

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Executive Director of Educational Services

Educational Services Committee: 15 May 2013

Subject: National Recognition Award: West Dunbartonshire Sewing Machine Collection

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To advise committee of the prestigious award of status of 'Nationally Recognised Collection' to the Council's historical sewing machine collection by Museums Galleries Scotland, the national development organisation for museums in Scotland and the awarding body for Recognised status.
- 1.2** To inform committee of the potential positive impact of this status ahead of a joint public announcement of the award by West Dunbartonshire Council and Museums Galleries Scotland.

2. Recommendations

The Educational Services Committee is recommended to:

- i. Note the contents of this report and the efforts being made by staff to ensure a national presence for West Dunbartonshire's museum collections.
- ii. Note the effort taken by officers in compiling the Recognition portfolio and application documentation.
- iii. Note the strategic development being made by Libraries and Culture as part of Educational Services to preserve, conserve and improve access to West Dunbartonshire's museum collections.
- iv. Note the potential for increased external funding to support conservation of and access to the council's museum collections through this award.

3. Background

- 3.1** In 2010, Libraries and Cultural Services were awarded a grant of £150k from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to research, conserve, preserve and catalogue the Council's sewing machine collection and related artefacts and archives. In particular the funding was awarded to recruit the post of Science and Technology Curator, to manage work on this collection.
- 3.2** This resulted in West Dunbartonshire becoming the only local authority in Scotland to create a curatorial post specifically dedicated to Science and Technology, providing an opportunity to become a lead organisation in the specialism of heritage science and technology collections, their identification and preservation.

- 3.3** Towards the end of the three year project, an extensive portfolio of information was assembled, including testimonials from the Smithsonian Institute, and Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian, Manchester and Bristol Universities, as well as the National Museums of Scotland. These supported work to establish the importance of the sewing machine collections of West Dunbartonshire, including the significant Singer Collection to the economic development of Scotland, the development of female equality and Scotland's economic impact on the world. This was submitted to the Recognition Panel, a distinguished group of museum, heritage collection and academic specialists who evaluated the collection in terms of its national importance.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** In September 2012, Educational Services were notified that the collection had been awarded Recognised status. However, this information was embargoed from the press until the re-opening of Clydebanks Museum and Art Gallery and the evaluation of the museum for Accredited Museum status, ensuring that the museum complied with national standards of care for visitors and artefact collections. Accredited status was subsequently awarded in February 2013.
- 4.2** The Recognition Panel was in unanimous agreement that West Dunbartonshire's sewing machine collection *"is not only of national but international significance"* stating that it is the largest collection of its kind in Europe, and the second largest in the world.
- 4.3** The award of Recognition puts West Dunbartonshire's sewing machine collection on a par with those of the National Museums and Galleries. In addition, it opens up new avenues of increased external funding for the artefact collections. Our sewing machine collection now has the status of a pre-eminent Scottish heritage collection and has the potential to become world renowned.
- 4.4** As a result of its new Recognised status, Libraries and Culture has as part of Educational Services already been awarded a further £67k towards the funding of a Technology and Access Curator for two years, ensuring continued work on the preservation of the collection, exploring learning potential and working on the online access of the collections. Work will continue on developing other avenues of external funding.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There will be the future recruitment of a Technology and Access Curator funded through monies awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund as a result of our Recognition award.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1** There are no financial implications within this report. However, as a result of its new Recognised status, Libraries and Culture has as part of Educational

Services already been awarded a further £67k towards the funding of a Technology and Access Curator for two years, ensuring continued work on the preservation of the collection, exploring learning potential and working on the online access of the collections.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** There is no risk to the Council associated with the contents of this report.

8. Equalities Impact

- 8.1** An Equalities Impact Screening has been carried out and there are no equalities impact issues raised as a consequence of this report.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** In achieving Recognition Status consultation took place with Smithsonian Institute, and Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian, Manchester and Bristol Universities, as well as the National Museums of Scotland.
- 9.2** West Dunbartonshire Museum Collections staff and Museums Galleries Scotland have been consulted in relation to the content of this report.
- 9.3** Legal Services and the Section 95 Officer have been consulted in relation to the content of this report.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** The award of National Recognition has established West Dunbartonshire's sewing machine and related archive collections as one of the pre-eminent collections in Scotland and the world, second only to that of the Smithsonian Museum in the United States.
- 10.2** Achieving National Recognition Status will bring with it increased opportunities to attract external funding to celebrate West Dunbartonshire's heritage, and increased tourism potential. Reflecting the council strategic aims to market itself to both internal and external audiences and improve the area's image and branding.
- 10.3** This award forms part of a strategic programme of improved governance, resource management and financial planning relating to the council's heritage resources in line with the council's strategic aims. This includes preservation, conservation and documentation of collections and an ongoing programme of improvement to collections stores and public access to collections.

Terry Lanagan
Executive Director of Education

Person to Contact: Gill Graham, Section Head Libraries & Cultural Services
Educational Services, 19 Poplar Road, Dumbarton G82
2RJ. Tel: 01389 608042.
E-mail gill.graham@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Wards Affected: All Wards

Appendix None

Background Paper: EI Screening