

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's *Pre-Budget scrutiny 2026-27: funding for culture*

COSLA welcomes the opportunity to provide responses to the Committee on the following two areas.

The Committee shares the concerns raised in evidence that the impact of increased Scottish Government funding for the sector may be being offset by funding reductions by local government. We ask that the Scottish Government to respond to these concerns in the context of the £100 million additional investment in the culture sector. We also request that COSLA provides a response to these concerns

In the joint COSLA/Solace/Directors of Finance [written response](#) to the Committee's Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2026/27 call for views, we highlighted the pressures on local authority and Arms-Length External Organisations (ALEO) culture and leisure services as a result of many years of real terms reductions to council funding and increasingly directed funding from the Scottish Government. This is a long-standing issue. The Scottish Government's increased culture budget from 2025/26 has also not benefitted local authorities.

Ongoing and continued cuts to Local Government funding over the years, along with more and more ringfenced and directed funding, has meant that necessary cuts have been disproportionately focused on non-statutory service areas like culture and leisure. Although additional, uncommitted funding of £289m in 2025/26 was welcome, this was not nearly enough to deal with all the immediate pressures faced by local authorities which included pay, inflation and the increase in employers national insurance contributions. The Accounts Commission have forecast a £647m budget gap across councils for 2025/26, £529m in 2026/27 and £496m in 2027/28. Councils require sufficient additional, unallocated funding in 2026/27 to sustain the delivery of preventative services such as culture and leisure.

There are serious challenges around the sustainable operation of local galleries, libraries and museums when any increased funding is primarily directed through national programmes. These are vital local facilities which are foundational to the ability of communities to engage in culture and the arts and have a key role in supporting improved health and wellbeing outcomes for our communities, in tackling poverty and inequality and growing local economies. Investment in these facilities also helps to meet our shared net zero targets. Insufficient Local Government funding impacts on the ability to achieve these shared priorities and outcomes.

There are also concerns from the wider cultural sector that the increased national funding has simply enabled a standstill for the sector with little clarity on how they will deal with any future changes and increased costs. Provision of this funding has not tackled long-standing infrastructure challenges which remain. There are also issues around what can realistically be achieved with £100m spread over four years, in the context of years of cuts to the cultural sector.

Sufficient and sustainable funding is required to embed local services for long-term impact for our communities, rather than a focus on shorter-term national funding.

COSLA has launched a [lobbying campaign](#) urging the Scottish Government to use the upcoming Scottish Budget to provide councils with the fair, sustainable and multi-year funding needed to protect such essential local services. We are **urging the Scottish Government to provide a £16 billion boost in revenue in the Scottish Budget, to secure fair and sustainable funding for councils, as well as an £844m general capital settlement.**

COSLA's recently launched [manifesto](#) for the upcoming Scottish Parliament election also calls for the meaningful recognition of the benefits of sport, culture and leisure, with support to increase national and local investment in facilities and initiatives to support the health, wellbeing and education of our communities, recognising the positive impact of local sport, leisure and cultural services.

The Committee notes the progress on introducing the Visitor Levy, recognising that – should individual Local Authorities choose to implement the Levy – the revenues could be used to help with the cost of local services and facilities. Given the culture sector's contribution to tourism in Scotland, we request COSLA provide clarity as to what opportunities for support the Levy might bring to the culture sector

The Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 creates an opportunity for sustained investment in facilities and services that support the visitor economy. Many councils have undertaken substantial activity to consider visitor levy implementation for their local area. There is an 18-month minimum notice period after a council agrees on its proposal, which must follow extensive local consultation, which means that these opportunities for investment will happen much later. There are four local authorities who have agreed a visitor levy proposal after completing a public consultation on their local proposal (Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and West Dunbartonshire) from January to November 2025.

The Act stipulates that the net proceeds of a visitor levy must be spent on facilitating the achievement of the scheme's objectives and on "developing, supporting and sustaining facilities and services which are substantially for or used by persons visiting [overnight] for leisure or business purposes (or both)". The opportunities for the culture sector could be both direct and indirect.

From those local authorities, opportunities for the culture sector have been identified within a total package, including:

- In the City of Edinburgh Council, 35% of the remaining net proceeds is allocated to Culture, Heritage and Events, this includes a Cultural Creation Fund, a New Work Commissioning Fund, Culture Infrastructure development, heritage building transformation and a Cultural Philanthropic Trust as well as budget provision for supporting new work, events, exhibitions and public art. [City of Edinburgh Council January 2025](#).
- In Glasgow City Council, visitor levy culture and events are identified as one of the three main investment areas. This will support the delivery of the Events Strategy 2035 and Cultural Strategy 2030, investing in the city's long-term attractiveness and sustainability and promoting Glasgow as a leading destination. [Glasgow City Council June 2025](#)

- In Aberdeen City Council's visitor levy proposal, detailed proposed investment streams identified included a Culture & Events Subvention Fund and a Culture & Sport Partner Fund. [Aberdeen City Council August 2025](#)
- In West Dunbartonshire Council, sustaining, supporting and developing the local culture, heritage and events is one of the three objectives and drivers for introducing a visitor levy. [West Dunbartonshire Council November 2025](#)
- At Stirling Council, culture and events are one of the five investment streams identified, which also received the highest respondent support of the five indicating that cultural programming and events are a strong driver for tourism in Stirling. [Stirling Council December 2025](#)
- In Highland Council, around 20% of the net proceeds from the visitor levy were for investment to enhance cultural experiences and celebrate and nurture heritage assets. [Highland Council December 2025](#)