

VOCAL CONFERENCE 2009

Macdonald Marine Hotel and Spa, Cromwell Road, North Berwick, East Lothian, EH39 4LZ

SPEAKING NOTES FOR MINISTER CEAC (MICHAEL RUSSELL MSP)

Introduction

- Good morning. I am grateful to Rod Stone and to VOCAL for inviting me to take part in your annual conference.
- I understand that our location is the most beautiful town in Scotland, as North Berwick was crowned recently in the Beautiful Scotland awards. Your conference hosts, in East Lothian Council, will be justifiably proud of this achievement. Let me add my congratulations.
- While we're on that topic, I know that North Berwick historically has attracted many famous people, not the least of these being Robert Louis Stevenson, for whom the town was a favourite childhood holiday spot.
- I also wish to extend a warm welcome to all the international guest speakers who are participating in this Conference. As Minister for External Affairs as well as Culture, I am delighted that you have joined us to share

your experiences and knowledge; I am sure the exchange of ideas that takes place over these 2 days will prove helpful and illuminating for all concerned. You certainly have a fascinating and challenging conference agenda.

- Those of you who were present yesterday would hear my colleague, Shona Robison, outlining her priorities for sport.
- Shona would give you her particular perspective as Sports Minister. But I'm certain that you'll find us both saying some similar things - about the key role that your organisations play in delivering recreation for the citizens of Scotland.

Theme

- The theme I shall take for this short address is "creating opportunity". All those whose business concerns delivering culture are in the 'opportunity business'.
- These are precious opportunities which deliver both social and economic outcomes – and tangible and intangible benefits. They are opportunities for people to forget, even temporarily, about the preoccupations of daily living and to do things which lift the spirit, provide emotional escape, and give them a chance to be active and creative.

- Scottish Government and local government share an interest and a commitment to widen access to culture.
- I am, of course, very aware of the financial pressures you will be experiencing within your authorities, and the private sector is not immune from these either.
- Where we can, we must ensure that our customers do not suffer. Be more cost-effective – and don't cut out what matters. Because culture and creativity have a unique ability to add real quality to lives.
- Now, more than ever before in recent times, it is vital that we harness this power to advance community confidence and well-being.
- Anyone who sees culture as an optional extra in the drive for economic and national prosperity should think again.
- The creative industries can grow further, boosting employment in that sector; cultural tourism can expand; and regeneration can be boosted by iconic design and landmark cultural facilities. Those are 3 key sources of potential growth which are well known and widely acknowledged.

- “Homecoming” is providing fresh evidence of the benefits of cultural tourism. And the recently published report, about new and better ways to support Scotland’s creative industries, owes thanks to all contributors, including VOCAL.
- We also know that the costs of dealing with the most pressing social problems can be reduced by stepping in with positive interventions that we and you can take before the problems start, or become critical priorities that take longer to resolve.
- The work we have been taking forward with VOCAL and CoSLA over the past year, and the efforts of the most enterprising local authorities, have helped position cultural services to exercise their influence on the local policy agenda.
- So if it’s true, as American author, H Jackson Brown Jnr, said, that “*Opportunity dances with those who are already on the dance floor*”, the ground is laid for that influence to be grasped.

The Concordat and Single Outcome Agreements

- The Concordat that gave us the Performance Framework recognises the unique democratic position which local government plays in the governance of Scotland.
- The Concordat is based on a parity of esteem. It is about how we develop policy – and how we do it together. We firmly believe that by developing policy together we will produce better and more workable policies that will deliver better outcomes for the people of Scotland.
- The ‘national/local’ relationship that underpins the Concordat is still in its early years; has already faced challenges; and will no doubt have to deal with more and tougher challenges in the years ahead. I am, however, convinced that the results it delivers will be profound and long-lasting.
- For local authority cultural services, the key word again is “opportunity”. Each of the National Outcomes presents an agenda with which culture can engage - and can engage successfully.
- The range of social and economic priorities identified in the first 2 rounds of Single Outcome Agreements presented a

host of reasons to explore the role culture and creativity can play in community life – in health, community cohesion, regeneration and much more.

- It is important that culture should be a key part of the SOA delivery process.
- My work with Schools and Skills Minister, Keith Brown, seeks to strengthen links with the excellent education work delivered by the culture sector. That is just one of the ways I am looking to ensure that culture and creativity can maximise their role – in this instance, to enliven learning opportunities for our young people within Curriculum for Excellence.
- As for culture’s ability to contribute to health and fitness, I hope that “Let’s Get Scotland Dancing” – part of the cultural strand of our ambitious Commonwealth Games legacy plan – will help to build on the phenomenal growth of dance in Scotland.

Leaders

- One of the lessons from our Cultural Pathfinder Programme was about the critical importance of leadership and identifying people who can function strategically as ‘cultural champions’.

- I would expect members of VOCAL to be uniquely well-placed to fulfil such the role of cultural leaders – reaching up to Council-level and across to other services and Community Planning sectors. Local authorities can be advocates as well as leaders in delivering culture to the people of Scotland.
- You may tell me, in the present climate of cut-backs and reprioritising of Council budgets, that no-one is listening to such advocacy.
- I don't under-estimate the problems you may face, but be aware of the negative impacts if you don't deliver. However, the question I'd pose in such a scenario, is – are you explaining the potential impacts of culture to colleagues in other services and sectors, and challenging them to show evidence that their more traditional delivery practices are achieving as much?
- And when you advocate for culture's positive role, remember the economic and social gains that are attainable at every stage of the process. For example, when disaffected young people are going to Blue Light Discos, is it being highlighted that fewer resources are needed to deal with the anti-social activities which were their alternative

recreational option? Spending now avoids greater spend further down the line.

- What is clear is that key groups who do not participate in culture are very often the same communities who are the focus of the most substantial challenges identified in most, if not all, of the Single Outcome Agreements.
- These are people assailed by: chronic health problems, inequality, poverty, and affected by crime and substance abuse etc. Their life-chances may be blighted by lack of opportunity, but those can improve significantly when people are enabled to exercise their 'natural right' to cultural experiences.
- I'd say that changing things for them feels more like a moral obligation than an 'opportunity', for those in a position to help. And if we believe in parity of access to the good things in life, we need to support that with investment.

Creative Scotland

- I am pleased to say that plans for Creative Scotland are progressing well, with the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Bill now at Stage One.

- When I spoke at the CoSLA conference in March I said that I had identified 3 priorities for Government's focus on culture: support for artists; access to culture; and boosting participation. these priorities are enshrined in the Bill.
- I'm aware of the major contribution which local authorities make, and I applaud the exemplary practice we see in some – but not yet all – parts of Scotland.
- My earnest hope is that local authorities will see the establishment of Creative Scotland as an exciting opportunity. I also hope that Creative Scotland will work with every local authority in Scotland.
- Creative Scotland can be a key partner for you to interact with. It will of course be for local authorities to decide how they take their own responsibilities forward.
- The next 'Creative Scotland dialogue' event I shall lead with Ewan Brown and Richard Holloway takes place next Monday 5 October, at Perth Concert Hall, at 10:30. One of the topics we have suggested for that discussion is Creative Scotland's relationship with local government. I hope I shall see many of you there, and taking part.

Quality

- Recent collaboration by Scottish Government and VOCAL has produced a Quality Improvement Framework.
- Many of you will have attended the recent roadshows, to hear about the project, and the next stages of trialling it and moving to implementation.
- The Quality Framework seeks to help local authorities examine how well, and inclusively, culture and sport services are delivering for their local communities.
- In the current climate, especially, sound planning is crucial. So are efficiency, effectiveness and securing best value from public services.
- Having accomplished 2 rounds of producing Single Outcome Agreements, Scottish Government and local government decided recently that the immediate focus should be on stepping up momentum for 'delivery'. The Quality Framework, "How Good Is Our Culture and Sport?", can help you demonstrate culture's impact across local services. I am pleased to commend it to you.

- It is important to ensure that public spending on the arts has an impact on as many people as possible. It is a good thing in itself for us to enable the arts to enrich people's lives. It also makes economic sense.

Concluding remarks

- We all know that when times are hard, hard choices are necessary. The £500m cut in the Scottish Government's budget is a reality.
- To justify spending public money, we have to make a positive difference to people's lives. Culture and creativity are central to the social and economic fabric of this country. We must all continue to invest, and apply imagination and commitment in pursuing routes to economic growth, if we are to emerge from the recession stronger, and more confident.
- Our vision of a public sector in Scotland working collectively to deliver a common purpose and set of strategic national objectives is a challenging one. Neither my Government nor you - the members of VOCAL - underestimate the scale of that challenge, but we shall rise to it together, of that I am certain.

- I hope we can work together to reaffirm the place of culture in this nation, and for every individual in this country. Culture sits at the heart of our best endeavours. It is our identity, and something we should all be extremely proud of.
- I mentioned earlier that North Berwick was the place where Robert Louis Stevenson spent some of his childhood. I am aware that he once remarked that there was no duty so much underrated as the duty of being happy. Our job in delivering culture is to make people happy. We need to work hard to ensure that it does.

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