

Cross party group on Culture and Communities

04 June 2025 6:00PM – 8:00PM

Minute

Present

MSPS

Foyso! Choudhury MSP - Convenor

Claire Baker MSP

Non-MSP group members

Registered (online and in-person) CPG members are listed at the end of this document.

We also welcomed Peter Beresford OBE, who was invited to attend the meeting as an active listener, and will be writing a reflective blog linking our discussions to his wider work on people-powered movements in politics, policy and practice.

Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Clare Adamson MSP

Sarah Boyack MSP

Sharon Dowey MSP

Michael Marra MSP

North Edinburgh Arts

Agenda item 2

Foysol Choudhury MSP proposed the minutes of the last meeting (25 February 2025), which were seconded by Stuart Hay.

Agenda item 3

Poet Katharine Macfarlane opened with a reading of *The Library*, celebrating the multiple roles Libraries serve for people and communities.

Agenda item 4

Opening address: Richard Bellingham, Director of Institute for Future Cities, University of Strathclyde. Key points included:

- The role, ecosystems and projected growth of cities (now and in the future)
- Different understandings of what makes a good city, considering both basic needs and values. Ideas of a good city vary according to who, and where, you are.
- Looking ahead, we can expect demographic change, social change, economic change (including to high streets and retail habits), as well as unanticipated shocks (like Covid).
- Common ambitions for city living include them being easy, equitable, flexible, sustainable and distinctive.

Agenda item 5

Panel discussion:

Giulia Gregnanin, Director of Timespan, Helmsdale (Sutherland)

- Introduced the role of a contemporary arts and heritage centre within a rural area, serving both a small local population and a large transient visitor audience.
- Timespan's roots in exploring the local heritage of the area (and the Scottish Clearances) and linking that to a global perspective and to international discussions around climate change, the legacies of empire, and social justice.

- The role of coproduction and cocreation in making work that belongs to ‘the commons’, including logistically - e.g. via the ‘people’s mobile archive’. This as a constant process of “learning and unlearning, doing and undoing”.
- Reconfiguring the idea of a museum as a “non neutral place”, working toward social justice.

Éadaoin Lynch, Research and Evaluation Manager, Scottish Book Trust

- Introduced [The value and impact of Scotland's libraries](#) report by the Scottish Book Trust, launched June 2025, which spoke to 300 librarians and 2000 library users across every Local Authority in Scotland.
- They looked at the challenges facing libraries, with 53 libraries closed since 2015. And the opportunities, with librarians as trusted professionals, as a key signposting point for all kinds of local services, and as a space for connection across socio-economic groups. We heard about the role of libraries in engendering social conscious and collective responsibility, and the interconnectedness of social cohesion and deprivation - with the risk (or conversely, the opportunity) of one dismantling the other.
- The report contains six recommendations: 1. The Scottish government publishes a clear legal definition of parameters to provide an adequate public library service. 2: Scottish government empowers Local Authorities across Scotland with sufficient funding and resource. 3. Training to support librarians to deliver a progressive accessible service. 4. Details of labour provisions, for example expenditure and income, are publicly available. 5. Libraries are funded to support and develop a balanced and quality service improvement culture. 6. More members of the public engage with and explore libraries and the libraries are funded to reach out and advertise to local communities.

Resources and further reading from Éadaoin Lynch:

[Health on the Shelf](#) 2020

[Libraries for Living, and for Living Better](#) 2023

[Libraries Connected - evidence to Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion](#) 2025

Follow up discussion from the panel presentations explored the importance of open and free access to information for democracy and fostering opportunities. We discussed inequities of access to cultural spaces, in terms of resources, economics and cultural capital. In the UK, 7% of libraries in the most deprived areas have closed,

compared to 3% in the least deprived. We considered the risk of burnout for key individuals who are leading activity (in a range of roles as volunteers, leaders of institutions, librarians etc), and the importance of supporting and enabling partnership working as a buffer to that (via an 'infrastructure of leadership').

Agenda item 6

Our lively Q&A explored:

- Learning from failure, and what could be done better in this work (especially in improving access, and around learning from those who don't engage, or who no longer have access to local services).
- Understanding the opportunities and costs of preventative spend (for example, in the cost of library closures).
- The opportunities for collaboration between physical spaces and individuals and community leaders.
- The opportunities of promoting the value of culture for health and wellbeing.
- Different generational patterns to using libraries, in particular, with a quote from a young person that "social media is where we spend our Saturdays".
- The risk of not seeing the value (of the "social glue" role of cultural institutions) until it is eroded or eradicated.
- Re-thinking measurement of impact, and 'what counts' as evidence.

Agenda item 7

There was no AOB

Agenda item 8

The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 8 October 2025, 6.30-8pm, and will be held online.

Added after the event: [A reflective blog on these discussions, from Peter Beresford OBE, can be viewed here.](#)

Registered (in-person and online) Non-MSP group members

Belinda McElhinney
Olga Niekrasova
Trish O'Grady
Mhari Robinson
Bronwen Nixon
Eleanor Styles
Jayne Smith
Graeme Howell
Grant Williams
Jayne Ashley
Robert Rae
Bryan Beattie
Laura Simpson
Robert Singer
Jakki Jeffery
Carol Main
Emma Mortimore
Douglas Westwater
Audrey Wilson
Lindsay Dunbar
Lynne Hocking
Samar Ziadat
Neil McIntyre
Suzanne Lofthus
Ola Wojtkiewicz
Ashley Smith Hammond
Stuart Hay
Phoenix Archer
Angela Adams-Gray
Marie Christie
Frazer Hay

Megan Leckie
Clare Adamson
Gavin Crichton
Seonaid Daly
Eve Nicol
Fadzai Mwakutuya
Sophie McCarthy
Virginia Radcliffe
Olivia Turner
Lucy Bell
Katey Warran
Philippa Cochrane
Erica Judge
Amy McNeese-Mechan
Orchid Liu
Jason Rose
Brian O hEadhra
Veronique Lapeyre
Helen Moore
Jude Anderson
Victoria Darbyshire
Katharine Wheeler
James Preston
Jane Ali-Knight
Rosemary James-Beith
Richard Bellingham
Anne Gallacher
Bryan Beattie
Adam McDougall
Clare Devaney
Fiona MacEwan
Caroline Adam
Shonaig Macpherson
Ann Packard
Jean Urquhart
Elke Finkenauer
Helen Trew
Kenny McGlashan
Amanda Catto
Anita Clark

Catriona Patterson
Katharine Macfarlane
Megan Braithwaite
Seonaid Daly
Shahnoor Minhas Amin
Liam Wiseman
Navid Foroutan
Pooja Shah
Dawn Dublin
Jaine Lumsden
Matt Baker
David Sinclair
Roseanne Tye
Giulia Gregnanin
Sarah Dingwall
Lynne Hocking
Alison Reeves
Nancy Riach
Diarmaid Lawlor
Peter Beresford
Catherine Maclean
Martha Burns Findlay
Kelly Donaldson
Tara McLoughlin
Laura Baxter
Nancy Riach
Jean Urquhart
Richard Bellingham
Katherine Wilkinson