

VOCAL – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

On the positive side, I would outline the following:-

- i) In overall terms, I believe VOCAL has continued to punch above its weight, through its strategic influence on key partners, most notably, the Scottish Executive, and COSLA.
- ii) This has manifested itself in a number of ways over the last year including:-
 - a) Representation on the steering group chaired by the Scottish Executive responsible for drafting “Reaching Higher”, the recently published National Sport Strategy. In partnership with COSLA, we made I believe, considerable drafting improvements to a document that in some respects was frustrating in the overall way and timescale, in which it was developed. Certainly, whatever reservations we may have about the final outcome, I believe our input was of considerable benefit and moved the strategy away from pronouncing a series of rather crude top down targets to a more locally driven approach, and also managed to highlight our concerns regarding sports facility infrastructure.
 - b) In terms of the Draft Culture Bill, VOCAL has played a key role in helping to shape the Draft Guidance on cultural entitlements and planning in conjunction with Sue Selwyn, the Local Government secondee from Falkirk Council.

Also, particularly through Rod Stone, we have been playing a key role on the Scottish Executive’s Quality Assurance Working Group with the aim of working towards developing a national model for self-assessment for the sector, based on the HMLe model for Community Learning and Development, and now with the direct support of HMLe on an advisory basis.

- c) We through John Zimny, continue to play a proactive role on Skills Active with John not only as Chair of Skills Active Scotland but also representing Scotland on the UK Board of Trustees. Through John, VOCAL should be able to play a key role in the forthcoming Scottish Executive’s skills review.

- d) In terms of our relationship with COSLA, we have worked closely together on drafting input and shaping the agenda of COSLA's Arts and Leisure Executive, developing joint responses to key national policy responses, the National Spending Review, and working closely with the previous COSLA spokesperson for the sector, Graham Garvie including taking part in joint discussions with the previous Minister.
- e) Also, we jointly staged the well attended 'Participation' Workshop earlier this year at COSLA HQ.
- f) The officer relationship with the Scottish Executive has been reinforced with the initiation of regular quarterly meetings between VOCAL, COSLA and the respective Heads of the Cultural and Sports Divisions, Heather Jack and Francesca Osowska.
- g) Finally, from a VOCAL organisation perspective, membership numbers are healthy, attendance at this year's conference is very good, with LA's attending along with representatives from the Scottish Executive, COSLA, and a number of the national agencies.

Also the Conference Agenda has attracted two government ministers and the new spokesperson for COSLA for Culture and Sport Harry McGuigan from North Lanarkshire Council.

However, as ever, we face a number of challenges as an organisation:-

- i) First and foremost, the new landscape in which we work at a local and national level has been changed dramatically following the May elections, and the formation of the new SNP Scottish Government, and a variety of new administrations at local level.
- ii) We now have three government ministers for the sector, two attending our conference, Stewart Maxwell and Linda Fabiani, with Nicola Sturgeon having cabinet responsibility for sport.
- iii) COSLA has changed its structure with a spokesperson and a committee that has culture and sport as just one of a long list of responsibilities under the umbrella of "Community Well-Being and Safety".

- iv) The challenge for VOCAL is to respond as effectively to this new landscape as we have done previously and sustain the level of strategic influence that we have recently been able to exert.
- v) This will require wider representation from the VOCAL Executive if we are to continue to take part in discussions and meetings with COSLA, the national agencies, and the Scottish Executive across a range of issues and policy initiatives.
- vi) At the moment, the VOCAL Executive has a reasonable spread in terms of LA's and experience but a limited numbers of active participants and at the next VOCAL Executive meeting in October, we wish to debate how we:-
 - a) Look to the future, in terms of succession planning for key positions on the Executive, and attracting a new generation of members.
 - b) Expand the composition of the Executive.
 - c) Progress the agenda and nature and location of Executive meetings.

with a view to attracting strong representation at Executive meetings and involvement in its work.

Also, we have to recognise that the landscape is changing local authority level. A new round of financial pressures for local authorities fuelled by the efficient government agenda and equal pay issues, has seen a renewed interest in the formation of leisure trusts, and as is the case with Glasgow and possibly some other LA's, the formation of more holistically based cultural and leisure trusts/companies. It is crucial that VOCAL's responds to these developments, and for instance starts to forge a stronger relationship with SPORTA, the Scottish branch of the UK's national organisation for Leisure Trusts.

With respect to our financial support from PMP, we can continue with this relationship for a further two years, and I would like to express sincere thanks to PMP for not only this support but also in the sensitive way that they have handled this support to our organisation.

Finally, the coming year will hopefully see Glasgow announced in November as the host city for the 2014 CWG. This is both a great opportunity and challenge for our sector.

Building on the work underpinning the Draft Cultural Bill, and “Reaching Higher”, can we together with the Scottish Executive, the national agencies, the voluntary community and business sector use the milestones of 2012 and 2014 to instigate a step change in levels of engagement and participation in culture and sport, remembering the CWG is potentially as much a cultural festival and milestone as a sporting event? This will not only require improved levels of planning, partnership, coordination and leadership, but also additional resources and again with 2012 and 2014 as milestones, can we together better articulate this case and achieve a lasting legacy.

Ian Hooper

4 September 2007