for the benefit of the nation and the development of its cultural life.

Primary Tasks

- *Provide leadership to library and information services and facilitate the co-ordination of these services.*
- *Promote understanding of the contribution of the library and information services to life of the nation.*
- *Monitor standards of provision of library and information services and advocate the development required for their continuing vitality.*
- *Advise Scottish Ministers upon library and information service matters.*
- *Undertake research and provide information, education and advice to its members*
- *Liaise with other organisations and institutions*
- *Award grant-in-aid to promote innovation and development in Scottish library and information services.*

Rights, Entitlements and Responsibilities

The current library legislation forms the basis of a "cultural right" to a free public library service giving access to books and information. The weaknesses are the lack of definition of the term "adequate" and the lack of enforcement. The Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 charges local authorities with responsibility for "community well being" under which public library legislation could be re-enforced. There a need for "adequate" to be clearly defined, which could be achieved through series of entitlements. These entitlements should deliverable, measurable and enforceable to ensure quality and transparency of library services for the people of Scotland. It may be useful to define entitlements in other library sectors to give a broad view to citizens of how to access libraries and their collections across Scotland. It may then require extension of legislation to cover library and information services in schools, colleges, universities and to update the National Library legislation. It is SLIC's view that this will lead to more equitable provision across Scotland but requires an underpinning compliance framework.

There are a number of other key legislative frameworks which impact on the delivery of library services in Scotland: Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act, DDA, and Human Rights. The current library legislation when combined with these places obligations on libraries to enable access to information and to support citizens regardless of their age, ability, economic or ethnic background. The implications of this legislation will add considerable pressure on current levels of library resources.

For 150 years Scottish libraries have served the public in four key areas – information; reading, language and literacy; learning and access and community service. SLIC advocates that cultural entitlements are drawn from these four service functions. In addition library services have a role to play in supporting social inclusion, health improvement and cultural participation and expression and these factors should be also be reflected in the entitlements.

SLIC believes the establishment of cultural rights and associated entitlements does not create another layer of bureaucracy at the expense of front line service delivery. The administration of rights and entitlements could be embedded in the responsibilities of existing cultural agencies. It is SLIC's view, as a small enabling organisation, that the successful delivery of library services requires a delicate balance between national service equity and local needs. Improved service delivery requires clear definition of service levels, appropriate infrastructure and funding.

Increasingly the people of Scotland require information and services 24/7. Whilst individuals can access huge amounts of information through Internet search engines recent research¹ has shown that they turn to trusted sources such as libraries, museums and archives for quality information. The challenge for libraries is to deliver services in the format that people want, as the public's imperative is access to information and services no matter where they are. It is SLIC's view that, with the global information explosion the demand for quality information services supported by mediation can only increase. Local authorities are being charged with the delivery services through SMARTCARD technologies. It is crucial that library services are included and funded to tailored services for individuals' needs. Key entitlements could be delivered through this programme as outlined in the Commission's vision "Future Scotland".

The responsibility for delivery of cultural services includes government, funding partners, cultural specialists, national organisations and individuals participating in culture. This makes this guardianship of cultural rights and entitlements complex. Well developed community planning should serve as a local focus to stimulate cultural activity. Improved links between national agencies and local government will help community plans improve by sharing national and global service best practice. COSLA could play a significant role to facilitating dialogue. SLIC's view is that the partnership between local government and national agencies is crucial to ensuring any cultural entitlements reflect the social-economic developments in Scotland over the next 20 years and beyond. Furthermore the partnerships between library providers across all sectors will need to be proactive and strong.

Since the publication of the National Cultural Strategy in 2000, the Scottish Executive has published updates on progress. However these issues have never been debated or discussed between the wider cultural agencies since the demise of the Joint Implementation Group. This group was tasked with monitoring the cultural strategy and chaired by the Minister. Such a strategic Cultural Executive Group, including national agencies and COSLA, could provide a forum to monitor and develop cultural entitlements. It may be useful to consider the EU Presidency model, whereby one organisation would chair the group for one year, supporting the meetings and providing administrative support.

¹ Professor Bob Usherwood et Al. Still Valid after all these years: Repositories of Public Knowledge in the Information Age. University of Sheffield

Cultural Leadership

SLIC is the advisory body on library and information services to the Scottish Executive and provides support, advocacy and leadership for its members. The Council has cross-sectoral membership and wider representation on management committee. SLIC's independence, governance and accountability model aims to ensure that library strategy and development is in line with members' ability to deliver. SLIC is well placed to co-ordinate funding for the sector and has experience in managing funding programmes linked to funding criteria and compliance. SLIC believes that arms length organisations will work but only if relevant agencies are charged with enforcement or alternatively can instigate compliance through the Scottish Executive.

Recently close collaboration with Scottish Museums Council on specific projects and the UK Joint Forum for Libraries Museums and Archives has demonstrated that there can be useful collaboration for specific agreed objectives. The establishment of a Cultural Executive Group, with funding for innovation and equity, could further enhance this kind of collaborative working.

Given the diverse spectrum of activity within the cultural sector, the issue is perhaps not one of leadership rather a need for a Cultural Champion, perhaps linked to the Cultural Executive Group. The Scottish Executive would need to define the role and powers of a Cultural Champion before progressing.

Decision making on the development cultural rights and entitlements requires a balance of interests between grassroots organisations, the public and professionals. Most local authorities use focus groups as part of Best Value and Community Planning and these provide a route to engage individuals and voluntary groups in the development of strategic rights and general entitlements. Community Planning reports could be used to identify national trends and requirements through the Cultural Executive Group.

Scotland's library services have been defined by different legislative and education influences. Scotland was the first country in UK to have public library standards, whilst England and Wales followed later with different standards appropriate to their needs. The Scotland Act and the supplementary note to the Concordat between DCMS and Scottish Executive signed in Nov 2003, clearly states that museums, libraries and archives are devolved. For libraries reserved powers, only extend to copyright. The UK Joint Forum exists as an information interchange between museums, libraries and archives, but recognises that joint initiatives may not be possible due to funding priorities of the devolved administrations. Where funding becomes available on a UK basis, the Big Lottery has experience of delivering UK programmes to meet devolved need – The People's Network. The Joint Forum for Museums Libraries and Archives could be an effective co-ordination network.

Pan-Sectoral Planning

The Scottish Executive has clear objectives outlined for the Tourism Culture and Sport portfolio. National Agencies are required to ensure that their strategic plans are in line with these objectives. The establishment of a Cultural Executive Group, as mentioned above, will facilitate national strategic planning. The CEG could be responsible for enabling innovative projects and their national roll out. Pan sectoral planning needs to be linked to community planning based on identified need, realistic targets and sustainable exit strategies.

Funding arrangements

Local authorities receive the majority of their funding from Scottish Executive and have limited tax raising powers. Since local government reorganisation library services have seen some £8M wiped from their budgets. However it is clear that where funding is retained or further investment secured from within local authorities or from external funders – services can be significantly improved.

Lottery funding has encouraged innovation in library services with ICT and reading initiatives. The New Opportunities Fund (now Big Lottery Fund) provided a significant injection of funding (almost £13m for infrastructure and staff training over a 3 year period) for the People's Network project to connect all libraries to the Internet. In the spirit of the original legislation, it was a condition of the NOF grant that access is free. With the end of NOF funding, there have been questions in some authorities over the long term sustainability of free access to information through ICT in libraries.

The reading experience of library users has been improved by reading development. In some authorities falling issues have even been reversed. The significant barrier to service development is that, despite the best attempts of funding organisations, they have not always delivered long term sustainability in a pressured local authority financial environment. Both projects have demonstrated that national ring fenced funding with clearly defined criteria can deliver service improvement.

SLIC has co-ordinated national procurement of electronic resources for public libraries with lottery funding which has provided best value and made funding go further. Savings of up to 70% can be achieved with a full national license; the problem is that not all authorities have the resources to participate. Other countries have national licensing models, with funds which are top sliced by government. The procurement of a core collection of electronic resources which meet the needs of the sectors, to be delivered locally through libraries in any publicly funded sector, would be a significant step forward in a Smart Successful Scotland. In spite of three year funding cycles in local authorities, library services annually struggle to retain or increase budgets for front line service delivery. In the future it may be useful to see funding linked to excellence and performance over a longer period

It is difficult to make comparisons in funding and activity across the cultural sector. Library services contribute to many agendas and levels of library use are high. Currently, 27% of the population borrow books from public libraries every year. Another 27% use the library for other purposes, ICT, research, information, learning centre or a community meeting place. In addition libraries are well used in schools, colleges, universities and the workplace. Libraries would benefit from model of funding on the percentage per 1000 population using a service. However, good levels of funding are not necessarily indicative of good service - standards and evaluation of cultural services would provide a focus to measure the outcomes linked to enhanced funding.

The development of a sustainable Scottish publishing industry has been the subject of recent debate, not least the role that Scottish public libraries should have in supporting and promoting Scottish works. SLIC has been actively involved in encouraging libraries to procure Scottish material with the development of the Scottish Bibliography and encouraging a pilot promotion programme in Dundee. As previously indicated funds available for stock selection have been significantly reduced. With increased pressure for material in different formats for DDA and the demands of Freedom of Information, these funds are even more stretched. The vision of a copy of every Scottish work in every Scottish public library would require Scottish Executive intervention to fund and implement. Through collaboration and the Scottish Library Network it is possible to establish a joint procurement programme for Scottish material for a limited number of copies to be available across Scotland. The success of either of these options depends upon a programme of promotion of Scottish material and a wider programme of Reader Development which is nationally funded. A number of reading promotions featuring Scottish material have been successful in the past. The Scottish Writers Project in schools successfully promoted Scottish Writers, supplying multiple copies to schools with promotional and print materials – perhaps this model could usefully be revisited with appropriate funding.

SLIC's view is that library services are poorly marketed. Library services have limited opportunities to access corporate marketing budgets and this is a problem faced by many cultural services, not even 1% of budgets will be spent on marketing and promotion of services.

far less the industry base of 10%. Experience has shown that where quality marketing is in place more people are attracted to use services, for example Glasgow's REAL brand. SLIC would advocate the development of a national marketing strategy and fund and be willing to investigate how this may be achieved.

Standards & Evaluation

Successful library service provision requires a delicate balance of national service equity against local needs. The Scottish Library and Information Council has been asked by the Scottish Executive to develop third generation public library standards which will set a benchmark for library services for all users, linking public demand with appropriate provision. This third set of standards, in conjunction with the cultural entitlements, has the potential to improve provision. Mechanisms of compliance and reward for meeting cultural delivery objectives will need to be developed and implemented in tandem with this initiative.

SLIC has considerable experience in developing standards and evaluation frameworks for public libraries, schools, colleges and prisons. As a result of this, SLIC advocate that, standards and self evaluation alone do not lead to improvements in services. They must be linked to an inspection framework such as HMIE for schools and community learning. It is possible to link library standards and self evaluation to existing frameworks, with transferable indicators of performance. Whilst using HMIE may put additional pressure on this system, associate assessors with cultural specialisms could provide a robust and sustainable framework to evaluate service quality.

Operations and administration

Significant progress has been made in Scotland towards a more integrated approach to service provision and co-operation largely through funding from NOF and Scottish Executive under the auspices of SLIC and its membership. ICT investment in public libraries, colleges and schools has meant that there are more opportunities to share resources and collaborate. Whilst ICT provision in formal education provision is sustained through national and local investment, the public library sector is very reliant on the vagaries of local authority ICT provision. A more cohesive approach to sustain the ICT infrastructure and develop innovative electronic services is required. However it is crucial that the existing knowledge and competencies base is used effectively. SLIC has long advocated a distributed model, with a shared ICT backbone.

By March 2005 libraries across Scotland will be able to search each others' catalogues to request material through the well established Inter Library Loan system. SLIC is currently piloting a cross-sectoral Resource Sharing service, exploring how resources can be shared through technology to improve services to the users. The project could transform the way people access material with potential administrative savings. The Scottish Cultural Portal has demonstrated that a distributed network is viable, efficient and economic. It allows users to access information held by a range of organisations using interoperable standards advocated by Scottish Executive.

Library services in other sectors may have different objectives, for example to support education in schools, universities and colleges, but have a role to play in delivering and supporting culture. The development of a national collections and digitisation strategy would clearly define the role of various institutions. Some may suggest that there is a need for an agency to support this, however it is SLIC's view that the development of a strategic, agreed and funded implementation plan, between existing partners, would be better use of the public purse.

A fundamental issue for libraries is the quality of the buildings' network. Funding for capital investment has been limited. There are good examples of combined service points in a number of authorities, particularly in Glasgow, where leisure centres, museums and libraries are co-

located. The public value libraries as social spaces at the "heart" of their communities. As the ultimate funder of public service, people should have quality facilities which they are proud use. SLIC would urge the consideration of a cultural building programme, like the Irish model, which funds the provision of new libraries with other community buildings. The current schools PPP programme is a possible option, but co-location with formal education, whilst cost effective as part of capital and revenue programmes, may create barriers for some users. Libraries and other cultural services need to be sited where the public can access them easily as part of their daily life.

The issue of management and administration costs against front line service delivery was raised in 2004 by Tim Coates in his report "Who's in charge". Whilst some of his observations are accurate others are unfounded and the causes and suggestions for reform are simplistic. Administration and operational costs are very often not defined or negotiated by the library service, but are part of a larger corporate agenda. For example, nationally annually agreed staff salary increases, internal and external service level agreements etc. However, library services often have to find these costs from within existing budgets.

International collaboration is a key element of library organisational landscape, through IFLA, European Programmes, British Council and SLIC and CILIP in Scotland have been involved in activity for a number of years. The UK Joint Forum also provides a shared voice for libraries, museums and archives. SLIC will continue to engage and participate where appropriate.

Local Authorities

Local authorities have been charged with the delivery of free public library service to their communities for 150 years and whilst service varies, overall local authorities have delivered services which are warmly received by the public. In fact many users do not realise that libraries are part of council service delivery. Local authorities adopted COSLA standards but in some instances have chosen not to or were unable to meet them. Broad political support for the principle of public libraries is often tempered by the harsh realities of funding and library services have often been at the sharp end of budget cuts. In the absence of service improvement it may be useful in future to consider ring fenced funding linked to service standards. This will ensure library services develop a guarantee of quality. It may also be useful to explore collaborative approaches to specific elements of service, which could achieve savings to be re-invested in the service.

Regional Bodies

Cross-sectoral co-operation at a regional level is a significant part of library professional practice. Regional groupings, both organisational and professional, have evolved from the imperatives of cost effectiveness, opportunities for project funding, shared training initiatives and exchange of ideas and best practice. However the formalization of regional structures for all services may distance local political control and ownership. This could conflict with the community planning process. Local influence is essential to the successful delivery of culture to citizens. "Experience has shown in this country and abroad that the placing of direct control of library services under committees primarily responsibly for other functions has led to the distortion and underdevelopment of library services"². There is little evidence that this has changed, indeed events since local government reorganisation would strengthen this view. Library services are often a small part of a large division, delivering services to a large proportion of the population. This can create tension between funding and service delivery within the division. Any governance structure has to ensure local accountability continues but more crucially have a sharp focus on service delivery. If funding is linked to innovation and excellence it would be useful to encourage regional networks to bid for grants once linked to

² Management Structures for the public library service, 1973

performance. It must also allow for partnership working between libraries in difference sectors and remove any artificial sectoral barriers on expenditure.

National

In library terms many organisations hold material of national significance; however this would not necessarily deem the said organisations to be a “national” institution. For libraries, museums and archives the development of a national collections policy, linked to preservation and digitisation, would be a useful way to provide access to and information on Scotland’s collections. Access to cultural heritage can then be promoted 24/7. SLIC is supporting CAIRNS and SCONE projects which are beginning to map where collections are and how they are accessed. In partnership with the National Library of Scotland, SLIC is developing a collections strategy, which could be extended to museums and archives.

National Institutions are often viewed as being remote from the majority of the country; they have now been charged with reaching out from their institutional base and establishing relationships with local authorities and other service providers to support local collections and take their own collections to communities. SLIC would support this approach, but recommends building on our existing embryonic infrastructures with a strategy, implementation plan and appropriate funding.

Cross-cutting

As already mentioned the establishment of a Cultural Executive Group would offer the opportunity to identify areas of cross sectoral collaboration.

One of the key issues for public libraries is that they support objectives of other departments within government, both at national and local level. These departments include education, children services, social work, health etc, but libraries are not funded from these divisions. Library services would benefit from being able to charge these departments for specialist services or contributing to their portfolio objectives. Whilst small in terms of overall expenditure in large departments such as education, small amounts of money can be transformed by library services into robust, sustainable quality services, for example housebound services, children’s homework clubs.

Conclusion

SLIC welcomes the Cultural Commission’s Interim Statement and its positive view of libraries. SLIC sees its role and expertise in supporting cultural provision in the following priority areas

- The need for a sustainable common national ICT infrastructure to support citizenship, lifelong learning and resource sharing and collaborative collection development.
- The need for adherence to national standards both in metadata creation and service development.
- The development of shared resources and services independent of location and available 24/7.
- Development of standards and entitlements around 4 key areas
- Development of national initiatives for local delivery
- The recognition of libraries as partners in the education system and delivery of lifelong learning, in particular in the area of information skills and knowledge management.
- The encouragement of partnership working with e.g. Scottish Enterprise (REAL) and Learndirect to encourage a view of libraries as a place of useful learning in a social context and contribute to active citizenship.
- The exploration of cross domain working with other cultural partners in the context of community planning to encourage access, social inclusion and meet the health and education agendas of the Executive.

- SLIC's role in encouraging research and development in the areas of resource sharing, collaborative cataloguing, exposing the hidden web etc.

It is SLIC's view is that the Commission should prioritise the development of standards evaluation and inspection framework, cultural buildings programme, sustainable national resources. We look forward to further consultation with the Commission to achieve these objectives

Ian

From: Karen
Sent: 17 January 2005 09:43
To: info
Subject: FW: SLIC Submission to Cultural Consultation Phase 2[Scanned]

-----Original Message-----

From: Elaine Fulton [mailto:e.fulton@slainte.org.uk]
Sent: 14 January 2005 15:21
To: James Boyle; James
Cc: Richard
Subject: SLIC Submission to Cultural Consultation Phase 2[Scanned]

James/Richard

And finally – SLIC's submission. We can now go and lie in a darkened room for a couple of hours. Can you confirm that one or both of you got all these and get open them, given the hiccups there have been with email.

Have a good weekend

Cheers

Elaine

Elaine Fulton
Director
Scottish Library and Information Council/CILIP in Scotland
1st Floor, Building C
Brandon Gate, Leechlee Road
Hamilton, ML3 6AU
Tel: 01698 458888
Fax: 01698 283170
[Http://www.slainte.org.uk](http://www.slainte.org.uk)

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