

# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR SCOTLAND

## Historic Scotland's Support for the Voluntary Sector

### 1. Introduction

The Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland (HEACS) is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the consultation paper from Historic Scotland on its support for the voluntary sector.

The paper rightly opens with an acknowledgement of the importance of the voluntary sector in Scotland, and refers back to the Scottish Executive's Vision for the Voluntary Sector as a sector which is vibrant, sustainable, strong and independent.

It is worth noting, as the consultation paper does not, that the Vision paper describes the Executive's relationship with the sector as having evolved from one based largely around funding to something more sophisticated which recognises important joint agendas for the future. The Executive identifies four key areas of support for the sector, and where additional support will be necessary:

- as partners in service delivery, for which the sector will need to be more involved in strategic planning of services locally, including community planning;
- as partners in building strong communities;
- for its role in advocacy and development of policy thinking, with the sector becoming more involved at an earlier stage in the policy cycle in order to achieve better outcomes in implementation; and
- as an agent of change.

HEACS suggests that this consultation paper is less ambitious for the historic environment voluntary sector than is the Executive for the sector as a whole, and in that respect is a missed opportunity. It is for example good that the level of investment is to be maintained. It is very disappointing that there is no increase.

The recent mapping of the infrastructure of the historic environment, which concentrated largely on the voluntary sector, clearly identified a strong and active sector, working in all areas of Scotland and across the full range of historic environment interests and activities. The levels of volunteer involvement demonstrate the high value which communities place on their historic environment, and a significant proportion of organisations confirmed their interest in policy development. The survey also however points to a need for significant investment in capacity building within the sector, particularly in the areas of policy development, and the capacity to engage in the kind of involvement in long term strategic planning identified in the Vision paper.

Through this review, Historic Scotland should be looking to the longer term, and to the kind of investment which will help the sector to find its voice, to build on its strengths, and to increase its capacity to deliver. It is important that the case for increased investment be made now in preparation for the next spending review. Underinvestment now will be difficult to reverse, and will have the long term effects of reducing the sector's capacity to fulfil the roles which the paper identifies for it.

## **2. Review Context**

The strategic review of the voluntary sector provides an important and useful backdrop to this review.

HEACS welcomes the recognition that funding of the voluntary sector is an investment. This implies a new way of thinking of the relationship between government and the sector, which will make the development of the 'joint agendas' of the Vision paper more likely.

HEACS also welcomes the move to full cost recovery, though in the proposed context of stand still in the level of investment, it seems likely that there will be losses as well as gains from this in the short term. Clear guidance on how this will work will be necessary.

HEACS also welcomes the commitment to joined-up policy making and meaningful partnerships between the public and voluntary sectors, and the recognition of the need to improve support services to voluntary organisations. These are however areas where the historic environment voluntary sector will require increased investment in the infrastructure bodies with responsibility for capacity building within the sector. HEACS recommends that more thought be given to ways of ensuring that investment.

## **3. The Role of the Voluntary Sector in the Historic Environment**

The paper sets out the broad range of roles and functions of the voluntary sector in the historic environment. The key question as HEACS sees it is to consider how the limited investment available can best be used, and how priorities will be set. The results of the mapping exercise may be useful in this.

## **4. Historic Scotland's investment objectives**

Historic Scotland has aligned its investment objectives with its own corporate objectives. This is in line with the wider policy of government which is to support voluntary action which helps government to achieve its objectives. HEACS suggests that the second objective could usefully be expanded to include cultural and social benefits. We welcome objective 5 and 6, and would suggest that these should be considered as priority for investment at this time. We note

however, that no reference is made to the ways in which the historic environment contributes to other government policies and priorities and the role of the voluntary sector in that.

## **5. Delivering Historic Scotland's investment in the voluntary sector**

HEACS welcomes the commitment to more efficient, open and transparent processes.

The ending of the distinction between core and project funding will require careful thought. The paper recognises the success of core funding. It is essential that any change does not reduce the availability of funding for core activities, which in HEACS' view ought to be a priority for government funding. Project funding is of course also important, but few funders are prepared to support core costs, hence the need for government to make it a priority. The capacity of the sector to deliver what is expected from it will be seriously at risk if core funding is eroded.

HEACS recommends that, if the change is made, Historic Scotland should develop a way of reporting on its funding of the voluntary sector which makes clear how much has been invested in the long term core activities of organisations, and how much in shorter term initiatives.

HEACS is broadly supportive of the move to FCR, provided clear guidance is prepared, and that it is carefully managed in the initial stages.

The move to three year funding is to be welcomed, if only to bring the historic environment into line with other parts of the voluntary sector where the three year principle has been in force for some time. The three year cycle is particularly important for core activities, and gives organisations a framework for longer term strategic thinking and planning. There is a case to be made for a longer planning cycle for some more ambitious projects. These should be identified and considered on a one-to-one basis.

## **6. Establishing priorities for 2007 - 10**

HEACS recognises that there is some scope for increased efficiency through organisations sharing facilities and support services, though it should be recognised that this can also present management challenges. There are many examples of successful cooperation of this kind, some of which were however only made possible by substantial investment at the outset. There are also good examples of partnership working.

We are more cautious about the scope for mergers. Any move to actively encourage mergers of voluntary organisations should be based on careful research of the factors which would come into play, and what might be lost as well as what might be gained. In the absence of profit as a measure of success

(and one which often hides other kinds of loss resulting from mergers in the business sector), the gains and losses from mergers of voluntary organisations would need a different range of measures, including loss of 'added value'.

HEACS first identified the need to invest in the infrastructure for the historic environment in the first year of its work, in its response to the Review of Historic Scotland. The mapping exercise has confirmed that view. We welcome the commitment in this paper to identify the gaps and to invest in addressing them. Comparison can be made with other parts of the voluntary sector where investment in infrastructure by government has led to real strategic and operational gains.

HEACS would support the general principle that funding from national government should generally be directed towards national organisations. Exceptions can however be made when a local project is seen to have national significance, or in the case of national networks of local bodies which have a capacity building role. Examples include the networks of Councils of Voluntary Organisations and of Volunteer Centres, each of which receive core support from national funds. The network of BPT's could be a case in point here.

## **7. Administration of the Heritage Grants Scheme**

HEACS supports the moves to speed up decisions and improving the service to applicants. Formal offers which clearly set out the terms and conditions of grant are helpful, and offer a form of protection to both parties. It is important that the proposed outputs and outcomes are clearly stated and accepted at the outset, and the monitoring framework established. These should be open to review and adjustment over the three year period.

HEACS notes the proposed changes to the administration of the sponsorship funds. Small grants schemes of this kind are very valuable and important, and are always noteworthy for the imaginative work which they support. We suggest that if the changes are introduced, they should be monitored over the first three years of operation.

## **8. Conclusion**

HEACS has welcomed this review and consultation on the strategic direction of the investment provided by Historic Scotland. Our hope would be that strategic investment in the infrastructure could mean that the next review will be carried out in partnership with the voluntary sector, in the same way that the Executive's Vision for the Voluntary Sector was developed in partnership.

**HEACS**  
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