



Northern Ireland Museums Council

The Future of Northern Ireland's Local Museum Services

2012

Introduction

Museums play a unique and vital role in preserving our common heritage. They collect and safeguard artefacts and specimens, interpreting them and making them accessible to as many people as possible for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. In doing so museums make notable contributions to the cultural and creative fabric of this part of the world, to our identity and how we would wish the world to see us. Their value is recognised by government: the Northern Ireland Executive has set out its vision and ambition for the sector through the Northern Ireland Museums Policy, which is a building block of the Programme for Government 2011-15.

Through the Programme for Government 2011-15, the Northern Ireland Executive has stated its commitment to proceed with the reorganisation of local government by 2015. This will see a reduction in the number of local councils, from 26 to 11, the aspiration being to create stronger more efficient councils delivering additional services while being responsive to the needs, aspirations and concerns of citizens.

This change will have a direct impact upon the 20 museums that are run by 17 of the current local councils. But it will affect the National Museums Northern Ireland and the other 18 independent and voluntary-run museums too. In short the reorganisation of local government will fundamentally revise the way our museums are run and how they deliver their services. It will directly influence how the evidence of our cultures and identities is looked after, and how these collections will be developed and used for the cultural, social and economic benefit of this and future generations.

While immediately challenging, the reform of local government also offers a host of opportunities for the sector. It opens up the prospect of the strategic development of the infrastructure to ensure that quality museum services are delivered more uniformly across Northern Ireland, as well as consolidating the role of museums in education and learning, tourism and economic regeneration, health and well-being, identity and community relations at a local level. With the new councils undertaking additional services, there is an opportunity for museums to play an enhanced role in raising the standards of heritage preservation, and encouraging access and participation in associated activities.

In issuing this paper, the Northern Ireland Museums Council aims to inform the local government reform process and to stimulate debate and discussion around the essential and significant role the new councils will play in the protection, preservation and use of cultural heritage through museum and their associated services.

The Museum Sector at Present

The Overview

The museum sector in Northern Ireland currently comprises 42 museums recognised under the Museum Accreditation Scheme. Of these, four come under the National Museums Northern Ireland. The other 38 make up the local museum sector. Of these 20 are run by 17 of the 26 current city, district and borough councils, and the other 18 are independent and voluntary-run museums.

Museum provision in Northern Ireland is supported by two key bodies – the National Museums Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Museums Council.

National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) “care for and present inspirational collections that reflect the creativity, innovation, history, culture and people of Northern Ireland”¹, and operate four museum sites - the Ulster Museum, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Ulster American Folk Park, and the Armagh County Museum.

The Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) was established in 1993 to assist local museums across Northern Ireland in maintaining and improving their standards of collections care and in their public services, and to promote a coherent framework of museum provision. The Council provides grant assistance to local museums in support of their programmes, research on collections and the acquisition of objects. It also offers training, advice and information, undertakes research, maintains the standards programme (the Museum Accreditation Scheme) and is the principle advocate for the local museum sector.

NMNI was established under the Museums and Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 and as such is funded directly by government through the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). The Northern Ireland Museums Council is a charitable company that is principally funded through the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Both are Non-Departmental Public Bodies and assist the Department with the delivery of the Northern Ireland Museums Policy.

Policy

In March 2011 the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure launched the *Northern Ireland Museums Policy*², which is the policy framework for national and local museums for the next ten years. This policy stresses museums value in terms of culture and the preservation of our heritage. It highlights their role in tourism, economic and social regeneration, their contribution to education and learning, to better community relations and as powerful representations of individual, civic, regional and national pride.

The vision of the policy is for a coordinated and sustainable museum sector that develops, preserves and interprets its collections to the highest possible standards; delivers quality services that inspire, educate and engage local, national and international visitors and users; harnesses its strengths and diversity to support economic, social and cultural development in Northern Ireland and a shared and better future.

As the policy states, “Fulfilling this vision will require a concerted effort, not just by museums, their staff and governing bodies, but also by central and local government”, working across the associated goals which are corralled under the four strategic priorities of,

¹ <http://nmni.com/home/about-us> accessed 11th July 2012

² See: http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/pdf_version_of_final_museums_policy.pdf

- Developing Audiences
- Education and Learning
- Collections Development, Care, Management and Use
- Infrastructure, Investment and Resources

Standards

The Museum Accreditation Scheme is the UK-wide sector standard for museums. All of the museums run by Northern Ireland's councils meet this standard. It is managed centrally by Arts Council England (since it absorbed the functions of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council in 2011) and administered locally by NIMC.

It is recognised as a badge of credibility for museums: enhancing perceptions about the institution; bolstering confidence when it comes to loaning objects between museums; and providing an *imprimatur* in relation to funding applications, particularly to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The scheme was recently reviewed and all museums currently recognised will be invited to apply to the new standard over the next three years (2012-15). This will require institutions to meet minimum standards across the three areas. Under *Organisational Health* the weight of assessment will be towards ensuring that museums have appropriate governance and management arrangements, business and financial planning, security and emergency planning, and have sufficient workforce and professional capacity. Secondly, concerning *Collections*, museums will have to meet specific standards regarding the ownership of their collections and have certain collections management policies and procedures in place, specifically for the development, documentation, care and conservation of the collection. And thirdly, concerning *Users and their Experiences*, the emphasis is upon museums developing good quality services for visitors and users, on the provision of a welcoming, accessible environment, with appropriate services and facilities, and ensuring that an effective and stimulating learning experience is provided.

As will be appreciated, there is a considerable degree of complementarity between the Northern Ireland Museums Policy and the Museum Accreditation Scheme.

Museums run by Councils

As the current legislation allows (see Appendix I), museum provision by Northern Ireland's city, district and borough councils is an area of discretionary spend.

As the rationale for the operation of these museums is not prescribed by statute, councils deliver their museum services in pursuit of a wide range of culture, economic and social benefits. These are highlighted at Appendix II and as may easily be appreciated, there are direct parallels between these motivations and the aspirations set out in the Northern Ireland Museums Policy.

In 2011 the council-run museums collectively welcomed some 339,000 visitors (compared with 225,615 in 2006), employed 84 full-time staff, 23 part-time staff, and 18 temporary staff, and engaged 16 volunteers.³

Over the last decade two-thirds of the councils running museums have invested heavily in their infrastructure, with most having made successful associated bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund. This has seen the renovation of the former Carnegie Library in Larne as a museum and cultural centre, the relocation of Ballymoney Museum to a purpose-built facility within Ballymoney Town Hall, the complete renovation of the Governor's Residence building at Down County Museum and the development of the new Carrickfergus Museum complex

³ NIMC: *Museum Mapping* (2012)

within the civic centre. Other notable signature projects include the restoration of Bagenal's Castle as the new Newry and Mourne Museum, the development of the Mid-Antrim Museum with The Braid by Ballymena Borough Council, the construction of the new cultural centre, including museum provision, by Limavady Borough Council, and the restoration of Sentry Hill House by Newtownabbey Borough Council.

Museums and Museum Services

Operating a museum venue is a prerequisite for meeting the Accreditation Standard. But running a museum does not necessarily mean that the governing body is operating a museum service.

A museum service has at least three meanings:

- One governing body operating more than one museum. For example, both Carrickfergus Borough Council and Derry City Council operate two Accredited museums each.
- Several governing bodies co-operating in a museum partnership to provide joint services. Two such partnerships currently exist:
 - The Causeway Museum Service, a partnership between Coleraine Borough Council, Ballymoney Borough Council, Limavady District Council, and Moyle District Council.
 - The Mid-Antrim Museums Service, comprising Ballymena Borough Council, Carrickfergus Borough Council, Larne District Council and Newtownabbey Borough Council.
- Museums providing services and resources outside of their building(s). All district council-run museums do this at present; through their web sites, by providing loan boxes to schools, undertaking community-focused work, and doing genealogical and other research, for instance.

District Councils without museum services

At present nine of the extant local councils do not operate a museum. All, however, demonstrably value and promote the heritage of their areas in various ways.

Belfast City Council states that it has,

*“adopted a Heritage Policy which will help us to contribute to the regeneration of Belfast. We will do this by looking at opportunities to develop and promote the heritage sector and therefore improve the quality of life and experiences of people who live in, work in and visit Belfast”.*⁴

In practical terms the City Council has taken an active role in advocating best practice in the preservation of the built heritage, leading by example through its restoration of the Ulster Hall, St George's Market and the Albert Clock, and in assuring the heritage of the City is taken into account during the planning process. It also facilitates the Belfast Heritage Forum and undertakes research on various aspects of the city's heritage.

Antrim Borough Council decided that cultural heritage should be a cornerstone on which its regeneration of the town centre would be built. Key elements in this process were the restoration of Antrim Castle Gardens at a cost of £5.4 million, and the conservation of the Courthouse.⁵ In a similar vein, the refurbishment of the old Belfast Bank in Market Square (as a museum), now known as Ranfurly House, and the landscaping of Castle Hill, are vital aspects of the regeneration of Dungannon being led by the Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council.

⁴ <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/culture/heritage.asp> Accessed 23rd July 2012

⁵ <http://www.antrimcastlegardens.org/about/> Accessed 23rd July 2012

Local heritage sites feature prominently in the tourism promotion of Cookstown Borough Council and Magherafelt District Council. Likewise, Ards Borough Council publishes a range of heritage trails on the natural and built heritage of the area, and provides focused information and assistance on Ulster-Scots genealogy, particularly to tourists.

In addition, some of the nine councils not operating a museum do provide varying amounts of grant assistance to independent museums and heritage organisations in their area. Omagh District Council has supported the An Creagan centre in the past, with Ards Borough Council providing grant support to the Somme Heritage Centre.

Independent Museums

There are 18 independent and voluntary-run museums that meet the Accreditation Standard. Of these, 7 are owned by the National Trust; 5 by regimental and police associations; 1 by the Church of Ireland; 1 is under the ownership of Queen's University; and the remaining 4 are operated by voluntary bodies constituted as companies limited by guarantee and with charitable status.

These 'independent' museums will also be affected by the Local Government Reform Programme, as nearly all benefit from their local council in one way or another: through grant funding, partnership working, curators in council-run museums acting as Museum Mentors, and/or through inclusion in promotional literature.

In 2011 these museums welcomed 254,216 visitors (compared with 205,265 in 2006), employed 61 full-time staff, 32 part-time staff, and 158 temporary staff, and engaged 299 volunteers.⁶

The Heritage Sector

Through its researches, NIMC estimates that there are a further 300 or so other organisations in Northern Ireland which in one way or another play a significant role in preserving and interpreting our heritage, with at least a third of these bodies maintaining a collection, and some operate as museums although not recognised under the Accreditation Standard at present. Some of these bodies, particularly the interpretation centres and the local history groups, receive funding from their local council.

⁶ NIMC: *Museum Mapping* (2012)

Local Government Reorganisation

In 2006, *Better Government for Northern Ireland – Final decisions of the Review of Public Administration* announced key changes in relation to the future structures and powers of local government in Northern Ireland, including a reduction in the number of district councils and an enhancement of the powers and functions of these councils.

This process has been pursued in the intervening years and the *Programme for Government 2011-15* states that the Northern Ireland Executive will establish the new 11 council model for local government by 2015.

To enable this change to proceed, three pieces of legislation have been proposed:

- Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill which would bring about the 11 new district councils and would modernise their structures and powers
- Local Government (Finance) Bill which would, among other things, introduce a power to allow all departments (not just the DOE) to pay grants to councils
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

These establish the process and mechanisms by which the establishment of the new councils will take place, the associated financial arrangements and the framework for the powers of these councils.

A Regional Transition Committee has been established to lead the Local Government Reform Programme centrally, with 11 transition committees, one for each proposed new council, being set up to agree the arrangements at a local level. The latter's responsibilities will include the appointment of key change management staff; establishing the priorities of the existing councils and the functions moving to the new councils; recommending how the existing systems and activities will move forward; conducting audits of current properties, grounds and assets; and undertaking communications about the decisions made.

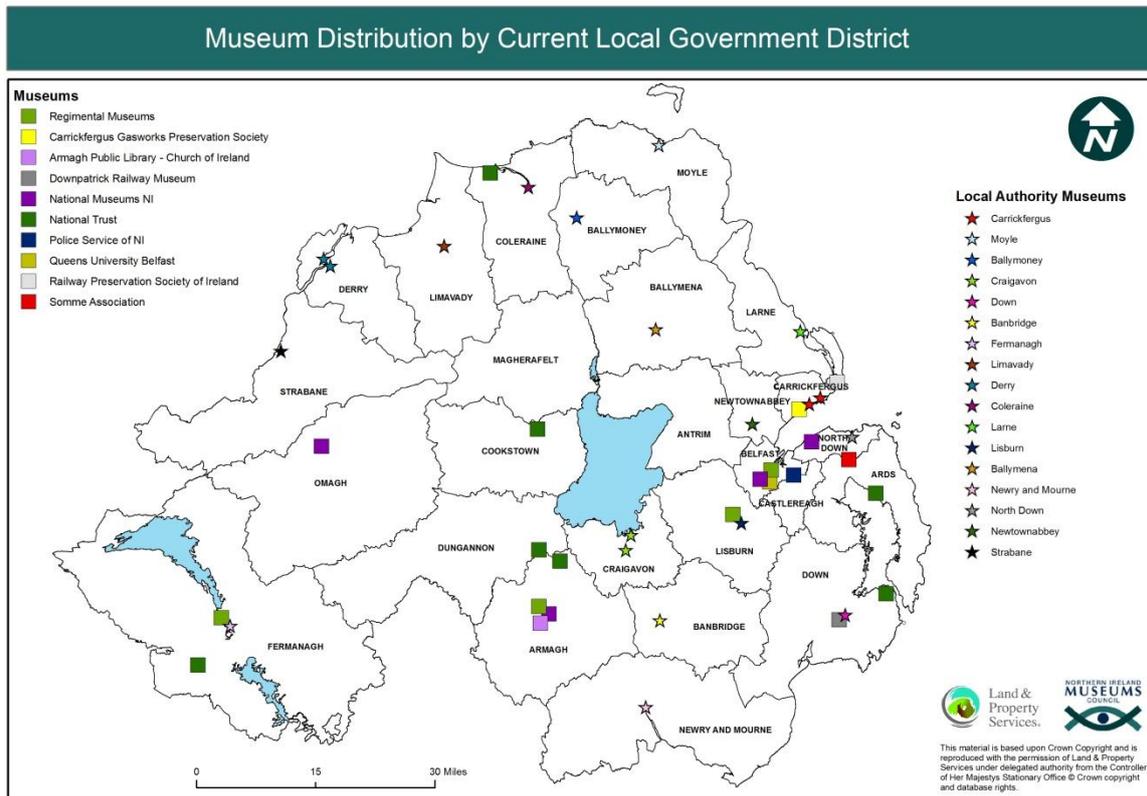
The outlines of the proposed legislation point to changes in the powers and functions of the future councils. Among the functions to be transferred to new councils, of relevance to museums, are:

- Listing and "spot listing" of buildings of local architectural or historic interest;
- Area and Local planning
- Urban regeneration and public spaces
- Conservation of natural and built heritage
- Community relations
- Neighbourhood renewal and community development
- Local economic development
- Regional tourism partnerships
- Promotion and marketing of local areas including visitor servicing
- Delivery of parts of European programmes
- Local water recreation facilities
- Local events
- Local arts
- Local nature reserves, biodiversity plans and areas of conservation interest
- Rural Development funds
- Emergency planning

The reduction of the number of councils from 26 to 11 will have a significant impact on councils' staff, including those working in museums. The Public Service Commission has published *Guiding Principles* relating to the treatment and transfer of staff.⁷

The Impact of the Local Government Reform Programme on museums

The location of the Accredited museums in respect of the current local authority boundaries is illustrated by the following map.⁸



Map 1: Museum Distribution across current Council areas.

Some notable aspects are revealed by Map 1, including;

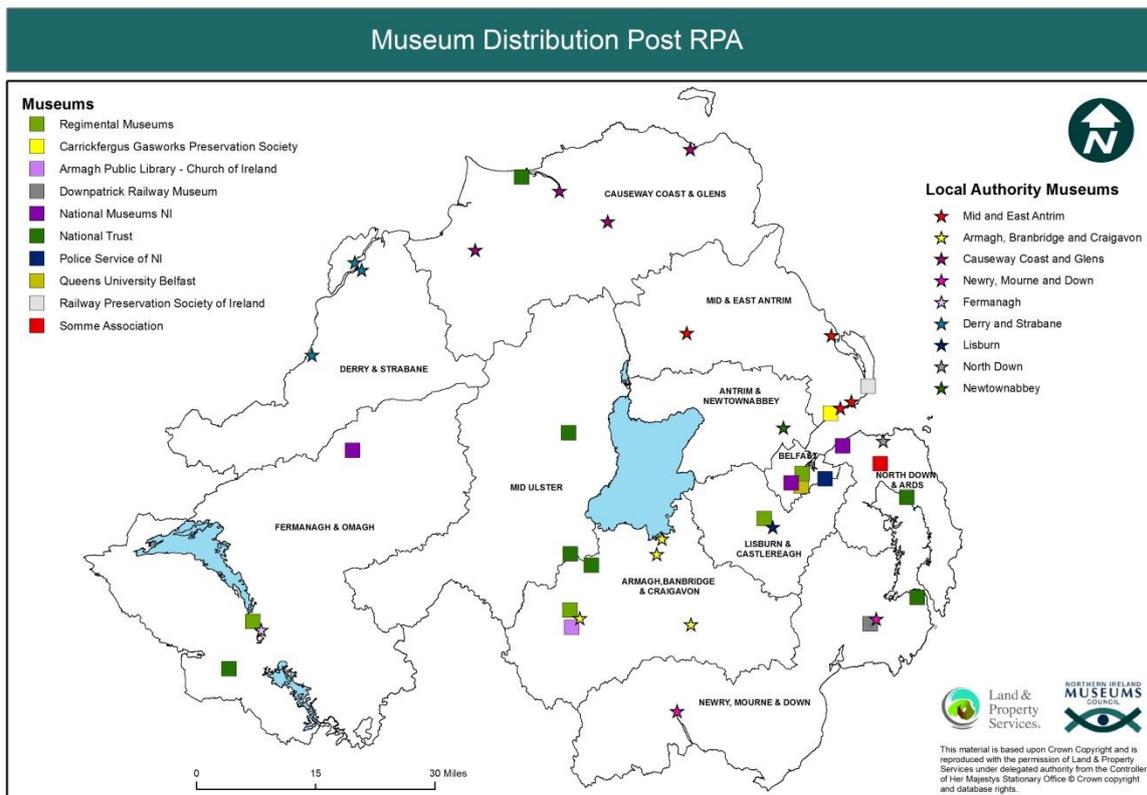
- Nine of the 26 councils do not operate a museum directly, namely: Antrim, Ards, Armagh, Belfast, Castlereagh, Cookstown, Dungannon and South Tyrone, Magherafelt and Omagh.
- There is at least one National or independent museum operating in half (13) of the current council areas.

⁷ <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/rpa-principles-compendium.pdf>

⁸ A Local Government Boundaries Commissioner was appointed to define and name the new councils. The Commissioner released a Final Recommendations Report on 26 June 2009. The Local Government (Boundaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 was approved by the Assembly on 12 June 2012. The Order gives effect to the boundaries as outlined in the Commissioner's Final Recommendations Report, with two modifications agreed by the Executive. These maps use the boundaries of the current local council areas and the boundaries of the Final Recommendations Report.

- There are four council areas which do not have any sort of museum – Dungannon, Ards, Antrim and Magherafelt
- There are two museum services that operate through a partnership between a number of Councils. The Causeway Museum Service is a partnership involving Limavady District Council, Coleraine Borough Council, Ballymoney Borough Council and Moyle District Council. And the Mid-Antrim Museum Service involves Ballymena Borough Council, Newtownabbey Borough Council, Larne District Council and Carrickfergus Borough Council.

The next map illustrates the location of the Accredited museums in relation to the suggested new district councils under the 11-council model of the Local Government Reform Programme.



Map 2: Museum Distribution across the proposed new Council areas.

Map 2 highlights some important considerations in relation to museum service provision after the Local Government Reform Programme has been implemented, including:

- The transfer of Armagh County Museum from the National Museums Northern Ireland to the new council for the Armagh/Banbridge and Craigavon area.
- Two of the 11 councils will not have an extant council-run museum in their area, namely; the future Belfast and the Mid-Ulster council areas, but 7 councils will have an established and proven basis for their museum service, with 5 councils having a service based on 2 or more of the existing museums.
- Two of the new council areas will not contain a National or Accredited independent museum – the Derry and Strabane, and the Antrim and Newtownabbey council areas.
- The anticipated new boundaries could see the councils involved with the Causeway Museum Service coming together, giving continuity in the delivery of museum

services through this partnership. Whereas the Mid-Antrim Museum Service will lose one of the current partners as Newtownabbey Borough Council moves to join Antrim Borough Council.

- The Fermanagh County Museum in Enniskillen will be the only council-run museum in the Fermanagh and Omagh area, and similarly, the North Down Museums will serve an expanded area encompassing North Down and Ards.

Museums after Local Government Reorganisation

As may be gathered from the previous sections of this report, the local museum sector in Northern Ireland operates on a relatively sound foundation: there are good governance structures in place, the infrastructure is being modernised, there are rising attendances and usage, the museums are being run by professional staff, and the collections are being developed in a focused manner. All of these aspects are examined within the sector standard, the Museum Accreditation Scheme, and it is anticipated that the requirements of the scheme will continue to be an essential benchmark in the delivery of museum services after the new councils are established.

While Accreditation indicates the standard of current performance, it also requires museums to develop forward plans and to look to the long-term success of the service. With its ten-year perspective, the Northern Ireland Museums Policy offers the prospect of building a more cohesive and coherent sector. Together the policy and the standard stand as useful touchstones in the process of transferring museum services to the new councils and to their shape and operation thereafter.

It is recommended that the Museum Accreditation Scheme and the Northern Ireland Museums Policy are used to inform the establishment and operation of museum services across the new councils.

Infrastructure

As stated above, there is considerable complementarity between the Accreditation scheme and the Policy - both stress the need for good governance and management, the provision of effective and stimulating learning experiences, servicing the needs and aspirations of visitors and users, and for high quality in the care and management of collections. In addition the Policy sets out a vision for the strategic co-ordination of high quality museum services across Northern Ireland and points to the benefits of providing access to representations of local and diverse cultural expressions. As Map 1 illustrates, such access and provision is not consistent across the region at the moment because not all of the current councils deliver museum services. And indeed, as Map 2 makes clear, there is the prospect of this state of affairs continuing after local government reorganisation.

NIMC believes that considerable local and regional benefits will come through the comprehensive provision of museum services across Northern Ireland. While it recognises the merits and achievements that come from operating a heritage service, the Council, advocates that each of the new councils should operate a museum, given the capacity of museums to deliver across a multitude of agendas (as demonstrated through the activity described in Appendix II), that are beyond the reach of a heritage service alone.

Nevertheless, the range of new powers that will be granted to the new councils does open up the opportunity for more comprehensive and joined-up museum and heritage services to be delivered, a concept explored further later on.

It is recommended that each new council delivers a museum and heritage service.

Governance and Operation

Under the Accreditation Standard museums must meet specific requirements concerning the governance, management and operation of their service. With a similar end in mind, a goal of the Museum Policy is “to strengthen governance, management and leadership across the museums sector.” Both see these elements as fundamental to running good museum services.

The Committee structure within councils has served well in this regard, as it provides a direct line of accountability between service delivery and elected representatives. However, given the diversity and weight of business before Council Committees it is sometimes a challenge to allocate sufficient time for museum matters to be considered broadly and thoroughly. Obviously, with the proposal that the new councils take on further responsibilities, this issue will again come to the fore.

It is recommended that specific and planned provision is made within the structures of the new Councils to ensure that the governance, strategic planning and accountability of their museum services achieve the requisite high standard.

In operational terms each museum and its governing body will be required to plan effectively for the long-term success of the services. To this end the Standard expects museums to have a series of policies and plans in place, foremost amongst which are: a forward plan, setting out the purpose, aims and objectives of the museum; agreements relating to the workforce and to the occupancy of the museum building; an emergency plan; collections policy and procedure (discussed further below); and statements concerning access, interpretation and user consultation.

As stated above, the Museum Accreditation Standard has recently been reviewed and all museums currently recognised will be invited to apply to the new standard. It is anticipated that all of the council-run museums will have applied and been admitted to the new standard by the early part of 2014. Consequently, each will have a suit of comparable documents and plans in place, the standardisation of which will greatly assist the process of merging the services across the merging Councils. As managers of the Accreditation Standard in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Museums Council advocate that museums look to further standardise their policies and plans, and in this regard the Museums Policy provides the structural reference.

It is recommended that specific provision is made within the agendas of the transition committees to examine the associated policies and plans for museum services by way of ensuring continuity of service and the maintenance of standards in museums.

It is recommended that each new Council adopt a forward plan for its museum service which correlates to the structure and goals of the Northern Ireland Museums Policy.

It is generally recognised that the success of any council-run services depends upon the skills and expertise of staff, and museums are no different in this regard. It is essential, and a requirement of the standard, that the future museum services employ experienced and qualified staff. Both the Accreditation standard and the Museums Policy point to the areas of specific expertise which will be required, namely; in managing the organisation and venue(s); the care and managements of collections; and facilitating user needs, particularly in education and learning, and the servicing of needs through digital and emerging technologies.

It is recommended that as part of the process of amalgamating museum services councils take note of the skills and expertise of extant staff and move to ensure that there are sufficiently knowledgeable and experienced staff in place to cover all of the needs and demands placed upon the new museum services.

Collections

The cultural, economic and social benefits that councils currently accrue through their museum services, and which the new councils might also anticipate, are dependent upon the standards achieved and maintained in the development, care, management and use of museum collections. Therefore particular attention will need to be given to these areas during the transition period for councils.

More specifically, there are four aspects which will require attention.

The first relates to the ownership of the collections, together with title and any associated copyrights and other intellectual property matters. In transferring collections to the new council particular attention will need to be given to the object loan agreements with other institutions or individuals. Also, there may be technical issues concerning the treatment of such collections as assets of the new councils, which will require clarification.

A Collections Development Policy, also known as the acquisition and disposal policy, sets out the *raison d'être* of what and how a museum collects. In model form it includes a statement of purpose, an overview of current collections, the future collecting themes and priorities, the themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal as appropriate, and information relating to the legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal. The collection development policies of the extant councils geographically define their areas of interest, so that a particular council would state that its museum will collection objects relating to all aspects of the history of that particular council area. In addition some council-run museums also focus on a particular theme, an example being *The Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum*.

With the change in the council boundaries all of the collection development policies of council-run museums will need to be changed and new ones agreed by each of the new councils operating a museum service.

The Accreditation Standard requires all museums to have a documentation policy, agreed by the governing body. This policy aims to: improve accountability for collections; maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation procedures and collection information; extend access to collection information; and, strengthen the security of the collection. Each of these aspects will require specific attention as part of the transfer process. As the Accession Registers will be fundamental in defining scope of the collections whose title will be transferred to the new councils, it is essential that the documentation of collections is completed as far as possible prior to transfer. The technical compatibility of the documentation systems of museums across the merged council areas will need to be reviewed and standardised, as will the associated procedures. And a vital assessment of the security of the collections being transferred will need to be done.

Collections care and conservation is a constant concern of museums and their governing bodies. NIMC's research shows that considerable strides have been made recently in raising standards in this area. The investment by councils in their museum buildings has been critical in this improvement and it is recommended that maintaining these gains is a conscious consideration in the transition process. *The Survey of Museum Collections in Northern Ireland* (NIMC 2007) identified that the lack of storage space for museum

collections was an emerging issue. It is felt that the process of transition to the new council structures offers the opportunity to address this deficiency for each museum service.

It is recommended that particular attention is given to the matters concerning the transfer of title of museum collections, the definition of museum collection development policies for the new council areas, the documentation of collections (in preparation for transfer and thereafter), together with the protection and storage of museum collections.

Visitors, Users and Associated Services

As Appendix II illustrates, museums contribute to diverse cultural, economic and social agendas, with locally determined emphases often in keeping with the broader objectives of the particular council. These may change, and be added to, with the advent of the new council structures and in light of the additional powers that will be assigned to them. The Northern Ireland Museums Policy lays stress on museums' contribution to education, tourism, as well as the 'shared future' and community relations agenda. The Accreditation Standard too highlights tourism and learning as areas to which museums effectively contribute, but is more concerned with the generic aspects of developing high-quality service provision, including; the capture and analysis of information about museum users and non-users, plans to broaden the range of users, effective communication and marketing, providing access to collections and the provision of effective and stimulating learning and discovery experiences focused on the collections. These elements are directly in keeping with an aspiration of the local government reform, namely, to establish councils delivering additional services and being responsive to the needs, aspirations and concerns of citizens.

Establishing clarity on the strategic objectives and priorities of the future museum services will be an early requirement within the change process, particularly as this will influence the positioning of museum services within the structures of the new councils.

It is recommended that the transition process gives specific consideration to the focus and objectives of future museum services, the process by which museum services will report to council, and their position within the departmental structures of the new councils.

Opportunities for Councils and Museums

The move to establish fewer, larger councils with enhanced powers and functions will open up a range of new developmental opportunities for museums services.

As the maps and the associated analysis of the distribution of museums across the new council areas indicates, nearly half of the new councils will bring together two or more museums within their boundaries. Such amalgamations have the potential to enhance the critical mass of collections and staff expertise, unlock the capacity to undertake more diverse programming activity, to raise standards and to achieve efficiencies and economies of scale, beyond those available currently in council-run museums.

The new councils will assume a range of new powers, many of which will have a natural affinity to what museums currently do, or which are relevant to museums and heritage more generally. As stated earlier, museums are rightly perceived as the symbolic nuclei of local heritage activity and this strength should be built upon and exploited by the new councils through 'joining up' the resources and structures they will have to hand when carrying out their duties towards the natural, built and material heritage.

Opportunities for shared coordination will also emerge across other areas. For instance, the Accreditation Standard requires museums to have an effective emergency plan in place covering its workforce, visitors and collections. While there will be unique components of such a plan, it would be efficient and beneficial for it to be linked and integrated to the local area emergency plan that will be formulated by the future councils. In a similar vein, the monitoring and marketing methods used across tourism functions may suit the needs of museum services.

The prospect of enhanced co-ordination may extend beyond the council itself. Building upon current practice, the new structures could also see the 'critical mass' gains extended by developing the partnership between the council-run museum service and the other independent and national museums within the region. One aspect where this may prove fruitful would be in how the museum and heritage 'offer' of an area is marketed and promoted, particularly to out of state visitors.

It is recommended that the potential of future museum services to contribute to broader heritage related agendas, both within councils and through external partnerships, is carefully considered and that the necessary resources are allocated to assure that museum services fully contribute to agreed cultural, social and economic priorities.

Conclusion

As stated at the outset, museums can and do provide inspiration, learning and enjoyment for people of all ages and interests. Their capacity to do this has been strengthened considerably over the last decade by the investment and commitment of the local councils across Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Museums Council believes that museums services' role and achievements can be built upon further through the councils that will be established through the reform process, for the benefit of the people who will be living, working and visiting these areas. But for such benefits to materialise quickly and be exploited, an informed and mindful approach must be taken in the transfer of the museum services, staff and collections as part of the local government reform process. To this end NIMC commends the recommendations sent out in this report.

Appendix 1

Current legislation for museums

Currently, provision of museums by local councils is discretionary. Provision for them in law exists in two Orders in Council:

The [Youth and Recreation \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1986](#) states that

“each district council shall secure the provision of its area of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities, and for that purpose may, [do so] either alone or together with another district council or any other person”.

The operation of a museum contributes toward meeting this responsibility for the majority of local councils. As described above, 8 do so within two museum service partnerships - namely the Causeway Museum Service (comprising the Coleraine, Ballycastle, Ballymoney, and Limavady councils) and Mid-Antrim Museums Service (Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey)

The [Museums and Galleries \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998](#) states that

“a district council, either alone or together with another district council or any other person, may provide and maintain museums and galleries” and that .

“a district council may pay to another district council sums by way of contribution towards the expenses of the maintenance of provision of a museum or gallery by that other council” and that

“A district council may make grants towards the expenses of the maintenance or provision of a museum or gallery by any person”, and that

“A district council shall consult with the Department and such other bodies as the Department may determine before exercising [any of the above powers]

In short, currently, a district council may provide its own museum service, enter into a partnership with another council to do so, or fund independent or voluntary museums; but it must first consult with the Department and the bodies it determines (which may include the Northern Ireland Museums Council, given its role as a non-departmental advisory body to the Department).

It follows that any future district council developing or funding a museum or museum service, following Local Government Reform, may be advised by the Department and/or the Northern Ireland Museums Council to do so in accordance with the Northern Ireland Museums Policy and Accreditation.

Appendix II

Benefits of museums to local government

These include a diverse range of cultural, economic and social benefits.

Cultural

Cultural Identity

Without exception, the district councils that currently operate museums see them as providing foundations for cultural expression, and places where people can reflect on their cultural identity. This is demonstrated in their strategic documents and public statements. For instance, [Derry City Council](#) states,

The aim of our Museum Service is to promote greater awareness of the history and cultural heritage of the Council area. Our museums also provide a forum for the understanding of the diverse cultural traditions that exist within the area.

Similarly, [Fermanagh District Council](#) says,

The museum aims to promote the cultural richness of County Fermanagh to as wide an audience as possible.

And [Larne Borough Council](#) likewise states,

The renovation of the former Carnegie Library, which originally opened its doors to the public in 1906, has been given a new lease of life thanks to the completion of its lively community museum, and is very much at the centre of cultural life in the Borough of Larne.

Museums' ability to contribute to the sense of local belonging has become greater with the advent of the internet. It has, for example, enhanced provision of genealogy and family history services by [Ballymoney Museum](#) and [Derry City Council Heritage and Museums Service](#)

Civic Pride

Many district council-run museums are themselves local landmarks, symbolising local councils' pride in the history of their area, demonstrating the quality of local architectural heritage; or signalling area regeneration.

An important recent example is [The Braid in Ballymena](#), which combines Town Hall, Museum and Arts Centre, and about which Ballymena Borough Council states

Named after the river that runs through Ballymena, the Braid weaves together history, arts and culture alongside contemporary conference, tourism and civic facilities on a site that has been for centuries the centre of local civic life. From family activities to special interest events, there's something for everyone.

Community Relations

Museums use their collections to investigate the basis of beliefs, traditions and perspectives, and enable local achievements to be appreciated against the context of broader histories.

Museums in Northern Ireland have played a notable role in exploring issues around community relations and cultural diversity; and contribute to external perceptions of their

areas through providing touring exhibitions, and exchanging object loans with other museums. Two examples illustrate this well:

Through [*Divine Inspiration: Remarkable Books, Prints and Manuscripts Reflecting Faith*](#), the Mid-Antrim Museum explored Christianity, with particular reference to evangelism and the local legacy of the 1859 Ulster Revival; within the context of other world religions exemplified by internationally important works on paper lent by The Chester Betty Library in Dublin. The exhibition was developed in consultation with the Ballymena Inter- Ethnic Forum and Ballymena Inter-Church Forum, and sought to encourage mutual understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity within and between ethnic and indigenous communities of the North East.

[*Connection & Division - The Hidden Histories of 1910-1930*](#) was an innovative partnership between Fermanagh County Museum, the Inniskillings Museum and Derry Heritage and Museum Service, in collaboration with the University of Ulster, focused upon developing the collections at each museum through the acquisition of artefacts to fill gaps in the collections relating to the 1910-30 period in Irish history. It attracted funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund's *Collecting Cultures* Programme. The exhibition and the associated programme of lectures and presentations allowed a period of history to be explored by these museums, which could not have been done prior to the acquisition of the objects. Perhaps most importantly, this project fostered further community links, brought to light significant private collections of associated material and provided an exhibition through which the preconceptions could be critically explored.

Economic

The economic benefits accruing from museums to district council areas are widely recognised. These include their value as key elements of the local tourism 'offer', as employers, as purchasers of and outlets for local services, and as drivers of economic regeneration.

Urban Regeneration

Museums have often been used as the core of town or city centre regeneration. For example, the staff of the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum played a central role in delivering the [*Lisburn Historic Quarter Partnership*](#), which comprises key stakeholders from the private, public sectors, and is working to rejuvenate the old area of the City, most notably Bridge Street and Castle Gardens.

The [*Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre*](#), home to the Limavady Borough Council's museum service, is

located on Limavady's Main Street, incorporates the façade of the former Alexander Hall and has provided valuable regeneration to the physical townscape as well as fast becoming a cultural gem in the North West's crown.....It also boasts Limavady Tourist Information, gift shop and there are also two retail units, now fully let, providing a great opportunity and location for local businesses

Tourism

Museums act as orientation 'hubs' for visitors, especially if they house the local tourism information centre as many local authority museums now do. For example, in [*Carrickfergus*](#),

The museum reception area incorporates our Tourist Information Centre, providing visitors with information on all activities and accommodation

within Carrickfergus and in Northern Ireland. Our Museum Gift Shop features the best in locally sourced arts and crafts gifts.

This more comprehensive approach to visitor services provides integrated information about museums, natural and built heritage, and how people can access them.

Employment and Employability

The museums operated by district councils contribute directly to local economic development through

- Providing work placements through which skills can be enhanced. The most extensive recent example being the [Northern Ireland Museums Council Collections Skills Initiative](#), through which local authority museums provided 6 bursary placements, four of whom are now working in the sector.
- Promoting Employability, as exemplified by the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum's [Education and Employability](#) sessions
- Hosting volunteers. NIMC undertook a comprehensive look at volunteering in the sector in its *Volunteering in Local Museums in Northern Ireland* (2010)
- Providing employment. NIMC's *Staffing and Employment Trends within Northern Ireland's Museums* (2010) showed that 140 people worked in the district council-run museums.
- Provide job security and favourable terms and conditions, in line with public sector employment requirements.

Creative industries

Museums "are a fundamental resource for the arts and creative industries".⁹ The majority of the collections within Northern Ireland's museums have their origins in individual creativity, skill and talent, were made by the "creative originals producers" of the past, and in some cases were part of industries that drove economic development. Today, they can inform us about where we have come from in creative terms; and can and do inspire the artists and innovators of the future.

These collections comprise intellectual property which has the potential to create wealth and jobs through the development of creative content, products, services and experiences.

Museum staff themselves are both providers of creative services and experiences; and producers of creative content. The processes of conserving objects, curating them, researching and interpreting them, communicating about them, and producing exhibitions, education and outreach programmes and online resources for people to enjoy, learn from and be inspired by, are in themselves creative.

Furthermore, museums inspire people to undertake careers and set up companies in a range of related sectors, from which they also buy services. These include for example, conservators, independent training providers, IT and digital media suppliers, graphic and lighting design companies, historians, architects, visual artists, photographers, education consultants, interpreters and text writers, freelance curators, academic researchers, community and good relations professionals, engineers, event managers, model makers, living history enactors, etc..

⁹DCAL, *Northern Ireland Museums Policy*, March 2011, <http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/index/museums-r08-2/museums-r08.htm>

Social

Museums deliver diverse social benefits to individuals and communities across a variety of subjects and themes.

Learning and Education

Museums contribute to education and learning through the provision of events and activities targeted at schools and lifelong learners; through their research; and by providing resources and inspiration for learners at further and higher education levels. NIMC's 2009 report *Learning within Museums in Northern Ireland* provided a survey of this activity; and *Learning and Access in Museums* contains extensive case studies.

All council-run museums provide learning services in support of the Northern Ireland Curriculum by:

- Meeting Curriculum needs targeted at both Primary and Post-Primary Key Stages as exemplified by the programmes at [North Down Museum](#), [Newry and Mourne Museum](#) and [Fermanagh County Museum](#)
- Promoting Literacy. For instance Down County Museum's [Sporting Heroes](#) exhibition was written by primary school pupils
- Promoting Numeracy - [Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service's Mathematics and Numeracy Trails](#)
- 'Sparking' an interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) in school children. With associated examples being: Lisburn Museum's participation in National Science Week; the provision of access to collections of objects connected with the histories of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, as through Down County Museum displays of the images of Silent Valley being built and the portrait of Dr John Robb, Down Hospital Surgeon, at Down County Museum

Similarly, all district council museums foster Lifelong Learning opportunities, as at the [F. E. McWilliam Gallery & Studio](#) for example.

In terms of skills transference, The professional staff at Council-run museums often provide informal guidance to other museums and heritage organisations in their area, and some contribute on a more formal basis through acting as Museum Mentors to independent and voluntary-run museums going through the Museum Accreditation Scheme.

It should be noted that local councils in Northern Ireland do not have a statutory remit regarding formal education. In England, for example, almost all state-funded schools are deemed 'maintained schools' and as such receive their funding from local authorities, and are required to follow the National Curriculum. And in Scotland state schools are owned and operated by the local authorities. Consequently the opportunities to link museum education work with the curriculum and schools' activities would appear to be much greater in England and Scotland than in Northern Ireland.

Well-being and Health

Both generally, through their commitment to volunteering, work placements and training, and more specifically through discrete and focused projects dealing with the broad range of social issues, museums are making a notable contribution to collective and individual well-being. Culture Unlimited's report *Museums of the Mind: Mental Health, Emotional Well-being and Museums*¹⁰ sets out the case.

Examples of such work being undertaken across Northern Ireland include:

¹⁰ <http://www.cultureunlimited.org/museums-of-the-mind.php>

- Enabling people to explore their own histories and those of others, through the organisation of projects centred on reminiscence, such as the partnership between Newry and Mourne Museums and Age Concern.
- Developing programmes and resources addressing a broad range of contemporary and historical social and political subjects and issues. Examples include, for example, Fermanagh County Museum's work with diverse ethnic groups; the work of [Causeway Museum Service with Age Concern](#); and [Mid-Antrim Museum Service's Community History Programme](#)
- Providing outlets for creative and cultural expression. A fine example of this is the F.E. McWilliam Gallery & Studio in Banbridge both features the work of internationally renowned visual artists and works in partnership with art colleges to showcase students' work

Museums delivery a multitude of events and activities as a means of promoting active lifestyles.

Museum provision beyond their own walls is now standard; for example through museum staff visiting schools, providing loan boxes, organising touring exhibitions, working with community groups in locations convenient to them; arranging walking or bus tours to historical sites.

Local authority museums 'signpost' people to further involvement with culture and heritage: the [Limavady Heritage Trails](#) developed by Causeway Museum Service being a prime example.

Museums are frequently the location for community group meetings - Down County Museum has a close relationship with the Lecale and Co. Down Historical Society and frequently hosts its meetings, and it is also the centre of the [Downpatrick Young Archaeologists' Club](#); and arranges excavations and activities for them throughout the county.

Participation is also encouraged through the operation of 'Friends' groups, which play a significant role in fund-raising, as well as providing advice and guidance, and act as 'sounding boards' for the staff and the governing body. An excellent example is [Fermanagh County Museum's Friends Association](#)