

## **Written evidence from Community Leisure Scotland on how budgetary decisions can support the mainstreaming of culture across the Scottish Government, including the impact on health and wellbeing.**

### **Introduction**

Community Leisure Scotland is responding on behalf of our members who deliver public leisure, sport and culture services across the country. In Scotland, we currently have 27 members, which are all registered charities (with a public benefit asset lock), often working in partnership with local authorities. 16 of our 27 members deliver some form of public culture within their local communities, including libraries, museums, galleries, theatres and community halls.

We welcome the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee on this important topic, ahead of the opportunity to engage with the Committee in an oral evidence session.

### **Current landscape for public culture charities**

Community Leisure Scotland's members have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and are facing a long recovery period. The six areas of concern identified by Creative Scotland, as referenced in the pre-budget scrutiny report, provide a clear overview of some of the challenges facing the wider culture sector, which are relevant to our members: the end of furlough; the repayment of business loans; increasing inflation; the retreat of public and private funding (e.g. local government and philanthropy); slow return of audiences; and the costs of the commitment to fair pay.

Many cultural activities were unable to take place for a significant period of time due to restrictions, capacity concerns and uncertainty around future restrictions prohibiting the forward planning of activities and events. There have inevitably been significant costs and resources required to reopen facilities and restart activities. This has been against a backdrop of reduced footfall and income as a result of physical distancing measures.

It should be noted that, in the context of cultural services, it is the large scale events, activities and live events and performances, which have income generation potential associated with them, then re-invested into sustaining free of charge public services.

There has also been a significant loss of reserves across public culture charities, using these to remain solvent throughout the pandemic. Despite support from local authorities, our members are in a significantly weaker financial position as we emerge from the pandemic, yet are facing new challenges in the near future, notably the unprecedented increase in energy costs and increases to the National Living Wage.

However, the role of public culture has never had greater recognition or appreciation than in recent months and years. At a time when venues and facilities were forced to close, activities and support through cultural organisations remained active. The culture sector pivoted to digital and offered a wealth of opportunities for cultural engagement digitally, through online library provision, exhibitions and events from museums and galleries online, and digital live performances. Many activities also took place outdoors in the open air, when weather permitted.

Across the local public culture sector, the age and condition of some cultural venues and facilities and associated maintenance costs also require consideration, with investment into these venues, particularly reflecting the role of the sector to support progress towards net zero. Furthermore, specifically for cultural trusts, the outcome of the Barclay Review of Non-Domestic Rates effectively removed the potential for any new facilities to achieve rates relief, with implications for future capital developments, impacting both local authorities and their culture trust partners.

### **Priorities going forward**

We welcome the focus of the new budget to aid the recovery of the sector, and fully support the ways of considering public spending identified in *Investing in Scotland's Future: resource spending review framework*. Specifically: cross-government collaboration, public service reform, and prevention.

#### Cross-government collaboration

For cross-government collaboration, an outcome focused approach around health and wellbeing would benefit from support through cross-portfolio funding to further build capacity and delivery. Our members recognise their role in communities as, first and foremost, supporting the health and wellbeing of their local communities and have the expertise, passion, scale and reach into communities to make a meaningful contribution to supporting health outcomes, such as improving mental and social health and wellbeing, and reducing social isolation and loneliness. However, there needs to be long-term and consistent investment to enable this work to grow with time to embed outcomes, which will not necessarily be achieved in the short-term.

It is important to understand and recognise the contribution of culture to the National Performance Framework at a national level and to CoSLA's policy priorities at a local level, specifically around local government funding, health and social care, and local economies and inclusive growth. Through meaningful cross-portfolio working and engagement, there is an opportunity to look at the impact of culture against these local and national priorities, and to join up budget conversations to offer support to culture organisations from other portfolio areas, specifically from the Health budget.

The Culture Strategy need to have a clear connect to the National Performance Framework, with clarity for organisations in the culture sector on the outcomes they should be reporting against, and how these interrelate. There is an opportunity through the refresh of the National

Planning Framework to also ensure review the Culture Strategy and ensure that there is a clear connection across the priorities. This will make it easier to fund work and organisations in the culture sector, with evidence of outcomes against both the NPF and the Culture Strategy.

### Public service reform

The key principles of public sector reform identified in the Christie Commission Report from 2011 are as relevant today as they were eleven years ago. Public services should: be built around people and communities, work together effectively to achieve outcomes; prioritise prevention, reduce inequalities and promote equality; and seek to improve performance and reduce costs. Including cultural plans at local authority level and recognising the contribution of culture to achieving local priorities is important to ensure the voice of culture and creatives is included throughout local decision making. When investing in place, it is important to remember that a place needs to not only be attractive for new people coming to live and work there, but if we truly want to have equity and equality, we need to develop places in line with the vision, identities and aspirations of the communities that already live there. Culture has a crucial role to play in translating these identities and visions into a narrative that can lead investment.

It is essential that we look to protect our public culture, and ensure that no short-term decisions around budget are made at a time of financial pressure that may have a significant and irreversible negative impact for the sector in the future. By adopting the principles identified by the Christie Commission report, and seeking to allow space to understand the impact of the pandemic on behaviours, we will ensure that there are no financial and budgetary decisions made that may have unintended consequences of closure of venues or facilities or loss of skills and expertise from the culture sector.

### Health and Wellbeing and Prevention

Culture has a clear impact on health and wellbeing outcomes, which has been demonstrated more than ever during the pandemic, when people were unable to access many of their usual cultural activities. Culture has an important role to play in supporting mental and social health and wellbeing, and offering social engagement opportunities. There are a wide range of performing arts and library development programmes to support social interaction and encourage a sense of belonging, with different target audiences, including: [Macmillan support services in libraries across Glasgow](#) and other areas across Scotland, bookbug sessions, knit and natter groups, [OnFife's book prescription service](#), [Falkirk Community Trusts' Care Words project](#) bringing together older people in care setting for reading and reminiscence sessions. Black History Month programmes of events. There are also programmes supporting people living with dementia to access local venues for dementia friendly activities such as [OnFife's project as art of the Cultural Connections work funded by Life Changes Trust](#), and [Live Border's Young Creatives programmes](#), supporting people aged 16-24 to engage in arts events in their own communities.

Cultural prescribing has well-evidenced impact on health and wellbeing, with potential for this to be delivered at a far greater scale than at present, if there was adequate funding and capacity. There not only needs to be capacity in terms of workforce to support the delivery of this, but

also a network of venues that are open consistently across the country to ensure there are places and spaces for cultural activities to take place. There also needs to be clear pathways from cultural prescribing to ensure the benefits are embedded in the long-term.

All funding needs to be long-term and flexible, to ensure that the culture sector is able to plan and to offer long-term projects. Flexibility is also crucial, particularly as we progress through the recovery phase following the pandemic, where changes in behaviours and engagement with culture is not fully understood. There must be scope to adapt to a new normal and to tailor cultural services and opportunities

## **Appendix**

Further information on the Trust model and Community Leisure UK can be accessed here: <https://communityleisureuk.org/the-trust-model/>

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