



TASGLANN NAN EILEAN FORWARD PLAN AND POLICIES

Report by Chief Officer, Economic and Community Regeneration

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to seek the Comhairle's approval of a Forward Plan and suite of policies to guide the delivery and strategic objectives of Tasglann nan Eilean (the archive service) over the next four years.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Tasglann nan Eilean is the archive service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and sits alongside Museum nan Eilean and the Archaeology Service as part of the Heritage Service.
- 2.2 A Forward Plan and associated policies guiding the direction and operation of the service were approved in September 2017, shortly after the opening of the new purpose-built archive facility at Lews Castle. The Forward Plan was due to be reviewed in 2020 but, due to changes in the staffing of the Heritage Service, as well as the disruption of the pandemic, it has only now been possible to update it.
- 2.3 The 2024-28 Tasglann nan Eilean Forward Plan is at Appendix 1 and provides an overview of the service remit, vision, mission, key achievements, and feedback from an independent survey of service users/ non-users. It sets the strategic aims and objectives for the next four years. The policies associated with the operation of the archives service have been updated in line with current sector standards and best practice and are at Appendices 2-6.
- 2.4 Tasglann nan Eilean aims to consistently deliver an archive service which meets nationally recognised standards of professional practice and legislative requirements, as reflected in the Forward Plan and suite of associated policies. The Forward Plan notes that, while it was an initial aspiration for the service, achieving Archive Service Accreditation is not currently a realistic aim. It should be noted that achievement of Archive Accreditation has no bearing on Museum Accreditation. The two schemes are completely separate, have different governance structures and awarding criteria, and different implications apply in regard to accreditation status of each service.
- 2.5 As Tasglann nan Eilean and Museum nan Eilean work closely together as part of the Comhairle's Heritage Service, it is an aim to make the Forward Plan of each service align to ensure that our services are delivered cohesively. Museum nan Eilean's Forward Plan was approved in April 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle approves:**
 - a) **the Tasglann nan Eilean Forward Plan 2024-2028 at Appendix 1; and**
 - b) **the updated policy documents for the Comhairle's Archive Service at Appendices 2-6.**

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Appendices: 1. Tasglann nan Eilean Forward Plan 2024-2028
 2. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Archive Policy v1.2
 3. Tasglann nan Eilean Collections Development Policy v2
 4. Tasglann nan Eilean Access and Engagement Policy v2.1
 5. Tasglann nan Eilean Collections Information Policy v2
 6. Tasglann nan Eilean Loans Policy v1.1

Background Papers: Report to Sustainable Development Committee 27/9/2017

IMPLICATIONS

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

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	Public Records Scotland Act 2011 (provision for records of enduring value)
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	Risk of reputational damage if Archive Service does not have an up to date Forward Plan and policies in place
Equalities	Aligns with Equality Act 2010 and CnES Equal Opportunities Policy
Corporate Strategy	Aligns with vision of Corporate Strategy: for 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 Tasglann nan Eilean Forward Plan has been developed taking account of the following:

- Mission, vision and values of Tasglann nan Eilean
- Museum nan Eilean Forward Plan 2023-2028
- Feedback from independent survey of service users / non-users carried out in 2022
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Corporate Strategy and Values
- Wider sector strategies and priorities
- Impact of the cyber-attack of November 2023

5.2 Tasglann nan Eilean is the archive service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. The service has a remit for a variety of archive-related functions:

- As record-keeper to the Comhairle, ensuring that its corporate memory is preserved and organised and that access is provided to the records.
- As an information resource providing access to data from the records for a wide variety of users, including internal.
- As custodian of the written heritage of the Outer Hebrides, providing a safe place of deposit for historical records, thereby ensuring their preservation for the future and a starting point for the study and promotion of the history and culture of the islands.

- As an educational resource underpinning the study of history at all levels from primary to postgraduate academic study, attracting researchers from around the world.
- As a resource for local people and visitors wishing to research aspects of the history of the Outer Hebrides, those in the creative industries/ media and anyone who requires to use the information or resources contained in the archive.

5.3 Since the service moved to Lews Castle and relaunched in 2016, there have been a number of key achievements in addition to delivery of routine services and tasks. These are outlined in detail in the Forward Plan, but include the following:

- Delivery of the Harris Tweed Authority Archive Project funded by The National Archives National Cataloguing Grants Programme and the HTA Educational Trust. (<https://www.outerhebridesheritage.org.uk/collection/harris-tweed-authority-archive/>)
- Mass transcription project undertaken during Covid lockdown. Almost 800 letters and documents from the Gibson Collection were digitised by MnE Visitor Services Officer and transcribed by various staff members, co-ordinated by Archivist (however most of this work currently inaccessible due to cyber attack).
- ‘Between Islands’ partnership project with Shetland Museum and Orkney Museum to create new exhibitions, funded by Leader Programme and led by Alex MacDonald of An Lanntair. Due to Covid this pivoted to [three online exhibitions](#), launched in 2020.
- Heritage Asset Audit report delivered as part of Great Place Strategy to create a strong evidence base to further inform the evolution and delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan.
- New bilingual [Heritage Services website](#) developed and launched (funded by Museums Galleries Scotland) to improve information about services and collections, and to make this more easily accessible for users and visitors.
- Cinema Sgìre Project delivered in partnership with National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive: aimed to digitise around 100 video recordings in an obsolete format, catalogue and make them accessible online, as well as undertake a programme of community engagement events to share highlights; funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig.
- Successful funding bid to Art Fund to enable two members of the Heritage Team to undertake a research trip to Nova Scotia in advance of Hebridean Homecoming exhibition/ conference.
- Successful funding bid to Museums Galleries Scotland to assist with costs of Emigration Conference in autumn 2025.

5.4 Much of the work the service achieved, in terms of cataloguing, documenting and digitising the collections is currently inaccessible due to the cyber-attack of November 2023. Recovery from this is an important strategic priority. Data underpins everything the archive service strives to deliver and is needed to effectively manage, identify and provide access to, collections.

5.5 The Archive Service Accreditation Standard was launched in 2012. It is a national standard which defines agreed standards for archive services across the UK, and also looks at areas such as resources and planning which underpin activities. As at July 2024, there are 185 Accredited Archive services in the UK, of which 11 are in Scotland. Of those in Scotland, three are local authority archive services.

5.6 When Tasglann nan Eilean relaunched at Lews Castle in 2016 it had been an ambition to apply for Archive Service Accreditation, but due to the level of resource which has been available to the service in terms of budget and staffing, and the demands on the service, this is not currently a realistic aspiration. The detrimental effect of the cyber-attack on data and information systems also makes accreditation an unrealistic goal at present.

5.7 The Forward Plan represents an ambitious programme of work for the coming years, in line with our **Vision** that ‘The documented past of the Outer Hebrides is valued, preserved, shared and enjoyed as a key asset, with the necessary investment and professional skills, enabling it to grow

sustainably and ethically, so that our collections, Gaelic culture and intangible heritage will enrich, educate, challenge, inspire and reflect diverse audiences.’

5.8 The Forward Plan identifies the following strategic aims for the service:

- Address the impact of the cyber attack by working with IT and others to recover the data needed to underpin delivery of an effective Archive Service.
- Promote the benefits and potential of archives through sharing collections and delivering activities that enrich and inspire the lives of more people, supporting greater inclusion, diversity, access and participation. This will include addressing issues of decolonisation and inclusive practice in collecting, describing, presenting, and engaging with content in archive collections.
- Preserve and develop our collections in line with policies and national standards ensuring their full unique potential is realised for the benefit of communities locally, nationally and internationally.
- Work to ensure a secure and sustainable future for the Archive Service to enable it to remain adaptive in a changing and challenging environment which includes social, digital and AI developments.
- Raise awareness of the archive and wider Heritage Service.
- Collaborate with funders, partners and communities to create ambitious, innovative, engaging projects that will stretch boundaries and develop the Archive & Museum Service and the wider Outer Hebrides heritage sector.
- Contribute to safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Gaelic language of the Outer Hebrides for the benefit of present and future generations.

5.9 The strategic objectives which contribute to the delivery of the above aims are detailed fully in the Forward Plan but they include:

- Re-establish access to Axiell CALM catalogue system for archive staff and investigate most effective method of making archive catalogues available online.
- Continue to collect archive material in line with Collections Development Policy in order to increase the range and depth of the collections held to ensure that records of enduring value documenting the Outer Hebrides - including material relating to communities, subjects or activities which are under-represented in our collections - are secured for public benefit.
- Work with Museum nan Eilean colleagues on Collections Resource Centres Project including potential extension of the Archive Service to Uist in order to preserve and provide improved access to pertinent archives.
- Hebridean Homecoming – international project to deliver Emigration Exhibition and Conference in 2025.

5.10 The Policies which guide delivery of the archive service have also been updated and refreshed in line with sector standards and best practice.

CONCLUSION

6.1 Tasglann nan Eilean has received excellent feedback from users since its inception and has contributed to a number of significant initiatives of benefit to the Comhairle and the wider heritage sector. It has done so in the context of strained staff and budgetary resources, and more recently, the impact of the cyber attack on its information systems. The Forward Plan and associated policies may be opportunities to do more should future resource allocation allow.