



MUSEUM SERVICE UPDATE

Report by Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to seek the Comhairle's approval of the Museum nan Eilean policies and plans which required to be updated as part of the Museum Accreditation Return and also to seek approval to disperse display cases to Comainn Eachdraidh.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Museum nan Eilean operates two accredited museums, both with changing exhibition programmes for diverse audiences. Its remit also includes caring for and conserving collections. In March 2024, the Accreditation status of both museums was reduced, by Museum Galleries Scotland, to Provisional Accreditation for 12 months, principally as a result of the effects of the cyber-attack on the service. The need for suitable staffing levels in line with national standards for the delivery of a museum service was also highlighted. Responses to, or resolution of, actions identified by the Accreditation Panel must be reported to Museums Galleries Scotland by March 2025.
- 2.2 This report follows a detailed report in November 2024 and a visit by Councillors to Marybank museum store and Museum & Tasglann nan Eilean in December 2024.
- 2.3 In order to meet loan requirements for national loans, Museum nan Eilean have purchased new display cases that will ensure that we are able to borrow artefacts and touring exhibitions from national institutions for the next 10 years. The old cases, although no longer fit for meeting these stringent conditions, are still useable and could be reused by other local heritage groups who do not need to meet national loan conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle approves:**
 - a) the Museum Forward Plan at Appendix 1;
 - b) the plans and policy documents for the Comhairle's Museum Service at Appendices 2-9; and
 - c) dispersal of obsolete museum display cases to Comainn Eachdraidh.

Contact Officer: Colin George Morrison, Team Leader Heritage & Culture

Appendices:

1. Museum Forward Plan
2. Collections Development Policy
3. Documentation Policy
4. Collections Care and Conservation Policy
5. Access Policy
6. Loans Policy
7. Heritage Service Site & Disaster Recovery Plan
8. Care & Conservation Plan
9. Documentation Plan

Background Papers: Reports to Sustainable Development Committee: September 2017, September 2020, December 2020, and November 2024.

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

| Resource Implications | Implications/None |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Financial | None |
| Legal | None |
| Staffing | None |
| Assets and Property | None |
| Strategic Implications | Implications/None |
| Risk | Risk of reputational damage if Museum nan Eilean fails to regain Full Accreditation status. Risk of loss of national loans. Risk of loss of funding opportunities specific to accredited museums. |
| Equalities | Aligns with Equality Act 2010 and CnES Equal Opportunities Policy |
| Corporate Strategy | Aligns with vision of Corporate Strategy: "To have socially and economically thriving communities with a focus on sustaining our quality of life, natural heritage, and Gaelic language and culture". |
| Environmental Impact | None |
| Consultation | None |

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Accreditation Scheme is the UK industry standard for museums in the UK managed and assessed by Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS). To qualify, museums must meet national standards on how they are managed, the services they offer and how they care for their collections. There are currently more than 1700 museums participating in the scheme. The Accreditation scheme sets out nationally agreed standards of good practice and enables museums to assess their current performance, as well as supporting them to plan and develop their services. It is a quality standard that serves as an authoritative benchmark for assessing performance, rewarding achievement and driving improvement
- 5.2 To achieve Full Accreditation, a museum must meet published requirements on how it is governed and managed, how it cares for and manages its collections, and what information and services it offers to museum users. Although there is a single Museum Accreditation Standard, it is not a 'one size fits all' scheme, and there are higher expectations of Local Authority museums.
- 5.3 In March 2024, the Accreditation status of both Museum nan Eilean Stornoway and Museum nan Eilean, Lionacleit were reduced to Provisional Accreditation for 12 months following the effects of the cyber-attack on the service. The Accreditation Panel identified required actions which resulted in the provisional award. Responses to, or resolution of these actions must be reported to Museums Galleries Scotland by the end of the provisional award period (20 March 2025). Responses will then be assessed against the Accreditation Standard with a recommendation taken to the next appropriate panel.

MUSEUM ACCREDITATION SCHEME

- 6.1 There are a number of benefits to being fully Accredited:
- it demonstrates that the museum has met a national standard;
 - it strengthens applications for public and private funding and gives investors' confidence in the organisation;
 - the ability to apply for funds only open to Accredited museums, and the ability to apply for Recognised Collections Status;
 - the ability to continue, or develop new loans, of national collections from other museums (for example the Chessmen from the British Museum);
 - it helps with forward planning by formalising procedures and policies; and

- it raises awareness and understanding of museums, so building confidence and credibility both within the governing body and among the public.
- 6.2 An award of Full Accreditation is valid for approximately five years, at which point museums are invited to provide a return to demonstrate continuing compliance with the Accreditation Standard, and how areas of improvement previously identified have been addressed.
- 6.3 This report updates on the progress against the Required Actions and the Areas for Development.

PROGRESS ON REQUIRED ACTIONS

7.1 Workforce: Provide an update on progress towards recruiting for the Heritage Manager and the two Heritage Officer roles.

- Although the Heritage Manager post remains on the establishment it has been vacant since March 2019 due to lack of budget allocation.
- In order to meet the requirements of re-gaining Museum accreditation, all funding options will be examined for this post.
- At present there is no funding available for Heritage Officer posts. This affects the ability of the service to effectively deliver a programme of bilingual activities for schools and community groups, to engage in learning and outreach opportunities, and to deliver all the aims of our Access Policy due to the lack of capacity within the team.

7.2 Forward Planning: Provide an updated Forward Plan which includes the museum's approach to the recent data breach, with accompanying signed and dated approval evidence. In addition, confirm all policies for workforce, Collections Development, Documentation, Care and Conservation, and Access are up to date.

The following plans and policies have been updated;

- Museum Forward Plan
- Collections Development Policy
- Documentation Policy
- Collections Care and Conservation Policy

7.3 Emergency Planning: Provide an updated Emergency Plan with signed and dated approval evidence.

The following plan has been updated:

- Heritage Service Site & Disaster Recovery Plan

7.4 Documentation Plan:

- **Provide a revised Documentation Plan in response to the data breach, with accompanying signed and dated approval evidence**

The following plan has been updated;

- Documentation Plan
- **Confirm the museum has access to its collections management systems (CMS), and please provide an update on how much collection information has been affected from the data breach**
 - In July 2024, Axiell (CMS provider) confirmed that they could access just under 9,000 collection records and the associated photographic and documentation databases along with the thesaurus.
 - Testing of the data has been completed in January 2025 and Axiell are now in the process of migrating the data to the new CMS interface.
 - It is hoped that this process will be complete by March 2025 in time for the Accreditation Return
 - This would give Museum nan Eilean access to all collection data up to June 2023. Data from June 2023 – March 2025 would then need to be input.

- **Provide an update on completing a full inventory of the collection and any documentation backlogs which have been identified**
 - An updated plan is included as part of the revised Documentation Plan. This has been re-estimated based on the progress made with Axiell.

7.5 **Confirm opening hours for the museum**

- Museums Galleries Scotland will be provided with both low season and high season hours.

7.6 **Provide an update on the museum's learning and engagement activities, including exhibitions, evidencing both formal and informal programmes**

- The exhibition programme was delayed by 1 year to allow for staff capacity to deal with data recovery as per the new Forward Plan.
- The new exhibition Cìanalas 's Dòchas | Homesickness and Hope: Stories of Hebridean Emigration will open in Museum nan Eilean Lionacleit on 31 May 2025 and will open in Museum nan Eilean Stornoway on 14 June 2025 and will run until 29 November 2025 in both venues.
- An Emigration conference will be held in Stornoway on 30 September – 2 October 2025 to tie in with our exhibition theme and the wider Outer Hebrides heritage sector theme of Hebridean Homecoming. This will be advertised shortly for both in-person and online delegates with Scottish and international speakers.
- Dependent on budget constraints it is hoped to run accompanying family friendly activities over summer 2025 linked to emigration.

AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT

8.1 **Care and conservation plan: At next return, provide an update on plans to improve the museum stores.**

- The Heritage Service have been working with colleagues to submit a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for funding for Feasibility Study & Options Appraisals for new Collections Resource Centres in Lewis and Benbecula which would be the first step in the process.
- The following plan has been updated:
 - Care and conservation plan

8.2 **Access: Confirm the date of your last access assessment (within the last five years). At next review, include within your access policy information about the range of interpretative methods you use to exhibit the collections**

The following policy has been updated:

- Access Policy

DISPLAY CASES

9.1 In order to receive loans from National Museums and Institutions, Museum nan Eilean must meet loan requirements set by the lenders. This includes the need for high quality secure cases that will hold their own set of environmental conditions. This ensures the safety of the artefacts while they are in the care of Museum nan Eilean.

9.2 Due to their age, the cases in both our museums used for temporary exhibitions no longer hold correct environmental conditions or meet security standards. Museum nan Eilean have therefore started a phased programme of purchasing new display cases that will ensure that we are able to borrow artefacts and touring exhibitions from national institutions for the next 10 years.

9.3 In addition, for the Museum Service to meet Government Indemnity Scheme conditions for insurance of loans from National Institutions, it must meet set strict environmental and security requirements.

- 9.4 The cases, although no longer fit for meeting these stringent conditions, are still useable and could be reused by other local heritage groups who do not need to meet national loan conditions.
- 9.5 Additionally a number of cases were lent to Comainn Eachdraidh when the Francis Street Museum closed. Due to lack of storage space in the new museum these have remained with these Comainn Eachdraidh since then, and it is now the desire to permanently transfer ownership.
- 9.6 It is therefore proposed to offer the recently obsolete cases and to transfer ownership of the oldest cases to local Comainn Eachdraich.

CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Significant progress has been made on the actions required to regain full Museum Accreditation following the effects of the cyber-attack, and the Museum Service is on course to submit its Museum Accreditation Return in March 2025 with an outcome anticipated in July.