Official Report
Aithisg Oifigeil

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Comataidh na Roinn Eòrpa, Cùisean Taobh A-muigh agus Cultar

Tuesday 15 September 2026

Session 7

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Tuesday 15 September 2026

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EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
4th Meeting 2026, Session 7

CONVENER

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DEPUTY CONVENER

*Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
*David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
*Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP)
*Jenny Young (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP) (Substitute Member)
Isabel Davis (Screen Scotland)
Alastair Evans (Creative Scotland)
Iain Munro (Creative Scotland)

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Tuesday 15 September 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Interests

The Convener (Patrick Harvie): Good morning, everybody—thank you for joining us, and welcome to the fourth meeting in session 7 of the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee.

We have apologies from Keith Brown, and I welcome Heather Anderson, who joins us as his committee substitute. That being the case, the first item of business is to invite her to declare any interests that are relevant to the committee's remit.

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): Thank you, convener. I have no relevant interests to declare.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

09:30

The Convener: Item 2 is to decide whether to take items 4 and 5 in private. Do members agree to do so?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Independent Review of Creative Scotland (Update)

09:31

The Convener: That brings us to the main business of the meeting. Item 3 is evidence from Creative Scotland on progress towards implementing the recommendations from the independent review that took place last year. I warmly welcome Iain Munro, chief executive of Creative Scotland; Isabel Davis, executive director of Screen Scotland; and Alastair Evans, director of strategy at Creative Scotland.

We have all been provided with a substantial amount of written evidence, including a fairly recent update and progress report. To begin, perhaps you could give us a brief overview of where you feel you are at in terms of progress to date, what the current challenges are and whether there have been any tensions or alterations in direction since the recommendations were made.

Iain Munro (Creative Scotland): Good morning, convener—it is nice to meet the new committee. Thank you for inviting us.

With regard to the delivery plan, we embraced the independent review, as I hope the committee knows. Our approach to it is a bit like our approach to audit—we embraced it as a critical friend to help us make improvements and ensure that we continue to be fit for purpose in the future. The review gave us some very helpful information, which we very much welcomed, and we were on to it straight away.

However, the review did not fully reflect the fact that many of the recommendations in it were aspects of work that we wanted to do and had already started, or had made plans for. That work had been paused for the review, so we were able to pick up the mantle on some aspects of it to make progress quite quickly.

An important aspect concerned the recommendations that go beyond Creative Scotland. We needed to work closely with the Scottish Government to understand how it wanted to respond to the review and feed in to support the work that we intended to set out in the delivery plan. We very quickly got into the spring of last year, and the pre-election and post-election periods and so on. However, we thought that it was important to keep people informed. We wanted to make that commitment from the off, which is why we published the latest update on the review last week.

As the committee will see, our approach, on seeing the independent review, was to understand the set of recommendations and see themes within them. Of course we are tracking each of them individually, but we have clustered them into the four section headings that are set out in the material that we have sent you. Those headings are strategy; our target operating model; governance, data and performance; and partnerships and relationships.

In segmenting the recommendations in that way, we have ensured that we can cross-reference between them all and address them to the fullest extent. Some of them overlap between different headings. We have tasked the senior leadership in the organisation with driving forward various aspects of the themes in the action plan with members of staff in the team.

An important aspect that reflects the review is how we work externally with partners and stakeholders and involve them in feeding us useful intelligence and information that keeps us current and relevant and enables us not only to think about the future, but to make meaningful progress now.

On strategy development, we have been advancing quite significantly. That is at the bow wave of the development programme because so much hangs off the strategy itself, such as how we organise ourselves, our systems, processes and governance, and our priorities, relationships and ways of working. We are very much focused on strategy development, and tucked in behind that are those other aspects of the target operating model.

Funding reform is another major part of our work. We have always seen and understood ourselves as a development organisation, which is important. We are most known for funding and it is a major part of what we do, but we have a national leadership role to play and we are very keen to continue to pursue that. Funding reform is part of what we are doing, but it is also about how we see ourselves. It is about asserting our leadership role, but doing so with and through partners and key stakeholders, including people in the sector as well as other public bodies, including local government.

I feel like we are making good progress across a whole suite of actions, which the committee has seen in the delivery plan. Not all that work has started, and there is still much to be done. I would not set a percentage figure on it overall, but our key objective is to progress that work through the 2026-27 financial year so that we are largely in good shape under our new strategy, and all that flows from it, from April 2027 onwards.

We are very much focused on that, and we have conversations with our board—in fact, we are meeting later this week—who are keeping a very close eye on progress on all of that to ensure that we remain on track for 2027 onwards.

The Convener: Thank you. I will start with some questions about how that fits into the broader timeline. For any organisation, taking a batch of recommendations from a review such as this could be seen as a bit of a snapshot, but it takes a long time for these questions to be considered and then resolved, and the recommendations implemented. A funding trajectory has been set, which is positive. Sometimes more money generates as much controversy as less money, so there are challenges as well as opportunities there.

We have had the independent review, and the Government now has a commitment to consult on legislation on culture and arts. That is a bit of a blank page—I see that as a positive; I am not trying to be critical of the fact that there is not a defined legislative agenda. An open consultation is going to take place about what kind of legislation the sector needs.

We—or Scotland in the broader sense—have set a funding trajectory and begun a review of Creative Scotland, which has included a recommendation that the current legislative basis of Creative Scotland is adequate and does not need to be changed. You are now developing your target operating model in the light of that, and then we will consult on the legislation. Are we doing all that in the right order?

Iain Munro: That is an important point. I will start again. Our current strategic framework, which was published after the pandemic, was deliberately not a conventional model in which we presented a five-year plan. That framework created some strategic points of focus for us—I call them anchors—that gave us the opportunity, in a world that was still evolving and changing post pandemic, to provide focus not only for ourselves but, importantly, for those who want to engage with us to deliver their ambitions. However, we always knew that there would be a staging post for us to evolve a fuller strategy in the more conventional sense.

In the context that you set out, it is interesting to note that we, as a national public body, have always wanted to understand how we align with the national culture strategy and, above that, with the national performance framework—and indeed, beyond that, with the United Nations sustainable development goals. That is still very much part of our thinking, and we want to do so in a way that enables us to land a strategy that gives us confidence for the foreseeable future, but also the opportunity to flex as we go, as things might evolve and change over the longer term.

We need to have something to focus on, and to focus with people on. It is important that we continue to evolve that, but we need to cross-reference and check that against the Scottish Government's thinking. That goes back to the relationship that I spoke about at the beginning of the meeting, with regard to what comes from the review in that changing context.

We are taking on board as much as we can see and understand at the moment. Of course, we will need to review and revisit that regularly, once we have landed the actual strategy, to understand what, in the operating environment, has actually changed and what we might want to do about it. It is a combination of trying to keep focused; sense checking with the environment that we currently see and understand; and ensuring that we have direct dialogue, in particular with the Scottish Government, to understand how we might need to shift things into the future and future proof as far as we can.

Some of that is about leadership and what we see as important for the future, not just the current conditions. It is about having dialogue with the sector and stakeholders, and with the Scottish Government, as we finalise the strategy.

The Convener: I am thinking about that dialogue with the sector—with the culture community, in the broader sense. When you hear voices speaking up for what they want from legislation in this area, do you think that that foreshadows any revisiting in the relatively near future, perhaps towards the end of the current session of Parliament, of the strategic decisions that you are making right now? Are there positives that could come out of that, or is there a danger that possible new legislation might mean revisiting what Creative Scotland is as an organisation? Could it change the legislative landscape in a way that means that you have to go back and do some of that work again?

Iain Munro: Based on the conversations that we have had, we are not anticipating anything substantive in relation to Creative Scotland, given that the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 that set up Creative Scotland was—as you said, convener—reflected in the independent review. We have not sensed checked any of this externally yet, because we are not quite at the point of doing strategy development, but once we are at that point later this year, we will be sense checking it externally—with partners and stakeholders, I mean, not with the Scottish Government.

There is a risk, of course—I acknowledge that—but the proposed culture bill is not about Creative Scotland. We have a considerable sense, born from all our history, and all the research and intelligence that we have and the relationships and feedback that we have had, including the independent review, that it points towards what I would describe as the set of ingredients that create

the conditions for arts, culture and creativity to thrive in the country.

We can dial elements of that up and down, but I do not think that the proposed legislation is necessarily about anything fundamental that might overturn the major component parts, which I would describe as support for individuals including artists and practitioners; support for organisations and businesses; work with audiences and communities; and growing the creative economy through international work and so on. We feel relatively confident that those component parts will stand the test of time. As I said, the points of emphasis and prioritisation within them may change over time—and only time will tell—but we have a reasonable sense in that regard.

The Convener: There is a last question from me before I bring in other members. I was trying to remind myself last night, when I was on the train through to Edinburgh, about the 2010 act that set up Creative Scotland. It is a big piece of legislation; even the sections that deal only with Creative Scotland are quite hefty. However, I could not find in it anything that defines "culture". Does the 2010 act define culture? Do any of the directives or guidance that the Scottish Government has given you tell you what you need to understand by "culture"?

We hear people say, for example, that comedy should be regarded as part of culture, but it is not funded by Creative Scotland. I have heard Scotland's science centres say that science should be regarded as part of culture and ought to be able to access those funding streams. There have been ongoing debates about the extent to which the games sector can be seen as culture, as opposed to purely part of enterprise or economic policy. Where do you get your definition of culture from?

09:45

Iain Munro: There is no such definition in the 2010 act. Part 4 of the act is pretty comprehensive, but we know that culture changes and evolves over time—it is how we live our lives.

It is wrong to say, in fact, that Creative Scotland does not fund comedy. We do—not in the conventional sense, but where there is creative writing in the performance, we support those aspects of it. There are many myths that surround Creative Scotland, but we embrace how the country and the creative sectors with which we work are evolving. That is often beyond art form boundaries—you are right about that. However, we are very realistic about the limitations on our human and financial resources when it comes to our ability to do everything that people would want of us.

Nonetheless, in thinking about strategy development and the creative economy, we would absolutely see the games sector as part of that. In fact, we already do some good work in relation to games sector development, but we want to do more.

We want to do more for the creative economy beyond the conventional sense of art forms and culture. The broader creative economy is part of Creative Scotland's brief and there is a real opportunity for us now, post review, in developing the strategy, with regard to our ambitions for other sectors. We want to do for three sectors in particular—the games sector; the design sector, which is another major strength of Scotland; and the creative technology sector—what we have been doing with screen through the growth of Screen Scotland within Creative Scotland.

There is much that we can see and want to embrace, but resource limitations are a key factor in our considerations. We try to take a rounded approach to interpretation, but we need to frame things with clarity for people as far as possible in order to manage expectations. We want to do more in areas where people want us do more, but we currently do not have the resources to be able to achieve that.

Having said that, the growth in Scottish Government funding for Creative Scotland is enormously welcome, and I thank the Scottish Government again for that. Nevertheless, there is never going to be enough for us to do everything, so some of our work is about prioritisation and explaining our priorities. We have to be able to account for why we have particular points of emphasis. Other things that people see as important will be important, but those may not be where we reasonably place our energy, effort, focus and resources at any one time. However, that can shift over time, and it definitely does so with regard to the evolution of a definition of culture.

The Convener: We will move on now.

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): I welcome the witnesses—thank you for joining us.

Let us take a bit of a step back. The review was pretty meaty, and we, as a committee, have had an opportunity to look through your response ahead of the session today.

Try to help us focus our minds, and help those in the culture sector more broadly who are watching the meeting. There are a lot of changes that need to happen. Mr Munro, perhaps you can start by giving us the three big things that are the absolute priority in your inbox, which you think are

where we need to start. We can then follow that up with your colleagues.

Iain Munro: Sure. I have been majoring on strategy, because of all that flows from it, so I would say that the strategy is a priority. There is also funding reform—

David Green: Mr Munro, can you be specific? Strategy is quite a big area.

Iain Munro: With regard to our areas of priority for the short, medium and long term, and the priorities that we want to focus on, and are focusing our resources on, I cannot say any more on the specifics than some of the thinking that I have shared already, because we are still in a development process. That thinking will be shared externally in order to inform that work.

We have done some work on the funding reform. The multiyear funding outcome, which was, in large part, the growth in the Scottish Government income that we received, is channelled into supporting organisations of all scales and types in all parts of Scotland, in all art forms and creative disciplines. It remains the case that the objective sitting behind that multiyear funding programme is to support as many of those as possible, for as long a period as possible.

We have two other main routes to funding, or ways in which we use our funding. One is our open access funds, which are for individual artists and project-based organisations who want to find opportunities for support to pursue their programmes of activity and ambitions. Then, in our development role, we have targeted funding, which is where we identify strategic needs, gaps or opportunities and see how we can make direct intervention with resources—it is not always about funding—or, through partnerships and networks, how we can unlock the challenge or opportunity that is being presented.

The third priority, which has multiple dimensions, is performance management. People want to see and understand how Creative Scotland is delivering success. We have a performance management framework, which will evolve as we deliver the next strategy. It is important for us to acquit ourselves well as a public body in terms of public expenditure, but it is also important that we feel that we are making progress, and that people can see and feel tangibly the progress that we are making.

You asked for the top three things but, actually, I have a top seven. I will not take time to go through them all, but one is the target operating model, which is an integral part of all of that. It is about how we organise ourselves but, importantly, it is about the enabling effect of that for the cultural and creative sector as well as for the public at large and audiences so that they feel the benefit. We talk about the cultural, social and economic value that is generated from the work that we support and the benefits that accrue from the people who work in the sector.

Those are the key things that I would flag.

David Green: Do Isabel Davis and Alastair Evans want to add anything?

Alastair Evans (Creative Scotland): I will build out a bit on the strategy, which is my area of responsibility. Our board sets our strategy, as Iain Munro mentioned, so a lot of my work at the moment involves working with the board on that. On the vision and mission for the organisation, as you said, convener, we have a very wide remit, so we want to find a way to clearly articulate that and how our priorities sit within it.

Long-term financial planning within an annual budget cycle, including our lottery income, which can fluctuate, is another key priority, as is capital. As you know, we have an ambition to turn to capital following the settlement of the multiyear fund. We know that there is need and demand in the sector, which comes in part from climate adaptation, in part from technology and the opportunities that it brings and in part from access needs. On top of that, there are the programmes of repair and upkeep that are required for the fabric of buildings. We are beginning work on our strategic needs assessment for the sector, which will play into capital planning.

Those are all important aspects of what we want to do, but there is also the other side, of working internally on culture. That involves the target operating model as well as our development role, the partnerships that we choose to prioritise and the opportunities that exist in the networks across Scotland. That internal piece sits alongside the prioritisation.

Isabel Davis (Screen Scotland): Good morning. The vision for Screen Scotland has always been to develop a year-round production hub so that people can work and live in Scotland and have a role in our sector, and so that audiences, both locally and internationally, can enjoy, consume and reflect on Scottish culture.

We have set out to achieve that vision through three primary drivers: doubling down on locally originated content, driving economic growth and building audience development. Those are the three legs of the stool that support that vision. I confess that we set up those drivers in 2024, as we relaunched our strategy, but they take account of the changing marketplace and they are just as resonant today, in 2026, as they were then—and I suspect that they will be by the end of our strategy, in 2030 to 2031.

The reason for that is that local origination is the way in which we build out our local sector, providing the ability for Scottish people and people who are based in Scotland to take charge of their own cultural and creative destinies, so that the experience of people who live here can be seen on screen; it is also so that people can create intellectual property locally that will help sustain their businesses and a local workforce.

Of course, we would not dream of putting parameters around where the stories can be told. We have very ambitious local storytellers who will be telling international stories. However, the notion that they should be living and working here and based here, and that the creativity emanates from here, is an absolutely central point of our strategy.

Secondly, there is economic development, which is characterised by our work to build out the sector and to put new studios in place. Down in Leith, FirstStage Studios is now in its sixth year of operation, having brought in large-scale work from streamers such as Amazon and Netflix. There are examples in other parts of the country, such as the Apple series “The Buccaneers” in Bathgate, for example. Those are huge developments over the past six years that have allowed Scotland to bring in a far greater degree of incoming production.

Alongside that we have supercharged our ability to develop our crew. We have brought in training programmes, often in close partnership with large-scale international producers—including Sony and Starz with “Outlander”, “Dept. Q” in Leith, and Apple with “The Buccaneers”. That is how we have been able to bring our fantastic crews into 2026, with just as great skills as anywhere else.

Audience development is the way in which that work is appreciated, by supporting local cinemas all the way through to supporting our films at international festivals, and in the commercial space by having commercial relationships with international distributors.

David Green: Thank you. That was concise, and I appreciate that—it is helpful.

I have been looking at the response plan that you produced last week, and there are a lot of instances of “We are going to explore”, “We are going to consider” and “We are going to review”. The committee and those who are watching this morning would probably find it helpful to get a better sense from you of what the milestones are, how you are going to measure your success and who is responsible for taking forward those actions. Listening to some of your responses, I think that some of your themes are quite broad.

Mr Munro, you indicated there are seven big priorities that you want to work through. That would suggest to me that we really need to drill into how that is going to be measured and achieved. Perhaps you can look to address that question in relation to how you are going to measure that and what further information you can provide to the committee.

Iain Munro: What the committee has seen is a public-facing update. Of course we have a comprehensive project management plan that sits beneath all of that, which identifies the workstreams, the owners, the people involved, the dependencies and so on. As I mentioned earlier, we are driving that work plan forward through 2026-27, and we will provide further updates. Increasingly, people will see the product of that work coming through. Some of it is already visible. We have been upgrading the website and providing more data and transparency on it, in response to the review. We are creating more autonomy for Screen Scotland in how the organisation is being supported.

We can reveal and share more of that in more detail, but please be assured that there is an underpinning here. There is a public-facing version and there is an actual work programme that the organisation is delivering. It is spread across the senior team, with a wider staff body and externals where that is appropriate.

David Green: It would be helpful, for the committee’s benefit, if you were able to follow up in writing afterwards. If you could do that for us, Mr Munro, we could understand better what that dashboard looks like and how progress is being made. Thank you for that.

I am conscious that you are due to stand down later this year, Mr Munro, and I wish you all the best for that. We will have a new chair appointed come next February—I think there was an announcement last week that you were looking for a new chair. I am looking at the timeline for a lot of the recommendations. There is publication work to be done this year into spring and summer 2027. How do you think your exit and a new chair coming in will impact on some of the really important changes that need to happen? What will that mean for successors?

10:00

Iain Munro: It has been carefully considered. As Alastair Evans mentioned, the board owns the strategy, and it has overall responsibility for the organisation. Yes, there will be a change in chair—and I will come back to that in a second. However, we are all firmly focused on driving forward the response to the review and the work programme, and anybody applying to be chief executive, board chair or a board member should see and understand that that is the case—but with an opportunity for some refinement or input, once

they are appointed and known to the organisation, before anything is absolutely locked down.

It was important that we did not pause or lose momentum in driving forward the response. It is fundamentally important for everybody, not least the organisation and the staff, that we continue to work within it. That is how the situation is seen and understood. I am very firmly focused until the end of my tenure on leading the organisation, with the board, in that work programme. The senior leadership team will be a key part of that continuity—with the board, of course.

David Green: I will take a further step back. As I represent a very rural constituency, I am particularly keen to understand how you will ensure that the strategy will be co-designed by artists and freelancers in a rural context or on the periphery of where some of the decision making will be made.

Allow me to give you one example to reflect on. I spoke to people at a small local independent charity over the weekend, and we were discussing applications for funding. There will be positive stories, and there will be stories that we can learn from. The point that was put to me was that, instead of spending thousands of hours on the front line, delivering projects all across Scotland, they spend those thousands of hours producing applications of 80,000-plus words. For a very small independent organisation, that requires a huge amount of time. How will you address that under a co-design approach, while at the same time gathering the greater amount of data that you have been asked for so that we can understand the impact across Scotland? That is a big task.

Iain Munro: The simplification and streamlining of application processes is a point of continuous improvement. We know it; we recognise it. We need to get the balance right between asking for enough information to make fine-grained judgments between applications on their success and minimising the bureaucracy that exists not just for applicants but for us as the organisation that handles the applications, given that we want to spend our time on development.

David Green: Could I just pinpoint something? It was put to me is that there is a fear of accountability that underpins a lot of funding applications from Creative Scotland's end. Would you recognise that and agree with that?

Iain Munro: What does "fear of accountability" mean?

David Green: In that the reason why so much strain is put on small organisations that are applying is that Creative Scotland is fearful of not having absolutely every piece of information, in case something goes wrong.

Iain Munro: No—I do not recognise that. We are always trying to get the balance right. The current processes reflect feedback that we have had previously, but we know that we can go much further. The review affirms that.

The extent to which people are form filling is well known to us. One of the things that we see as enabling us to make progress on that is the further digitisation of the funding programmes that we operate. In the simplification and streamlining, which is under discussion at the moment, there will be external opportunity for people to see and understand the direction of travel and to feed into that in due course, later in the year.

David Green: So there will be co-design, as it were.

Iain Munro: There will be opportunity for input. Whether you call it co-design or not, it is important for us to reflect what people are sharing and telling us, but we have to account for the funding, too.

The other point that I want to make is that we try to be helpful by giving people comprehensive guidance and information about what we are looking for in order to understand the individual strengths and merits of a proposal. We sometimes have word limits on that. We find that applicants always want to give us more and give us maximum information, thinking that that will be better or more advantageous, but that is not always the case, because it can tend to overwhelm an application and mask it.

We very much want to get the balance right for users, as applicants, and we want to ask the right questions and only use the information that people give us. The unfortunate thing is that demand is at unprecedented high levels and is still increasing, but that is not the case for our resources, with the exception of one or two elements that have multiyear funding. For the open access funds, which are largely the things that I imagine are being referred to, there are decreasing levels of success—we are sitting around 30 to 40 per cent. That is not helpful to anyone.

In the cascade from the strategy development, we were much clearer about our priorities. That will enable us to focus our funding programmes more specifically. People may not always agree with those priorities, but at least they will be able to see and understand where we want to focus and why. In that case, they need not waste time on an application for something that is not in that area of focus.

I hear you loud and clear, and we have heard that consistently. We will continue to make sure that we do our very best to address it.

David Green: Thank you. That was helpful. Before I hand back to you, convener, I just flag that

positive feedback on multiyear funding to put it on the record.

The Convener: A few other members want to explore funding issues. I reassure you that we also have a bunch of questions about Screen Scotland specifically, but I want to thoroughly explore the funding issues and the organisational landscape.

Jenny Young (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab): I want to touch on regional funding. The review referenced that there had been cuts to regional and lead officers. The feedback from stakeholders was that that had made the organisation seem more distant and perhaps less visible on the ground. Where do you have a physical presence? Where do you have officers?

Iain Munro: I have a few things to say on that, because there are several elements to the question.

Jenny Young: Will you just answer my first question, please? Where do you have officers?

Iain Munro: We have officers engaged across the country all the time. We have officers who live in different parts of Scotland, not just in the central belt—from Perthshire to north Fife, Stornoway, Skye and the Borders—and they are rooted in those communities and live there. We have officers from a range of specialisms engaged in different activities and events for various reasons with organisations and stakeholders around the country throughout the year.

On the multiyear point and the lead officer reference, the predecessor to multiyear funding was called RFO—regularly funded organisations. We had 119 such organisations. The growth in Scottish Government resources has enabled us to increase that to 261. Of those, 141 are brand new to the multiyear funding arrangements. The RFO arrangements had a dedicated lead officer from specialisms attached to an organisation. They attended board meetings and looked at the administrative side of the funding relationship, as well as the specialism.

Under the multiyear funding arrangements, we have split off a central team within the organisation that deals with the administration of the funding relationship. That frees the specialist officers to engage in their specialisms with the individual organisations on the ambitions and programmes that they are delivering. We are about 18 months into using that new model. We have had feedback from officers on it and we currently have a live survey of all multiyear-funded organisations that will give us feedback on the new ways of working. It is a point of continuous improvement for us to understand what that feedback tells us and what we should consider doing to evolve the multiyear funding model.

Beyond that, officers are engaged in a variety of activities at different points throughout the year across all of Scotland, and across the United Kingdom and internationally.

Jenny Young: I am still interested to know what the impact of the loss of regional officers has been. The stakeholders' testimony was that the work of Creative Scotland has perhaps become a bit more distant.

The paper that you provided shows the success rates of Creative Scotland funding award applications by local authority area. There is huge variation across the country; awards are not going purely to the central belt. However, some of the lowest acceptance rates include 33 per cent in the Falkirk Council area and 34 per cent in Dumfries and Galloway. First, there are patches of the country where it seems that fewer applications are being made—Falkirk and West Lothian councils had among the fewest applications for funding. Secondly, some council areas, such as Falkirk and Dumfries and Galloway, had quite a low acceptance rate compared with that other parts of the country where it sat well above 50 per cent. How do you square what you have just told me with that empirical data? How do you see that tracking across?

Iain Munro: The impact of multiyear funding is a very specific point. On the general point about geographical distribution, we are responsive to applications for the open access funds that come to us, whether from individuals or organisations, and that is what that data is largely reflecting. As you say, it shows that those rates vary in the different local authority areas. That tells us is that there is a spectrum of capacity and quality in different parts of the country that is coming through the open access funding streams.

Knowing that enables us to identify where we might make more targeted interventions, particularly through programmes such as the place partnerships that we have run. I think we have had those in 17 of the local authority areas, and about seven are live at the moment. Some of the areas that you have mentioned have been place partnership areas. In those programmes, we work to support local capacity building with the local cultural community and partners—including, wherever possible, the local authority—starting with understanding what the ambitions for that local area are and how we can help to unlock opportunities.

The programme brings financial resource with it. We usually try to leverage £200,000 to £250,000 and match funding with that locally—particularly from local government, where that is possible—to support a sustained, immersive programme of capacity building, with people on the ground

working with the local community partners and individuals to unlock that. The aim of that is to increase capacity and quality for the longer-term applications that are made to our open access funding programmes. It is a well-versed and effective model that has led to considerable change in some parts of the country that we were concerned about, where our data made it very visible that an area needed particular care and attention. We will continue to operate in that kind of way, with direct interventions alongside our general attendance to engagement with people on the ground in funding fairs.

We also have an inquiry service where people can access our services and get answers to queries such as "Where do I start?", which is a question that we sometimes get.

10:15

We run other national programmes, including the Culture Collective; it is absolutely about unlocking community ambition, with creative resources, people and financials wrapped around it. Of course, we also run the youth music initiative, which is reaching every local authority area in Scotland and provides opportunities for young people themselves to decide what they want to do and how we can support them to do it.

This might come up later, but with regard to partnership I would say that an awful lot of attention is being given to and expectation being put on Creative Scotland, and we do our very best to play our part prominently in local areas to support people. However, partnership is required to fully unlock the available opportunities, and we spend time particularly with local government, local cultural organisations and other stakeholders in different areas to understand the ambition and see what we can do together.

Jenny Young: That was going to be my next question. You have said that there are specific local areas where there might have been issues and that you have worked to improve the acceptance—or, I should say, success—rate in them. Have you done that through working with the local authority? With whom have you worked to do that? Could you answer that specific question?

Iain Munro: With place-based interventions, we try to ensure that the local authority is very much a prominent part of that partnership alongside the local cultural community, particularly cultural organisations in the local area. We want to make sure that, once the place partnership moves on and the agreed activities have been delivered, there is a legacy strengthening the capacity in the local area to take forward further ambition. We can then respond to that through different funding routes.

Fundamentally, however, local government is a key partner for us. It is a major supporter of cultural activity and a major owner of cultural assets across the country, but, as we know, public sector finances are under pressure and concerns are undoubtedly increasing—and increasingly fairly rapidly—about the prospect of serious reductions in local government funding. There is no way that Creative Scotland can step in to address that decline, but, as far as funding is concerned, we do our very best to ensure that at a strategic level, never mind an operational level, the local government relationship is as strong as it can be so that, where opportunities arise, it has some sense of a future that can be delivered.

Jenny Young: My other questions relate to public service reform and Screen Scotland, convener, so you might want to bring other members in.

The Convener: Thank you for that—we will carry on with the funding theme for the moment.

I am going to tweak the order a little bit, because I think that Heather Anderson wanted to touch on the local government issue that has just come up, and then I will come to Pauline Stafford.

Heather Anderson: I am very pleased to hear that you are undertaking a live consultation on multiyear funding with all the people who benefit from it. Convener, I think that, at this point, I should correct the record to say that I am a serving councillor on Dundee City Council.

The Convener: Thank you.

Heather Anderson: I have declared as much openly in the chamber, but I will just mention it here, too.

I, too, wanted to ask about the capital funding programme. You have just mentioned the complexity of the landscape and the fact that many of these assets are local government buildings that are leased to cultural organisations, and I wanted to ask about the reference in your response plan to setting up a capital fund and your intention to

"begin an assessment of infrastructure needs".

I just want to get some sense of whether you are undertaking that assessment, simply to get an idea of the scale of the capital fund that will be needed, and how long you think that you should spend on it. After all, it will be incredibly complicated, because of the shared tenure situation. How are you going to undertake the assessment, and what is its real purpose?

Iain Munro: In a second I will pass to Alastair Evans for more detail on the matter. You are right in what you have said, and we absolutely recognise the importance of the infrastructure, as it makes up a lot of the backbone of provision

across the country—it is not exclusively the case but it has a prominent role to play. Creative Scotland has a strong track record of supporting capital ambition, as did its predecessor bodies, and those assets are what unlocks creativity and engagement with audiences and so on.

For some years now, we have not had the opportunity financially to run any major capital programmes, so we were pleased with the independent review's finding that reinforced the point about capital. However, as we have said in writing to the committee, at the moment we simply cannot afford the range of ambitions that we have always had as an organisation, and we will need significant additional resource if those ambitions are going to be realised.

Capital is not cheap, as we know, and although we understand the economic and financial environment, there is a need to take care of the existing estate, which is ageing; it needs to continue to be fit for purpose not only as art forms and creative practice evolve but also with regard to adapting to climate and environment changes. Alastair can say a wee bit more about a small pilot programme that we have been running in relation to adaptation.

There are still ambitions for a new estate. The country does not stand still on its creativity and culture so we are aware that, as well as taking care of and ensuring that what exists is fit for purpose and the future, some new needs are emerging for local communities and the country as a whole. All of that will be under consideration in the work on which Alastair can share a bit more information.

Alastair Evans: The matter is complex, as you have said, Ms Anderson, but there are experts in it and we can draw on our long-running capital investment history. At this point the Scottish Futures Trust is a key partner in helping us to develop a needs assessment; it is also our partner in the scheme that Iain has mentioned, which is a pilot scheme for eight awards around the country that amount to around £350,000—from small awards, for example for the Bothy Project on Eigg, through to bigger ones, for example for Dundee Rep.

We need to try to understand the capital need around building requirements vis-a-vis adaptation to climate change. As I said earlier, other clear impacting factors exist, such as digitalisation and the need for expanding access. That work raises expectations, but it is key that we get the timing right on it, because not only would it be difficult to find out all that and not have the potential to play it into a funding scheme, but that data goes out of date really quickly, particularly on costings.

To answer your question directly, it is not only about the number of organisations out there that might need capital but about the quantum of that, which is really important. We need to try to understand the scale of the matter, and the mix of demand for new buildings with cases where a retrofit programme might work, or indeed where co-location of cultural services in a civic hub, for example, might be the answer. Previous iterations of the committee took evidence from the Scottish Library and Information Council on the work of co-locating libraries with health services, for example. We need to think about all that and about our horizon—what Scotland's infrastructure will look like in 2030 or 2050—which is why the partnership with the Scottish Futures Trust is so important.

That ranges across all our art forms. In screen, it is about local cinema provision, which includes models such as the Screen Machine, which, as members will be aware, travels around Scotland to take film to communities. Travelling Gallery and Visual Arts Scotland are examples of that kind of model, and that type of arrangement needs to be considered as much as buildings do.

It is a big piece of work. We will need to put resources into it, and have committed to doing so as a result of the review. It is important that partners are in that mix. The review recommends that that programme be applied across the whole of Scotland's cultural estate, which includes not only Creative Scotland but Museums Galleries Scotland, the national companies and so on, and that a wide view of the whole of cultural provision across Scotland is taken.

The scale of the work should not be underestimated, and neither should the time that it will take us to do it. However, it is good to be starting that work and to have that partnership in place.

Heather Anderson: I have one follow-up question. The issue is not just the scale but the complexity of the tenure. Would you consider using your funds to match alternative funding? Local authorities can borrow, but artistic organisations do not have the ability to borrow. They receive funding from Creative Scotland, but they are not financed from revenue to pay for borrowing. Would you consider looking at different funding mechanisms and legal arrangements in relation to quite complex buildings?

Alastair Evans: Yes, that is absolutely in the mix. We have always funded in partnership with others and have generally had a minority share in any capital project. However, we have leverage, and our funding is important with regard to bringing in partner funding and funding from trusts and foundations and from individual donors. All of that is in the mix, together with local authorities' ability to borrow and pay back, which is clearly a helpful mechanism.

Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am currently a sitting member of West Lothian Council.

I will pick up on Heather Anderson's point about the infrastructure plans. Creative Scotland will continue to play a small part in the overall picture in Scotland. However, because local authority budgets are under pressure, there is a great danger that there will be an acceleration in the loss of public spaces across the country, which are where a lot of cultural activity takes place. Even in the central belt, people in areas of multiple deprivation do not always have the ability to travel to centres of cultural activity such as Edinburgh or Glasgow, so there needs to be very local cultural activity.

A number of organisations are using the community wealth building arrangements to try to save some of those spaces. Are you looking at that area in relation to the organisations that you fund? Will that be part of your review of the infrastructure needs?

Iain Munro: Yes, in the broadest sense. What we need to do is map the ambition, the need and the infrastructure and connect that back to the mechanisms by which those issues might be addressed, which Heather Anderson mentioned. In some instances, it will be—forgive the phrase—horses for courses in terms of what is going to be the most meaningful way of unlocking an opportunity at a local level.

We have already done some mapping, and we anticipate that thousands of assets would be involved in that approach, so there have to be conversations about prioritisation with local communities, local areas and local authorities to unlock viable long-term opportunities. There will be consideration of what the most effective local mechanisms might need to be.

Alastair Evans: Community ownership is certainly in the mix. One thing that is always on our mind is the capacity of communities to take on not only the ownership but the programming of a venue or a local hall or whatever. Clear plans for the resourcing of an onward programme are another important part of that mix.

10:30

Pauline Stafford: The areas that need access to such spaces most are probably the ones that are least able to act in the short timescale that they have been given.

I will touch on public sector reform a tiny bit, because it ties into my questions on regional funding and equity, given the scale of the budget increases. Mr Munro, you mentioned that Creative Scotland sees itself as having a national leadership role, and you referred to the United Nations sustainability goals. The Government now considers public sector reform to be a big area of work in every portfolio. What will Creative Scotland's role be in that? We have talked a lot about preventative spending, and culture and the arts have a strong role to play in that.

Iain Munro: There is increasing recognition that that is very important, especially in the context of a wellbeing economy. The cultural, social and economic value from arts, culture and creativity is better understood now, but Creative Scotland's advocacy is a key part of how we ensure that there is a good, broad understanding of the contribution of arts and culture to health and education, for example. We do a lot of work in those areas.

In the context of public service reform, we are part of a culture cluster of Scottish Government-funded public bodies that have to have conversations about a range of issues, be it practical things such as shared services and shared storage facilities or policy areas where there are opportunities.

Under the PSR agenda, we are considering preventative spend, collaboration and wider and beneficial impacts beyond the single, specific policy area that we sit in. Those areas form an important part of the ongoing work that we want to progress, particularly in health. We do a lot in education and health already, but now there are even more opportunities in health. Some of that work requires willing collaborators, and we need to engage with those involved in other policy areas directly as part of advancing new models and models of different kinds.

Artists and other creative people bring new ways of thinking, so it is important to think about how their creativity can unlock new models for the future that will help us to access the opportunities that we know of. Public sector reform also presents opportunities to have different models for the future and more effective service delivery.

Pauline Stafford: Absolutely. That ties into my substantive question, which is on Creative Scotland's funding. You mentioned your four big themes and spoke about how partnerships and relationships will look. I am less focused on geographical and regional coverage and more focused on the areas of deprivation, how we can identify where the gaps are and what the most effective way to deal with them is. Jenny Young's questions picked up on a lot of that.

We have targeted funding programmes, place partnerships, the Culture Collective and regional and lead officer roles. When you work with local authorities as partners, what is the picture like on

their culture strategies? Can you tap into consistency across local authorities or is the approach fairly patchy?

Iain Munro: It is very patchy—to use your word—and that concerns us. In years gone by, we supported local authorities to grow their cultural expertise through having officers in local authorities, as well as offering support with their cultural strategies. However, over time, the number of specialist officers has eroded and declined, and the situation with local cultural strategies is similar.

That is not the case everywhere, but that has increasingly been the trend, and it concerns us because we need local expertise, capacity and connection in different local authority areas, particularly so that we can engage on the cultural strategies. The absence of them in many parts of the country weakens our ability to work together in the most effective way.

We have been paying attention to the issue. As I said, there has been a decline in recent years, especially in this climate of financial pressures. Choices are being made—we absolutely understand that. The absence of those people and strategies risks further exacerbating the challenge of local cultural opportunity. We cannot compensate for that in the way that people might want us to.

Pauline Stafford: Finally, did you say that there are 17 or seven place partnerships?

Iain Munro: There are 17.

Pauline Stafford: Do they all run for the same length of time?

Iain Munro: No—they vary, but they tend to run for at least a couple of years. On average, each partnership receives £200,000 to £250,000 from us, and there is an expectation of a similar amount from local government and local partners. It is a strategic co-created programme of work that draws on that resource, as necessary, to build capacity and improve quality.

Pauline Stafford: Some of the criteria for setting up a place partnership are the number and success of applications. We have a report that says that there are still four local authorities where no organisations have received multiyear funding. Would such a gap be part of the criteria that you look at?

Iain Munro: It is a consideration. The model is now proven. It has been running for more than 10 years—it is probably approaching 15. We need willing partners on the ground to get the most effective outcomes, and it can take time to cultivate that relationship and get to a point where there is confidence to run the place partnership programme together. However, we look at all sources of data, and intelligence and research, not only to engage with people but to understand where we might want to move forward together on a place partnership.

Alastair Evans: In the absence of a culture strategy or willingness from partners, we can convene them and help with the development of a place partnership. In Angus, that has been part of the place partnership. The same applies to Clackmannanshire, which is one of the four local authorities that Pauline Stafford mentioned.

You will sometimes see public representation of a place partnership if there are festivals or if a network of creatives is set up. At other times, it will be more about knitting together the capacity and capability in the background across the local partners. We do that convening role locally.

We are evaluating the programme as part of the work that we are doing in response to the review. That will go through the 17 examples and should be public.

The Convener: I appreciate Isabel Davis's patience. We have spent a little longer than I expected on funding, but we now have a batch of questions on Screen Scotland.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North) (SNP): The review recommended greater autonomy for Screen Scotland. The Scottish Government announced that it is going to take Screen Scotland out of Creative Scotland. What do you think led the Government to take that decision?

Isabel Davis: I am not here to speak for the Scottish Government but, from our perspective, I find the great progress that has been made over eight years very encouraging. We are an agency within an agency that has been incubated by Creative Scotland. I would love to pay tribute to Iain Munro for his role in that and to Creative Scotland more broadly for incubating us and seeing the success through for the past eight years. We work in a bespoke way for screen, by which I mean film and television—we do not include the games sector in our remit.

What the Scottish Government perhaps had in mind, even during the gap between the review being published and further evidence coming to light on the growth of the sector and on what it has been possible to achieve, was that, in the end, within the very concept of an incubator is the notion that one outgrows that structure at some point.

If we in Screen Scotland are to take forward all that growth and grow even more, it is time for us to have a fully dedicated team and no longer be perching on the precious resources of Creative Scotland and the shared team colleagues that we

have across comms, human resources, finance, business affairs and so on. That will ensure that the way in which we have built Screen Scotland—that is, as a dedicated specialist agency targeted fixedly on growth—can be supercharged for the future. That might be what the Government had in mind, if I were to have a guess.

Colin Beattie: Is Screen Scotland a specific entity that stands on its own within Creative Scotland, or does it call on resources from Creative Scotland? You have talked about administration, HR and all that sort of stuff. Would you have to recreate that?

Isabel Davis: We take the latter of the two approaches that you mentioned. There is no constitutional difference between us and Creative Scotland—we are very much a part of it. Under the present structure—which has been in place since 2018, when the body was set up—we have 23 team members working across the various departments that we evolved in the early stages of the model: scripted, unscripted, audience development, inbound production and education as well as advocacy and policy functions.

We have four dedicated staff members who work in what might be called shared services. However, I do not really like to call them that, because I do not want to undersell the notion of those services—it feels to me that they are just as much part of the capacity-building effort as any other part of Screen Scotland. In any case, those departments would be HR, comms, information technology and business affairs.

We share a governance structure, too. We have on the board of Creative Scotland a sub-committee; it is, in effect, the Screen Scotland mini-board, if you like, but all the Creative Scotland board members play a role in it. Of course, I also report to Iain Munro, and we have a range of other interdependencies in the organisation.

To stand alone, we would need a constitutional basis, and how things are taken forward constitutionally will be a decision for the Scottish Government. However, there is no doubt that, as we build out the model for a stand-alone agency, we will need additional staff. Given that we are a growth agency, the relatively modest costs of that should be wildly overshadowed by the economic growth that we have already brought in through our work with the sector and which we will bring in through the future work that we will do through that model.

Colin Beattie: So you are saying that, if the Scottish Government goes ahead with its stated intent, it will be hugely beneficial to Screen Scotland.

Isabel Davis: We exist only for the sector, so I would say that the benefits will be to the sector—and obviously to Scotland as a whole—with regard to the economic contribution and cultural impact that Screen Scotland will be able to effect.

Colin Beattie: Are there any implications for Creative Scotland? Will Screen Scotland moving away impact on your costs, your funding or anything else that you can think of?

Isabel Davis: I want to make just one more point, and then I will hand over to Iain Munro to answer your question.

We have not yet discussed the national lottery, which is really pertinent given the current review of lottery funding. As part of Creative Scotland, Screen Scotland benefits from Creative Scotland's lottery distribution role, and that is one of the many things that will need to be taken into account. As for anything beyond that, I am sure that Iain Munro would prefer to give you an answer.

Iain Munro: I was going to mention that 50 per cent of Screen Scotland's budget comes from the national lottery. As Creative Scotland is the named national lottery distributor under United Kingdom legislation, the Scottish Government will need to consider budget provision for a separate screen body to take care of that issue.

In answer to the rest of Colin Beattie's question, there are risks and uncertainties in relation to how this might happen, so what we need from the Scottish Government is a proper understanding of the transition plan. We will need to consider how we do two things. How will we continue to support the success of Screen Scotland and all that it is achieving for screen sector growth, while looking to the future and transitioning towards a new organisation in a way that minimises disruption for the wider Creative Scotland body?

Until that plan is clearer, we cannot properly understand how we can effectively support the navigation of it. However, whatever that is, I am very clear in the meantime that the Creative Scotland organisation should continue to support the continued success of Screen Scotland and not be distracted by the transition arrangements until we are much clearer about how it will happen.

10:45

Colin Beattie: It sounds as though, even post the break-up, there will still be a need for Creative Scotland to give Screen Scotland substantial support. Is that correct? I am talking about admin back-up and so on.

Iain Munro: That is not a point of certainty at all—it will depend on what model the Government wants to pursue to establish a separate body. It is

not our understanding that there would be shared administration behind the organisation, but we wait to hear from the Scottish Government about its thinking on that, too.

To be clear, our understanding is that there will be total separation—a body with complete autonomy, with its own board and leadership and with dedicated resources to enable the organisation to progress.

Colin Beattie: People will be looking to avoid duplication of costs in achieving this, but that will be for a future discussion.

I have a question for Screen Scotland. The review mentions delays in funding allocation, and Iain Munro said that you are going to digitalise the process. I presume that the current process is entirely manual. How much time will digitalising the process save in responding to applications?

Isabel Davis: That is a processing question. Some of our funds are now digitised, but the main, high-value ones still rely on applicants filling in Word documents that are sent by email, which are then manually transferred to other types of forms. That information is not flowing as fast as it might do, which is also having an impact on the speed at which we can evaluate.

In line with other funds at Creative Scotland and more broadly in this area, we are scheduled to have those funds digitised by the end of this year. That is one aspect of how we would like to become faster, smoother and more effective in how our funding administration works.

Colin Beattie: You refer to one aspect. What are the other aspects?

Isabel Davis: We have a complexity around the way in which funds are contracted, which is to do with the nature of investment as opposed to grants. Our funding at Screen Scotland is, broadly speaking, recoupable—as in, we want it back if a film or a television show makes money—and we tend to invest our money alongside multiple other investors, all of which have different terms and conditions attached to their money. That makes for a very complicated contracting process. Essentially, it is a negotiation and it involves a prototypical model for every negotiation that we enter into. That also introduces a level of complexity and there is a protractedness—I do not know whether delay is the right word—in the time that it takes for an applicant to apply to us for money, for a creative assessment and a logistical assessment of the project to take place, and then for the money to go out the door.

Colin Beattie: Will having an autonomous body impact on that?

Isabel Davis: If it is resourced correctly, the ability to have dedicated lawyers, dedicated digitisation and a bespoke model should certainly help.

Senga Beresford (South Scotland) (Reform): Most of the questions I was going to ask have been answered, but I will ask Iain Munro about one point. Of the actions in the plan relating to the 36 recommendations, how many carry a completion date, and will a strategy be published for that?

Iain Munro: To go back to Mr Green's question, we will be able to provide more information on the scheduling of all of that. The majority of the work plan is for 2026-27. Although some of it will necessarily carry over into 2027 onwards, including the capital plan, for example, the majority of the actions are for delivery in 2026-27.

Alastair Evans: It is worth noting that, of the 36 recommendations, five are for the Scottish Government. A number of the recommendations, including capital planning, require us to work with partners and to understand the resource landscape, and they are the ones that will potentially run for slightly longer. As Iain Munro said, we have completed work on a number of the recommendations already, including a skills audit of our board members and work on the website. We can provide that detail, along with the information that Mr Green requested.

Senga Beresford: I take it that that work will be carried on by your successors.

Iain Munro: Yes, absolutely. It is a work plan for the organisation.

Senga Beresford: Okay. That is all from me. Everything else has been covered.

The Convener: You were going to ask about Screen Scotland as well.

Senga Beresford: Colin Beattie already asked about that.

The Convener: Okay. In that case, I will bring in Jenny Young.

Jenny Young: I will make an observation. Creative Scotland was established in 2010 under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, during a previous wave of public service reform. That act dissolved Scottish Screen and took its remit into Creative Scotland. Then, in 2018, Screen Scotland was established within Creative Scotland, and we are now putting it out on its own.

At the same time, we have this overarching narrative from the Government about the need to reduce public sector bodies or, at least, to rationalise them. I speak to people who have worked in the national health service for years, and they tell me that they have observed a similar

pattern of the same ideas coming back around. It seems that, if you work in a service long enough, you end up back where you started. Do you think that it feels as if we are going around in circles?

Isabel Davis: Thank you for the question, which is a really good one. I have thought a lot about the broader observations for public sector renewal reform that come out of this exercise. I moved back to Scotland in 2018, so I was familiar with Scottish Screen as an outside observer, but I was not here when it was established.

In 2018, it was clear that the model for Screen Scotland was an economic development agency that was nimble and responsive, and that absolutely understood the place of a public body in relation to all of the international actors—the streamers, the film studios, the distributors, the talent and the co-producers from all over the world—and could genuinely engage with and be part of the grain of the industry. That is quite a different model to Scottish Screen. The other thing to say, of course, is that Scottish Screen only looked after film, whereas Screen Scotland embraced television, which—especially with regard to high-end TV—has been the engine of economic growth in the sector in this country since 2018 through to 2026.

I do not see us going around in circles. I think that the trajectory has, in fact, been upwards in terms of growth, and we have proved that through our economic value reports, which have come out biannually. We have proven our impact on the sector. I do not think that it is a case of deck chairs on the Titanic, if I may use that sort of expression. However, with regard to not wanting to ever expand the public sector, it is smart of the Government to look at where there is growth. If we are singing for our supper in terms of the economic contribution that we are making, why would you curtail that?

I would say that this is not the time to take our foot off the gas. Internationally, the conditions for content are hugely in flux. Commissioning of high-end programmes is still going on, but there are fewer of them. Therefore, Scotland is going to have to use everything that it has learned over the past eight years to continue to compete in that world. Given Screen Scotland's place in the sector and its autonomy, I certainly believe that there is a case for it to be given the resources that it needs, some of which will be financial. It needs to be given the whole toolkit that will enable it to go after those opportunities for Scotland.

There is another issue that members might want to ask about. At the start of our life, we were gifted an organisational model, through the memorandum of understanding, that brought together four other public agencies around the table: Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Funding Council. I understand why that was done, because all those bodies had, and continue to have, a role in and a responsibility towards the development of the screen sector, but the reality is that a five-way model does not work. I do not know what the broader extrapolation of that might be for the wider public service forum, but I can say that, as we like to say internally, if it is everyone's job, it is no one's job.

Those parties are not directed to prioritise screen or to ensure that their interventions align with the shape of the industry. This is not to criticise Scottish Enterprise—we have found its officers extremely helpful and they have a can-do attitude—but its ability to work with the screen sector has been curtailed by the fact that screen is not one of its stated priorities, so it is hard to see why it is around the table in the first place. Also, the parameters for what it can fund and what the outcomes should be tend to focus on full-time permanent jobs, which are, as you will know, not a feature of the screen sector. The screen sector has high-value freelance jobs, so we are not able to work towards Scottish Enterprise's goals.

There is certainly an opportunity in public sector renewal to look at how all the bodies are aligning to make sure that the growth sectors will be served by whatever structure emerges.

Jenny Young: I appreciate your point that this is a huge area of growth, and we should absolutely back the sectors that are bringing growth, particularly in the culture sphere. Ultimately, however, the Government is facing a £5 billion shortfall in its budget and, whatever it may say, that is what is motivating a lot of public service reform. This might be a question for Iain Munro as well, but are there pieces of work that the Government has asked you—or other bodies in what is quite a full landscape—to stop doing so that administrative and financial efforts can be focused on the new separate entity of Screen Scotland? Has the Government had that level of discussion with either of you?

Isabel Davis: We are tacking towards an economic gross value added target of £1 billion by 2030-31 so, in the context of the savings, we see ourselves as part of the answer. The economic value surveys that we do every two years identify where there has been growth, and we can see where there is an opportunity to turn up the dial. That drives where we put our resources, and we will continue to do that under the new model.

Iain Munro: We have not had a conversation in the direct way that you mentioned in the question. What is understood, though, is the extent to which the growth of the creative economy is a real

opportunity. Screen is an important part of that growth, and I mentioned that games and design are other important parts. Screen has cultural and social benefits, but the economic benefits are an important dimension, too. Backing the creative economy pays dividends for the country in multiple ways. That is a point of conversation about where the growth opportunity lies and how we might back it.

I mentioned earlier that, thanks to the Scottish Government, additional resources are flowing into culture, contrary to the position in other public policy areas. In this context, it is important to note that there is still money in the system that is as yet unallocated from the previous Administration's £100 million commitment, and the new £50 million commitment is still to come. There is an opportunity to understand how we can work with the Scottish Government to unlock some of those resources for Creative Scotland in order to channel resources back into public service reform in a different kind of contribution that is not just about reductions and streamlining, although that is part of what we are involved in and doing.

Jenny Young: That is perhaps something for us, as a committee, to probe with the Government. Thank you.

The Convener: The word "incubator" was used earlier to describe the approach that has been taken with Screen Scotland. In some of the written material, there is a suggestion that the same approach will be taken with other culture or creative sectors, but I do not see anything concrete to indicate that decisions have been taken about that. What should we expect in that space?

Iain Munro: There have been no concrete decisions. It is a live conversation and we are doing some work to help to support the Scottish Government by providing advice and research to inform its thinking. I think that it appreciates the success of the Screen Scotland model and can see opportunities from a very willing national body in Creative Scotland to do the same for other areas of the creative economy. I mention games again as an illustration of that. The conversation is live and I hope that we will be able to unlock that before too long.

The Convener: Is that a discussion between Creative Scotland and the Government—

Iain Munro: Yes.

The Convener: —or does the decision rest with one or the other?

11:00

Iain Munro: No. The Screen Scotland example is important because it arose from a combination of political backing and mandate, coupled with the right people—I pay tribute to Isabel Davis and the team for driving that—some modest pounds of a financial increase that Screen Scotland benefitted from at the start of 2018 to supplement the national lottery funding that we already have for screen, and a policy commitment. The combination of those four Ps has helped to unlock the success of Screen Scotland. We want to secure that for other subsectors of the creative industries, within Creative Scotland but not always with a view to those being incubated and then spun off. It is important to drive the benefits of that approach for the different industries and subsectors, and for the country, across the triple bottom line, but it must be done in partnership with the industry and those subsectors. Therefore, we see a combined model as the most effective: the Government, with Creative Scotland in a leadership role, alongside key industry partners—with us playing various roles to do the right thing, depending on what we seek to deliver.

The Convener: I forget the long title, but there was a task force that produced a set of recommendations on the fair work agenda in the sector. There is also recognition that Creative Scotland is not the employer of everybody working in the culture sector and that there are therefore limits to the extent to which Creative Scotland, in the way that you undertake your work, can practically and in reality embed fair work practices across the sector. Where are you at with the issue, and to what extent does that feature in your action plan for implementing the independent review's recommendations for how Creative Scotland's work goes forward? We have seen controversy in relation to fair work practices in the games sector, in a location just across the road from the Parliament, and a number of impacts on freelancers and independent organisations that receive Creative Scotland funding. The Centre for Contemporary Arts is another example of people's livelihoods and living being left high and dry by the events that took place there, and there have been many examples of that around the country. In reality, how effectively will you be able to embed fair work principles?

Iain Munro: I will hand over to Alastair Evans in a second. Good progress has been made, although there is much still to be done. The task force's report reflects a set of conditions in the sector that need to be tackled. We have a role to play in that, which we are doing and which Alastair can set out in more detail. There is a lot of expectation on us to undertake a role that we do not have, which is to be a regulator for the sector or to police it in some way. We use the multiple channels that we have to make progress on the fair work agenda. It is one of our priorities in our

current strategic framework, and we will remain committed to it.

In part, the work is about how we translate fair work practices through our own activities, such as funding contracts, but some of it is about the advice, support and guidance that we can provide to the sector to inform different practices and expectations, as well as working with and through others. In particular, that means working closely with unions in dialogue on the whole agenda.

Alastair Evans: I was a member of the Government's culture fair work task force, which reported at the end of last year; I believe that the Scottish Government's response to the report is fairly imminent. It is an ambitious report, as I am sure that those who have seen it will agree. It recognises that not all powers in that area are devolved and that Westminster continues to hold the reins on several employment issues.

The timing of the report means that it does not quite catch some of the changes that we have seen through the UK's Employment Rights Act 2025. The Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority is now established and operating, which is very positive; although it emerged from the film sector, it is now working much more widely, because one aspect of the scope of the fair work policy is bullying and harassment.

With regard to what we are doing, we enforce the conditionality that we need to through Government fair work first policies, as Iain Munro said, which means that everyone whom we fund needs to be clear that they will pay the real living wage, and that organisations of different scales have forums for workers' voices, which can include, but are not limited to, union representation. That is our basis for ensuring the commitment across everyone whom we fund.

However, we do much more: we have a popular freelancers guide, for example, which is in its fourth edition; we are a hub of expertise and our website collects all the resources and is well used. However, as Iain said, we do not investigate and adjudicate where we do not have any legal basis to do so. There are ways for the advisory, conciliation and arbitration service and others to look at a dispute about whether the workplace representation is genuine, for example, but that is not for us. We are not a regulator, which I know can be frustrating for the unions.

It is worth saying that we have extended that work into our national lottery funding, which applies to grant-in-aid Scottish Government funding. We have a well-used, popular opportunities site, which we can monitor, and we regularly ask people to amend and remove adverts that we feel are not in keeping with fair work—for example, volunteering roles that are for far too many hours a week or are for rigging a stage or managing two people, which are not volunteer opportunities. We work with multiyear organisations, too, to ensure that their vacancies are publicly advertised and are not a shoo-in for someone in the organisation—as you will know, one of our strategic priorities is to ensure that conditions are met in larger funds, such as our multiyear fund. We are doing a lot of work in that area.

Isabel Davis mentioned the film industry and high-end freelancers. An area of concern is that not all freelancers are high end, particularly at the start of their career. Self-employment is not part of the fair work policy, so we cannot legally stipulate rates of pay for freelancers—they state their own rules. That area feels like the next step, and it is very much identified in the culture fair work task force—we see what the Government is saying through that. One of the recommendations is for a freelance champion, and I am pleased that the Employment Rights Act 2025 has brought two UK freelance champions into the mix, who have recently been announced and are starting to work in that space. It feels important to give representation to that group, which is really sizeable in many of our subsectors—about 40 per cent of the music sector, for example, works freelance.

The Convener: You mentioned that you anticipate the Government's response to the task force recommendations imminently. Has Creative Scotland fed into that work, or are you waiting with bated breath to find out what the report says? Did you co-create the report with the task force?

Alastair Evans: I sat on that task force alongside, I think, about 20 people—

The Convener: But the Government's response to the recommendations—

Alastair Evans: The report is to Government. One of its recommendations is around our monitoring; we are taking it forward because it almost directly mirrors the independent review of Creative Scotland's recommendation. We have already accepted that we will look again at our monitoring regime and at fair work.

Iain Munro: We have not seen the Government's response.

The Convener: You have not?

Iain Munro: No.

The Convener: Well, we all look forward to opportunities to discuss it when we see it, and much else besides on your agenda. As members have no final questions for witnesses, I thank you all very much—I know that the meeting has run for

slightly longer than we planned, but I appreciate your time.

11:10

Meeting continued in private until 11:29.

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