

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Tuesday 22 September 2026
5th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Historic Environment Scotland

1. The Committee will take evidence from Historic Environment Scotland in relation to governance of the organisation. The Committee will hear from—
 - Stephen Uphill, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Historic Environment Scotland
 - Ronnie Hinds, Interim Chair, Historic Environment Scotland
2. Historic Environment Scotland has provided a written submission in advance of the evidence session, which is attached at **Annexe A**.

Clerks to the Committee
September 2026

Annexe A: Historic Environment Scotland written submission

Patrick Harvie MSP
Convener for Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

16 September 2026

Via email: EEAC.Committee@parliament.scot

Dear Convener,

Historic Environment Scotland – Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee evidence session

Thank you for inviting me to appear before the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide an update on Historic Environment Scotland (HES), and to discuss both the progress we have made and the work that still lies ahead.

I want to begin by recognising the seriousness of the findings set out in the Auditor General's Section 22 report and those subsequently identified through our independent Organisational and Cultural Review. Together with our Equality Audit, these processes and reviews have provided an important opportunity for HES to reflect openly on how we operate as an organisation, where we need to improve, and the kind of organisation we want to become.

The Board has fully accepted the recommendations of the Organisational and Cultural Review and we are committed to taking forward the findings of the internal and external audits, including Section 22, and the Equality Audit as part of a transformation programme. An outline implementation plan was presented to the Board in August and is now being developed in more detail. We expect this to be a multi-year programme of change, as meaningful organisational and cultural change takes time. Our focus is not simply on completing recommendations, but on ensuring that improvements become embedded and are sustained over the longer term.

Our immediate priorities are on recovery, which we see as being achieved through a focus on stability, leadership and transformation. This includes recruiting a permanent Chief Executive, supporting the appointment of a new Chair and Board members, implementing the recommendations from the Organisational and Cultural Review, including a new structure, and putting in place the foundations for a longer-term transformation programme.

We are also strengthening the organisation internally. In response to the issues identified through the audit and review, we are improving policies, controls and ways of working, including strengthened arrangements for registers of interests and refreshed guidance on hospitality. For example, we have reviewed the use of Electronic Procurement Cards (ePC) across HES, and refreshed our suite of guidance relating to this. We have also strengthened and clarified our guidance around official hospitality, and further work is ongoing to comprehensively review and refresh our people policies to ensure that HES is a workplace where colleagues

can feel safe, secure and included. I would be pleased to share more detail about these steps with the Committee next week.

We recognise that rebuilding confidence requires demonstrable action: stable leadership, clear governance, strong controls and organisational foundations that support lasting change. However, transformation cannot be achieved through structures, policies and processes alone. The most significant change will be cultural. Colleagues and stakeholders have told us they want to see greater openness, trust and accountability, clearer expectations of leaders and managers, confidence that they can speak up and be heard, and a culture in which HES learns from problems rather than becoming defensive about them.

It is important to recognise that HES remains an organisation with significant strengths. Throughout a challenging time, colleagues across the organisation have continued to deliver essential services, care for nationally important heritage assets, provide expert advice, support communities, and welcome visitors to sites across Scotland. We want to build on the professionalism, expertise and commitment of our people, ensuring that colleagues are properly involved both in recovery and in shaping the future organisation HES needs to become.

One of the points made during the Committee session that particularly resonated with me was the recognition that culture is not an optional extra, but a vital contributor to wider social, educational, economic and community outcomes. Heritage has an important role within that wider ecosystem. This contribution extends beyond organisational reform. HES supports wider Scottish Government priorities through stewardship of the historic environment, support for tourism and economic activity, engagement with communities, educational programmes and specialist advice. These activities align closely with the Government's ambitions for culture as a contributor to wellbeing, learning, place-making, economic opportunity and community cohesion.

I do not want our response to current challenges to be limited solely to organisational recovery. There is an important conversation underway about the future of public services, the role of culture in national life and how public bodies can collaborate more effectively to deliver greater public value and impact. That is why I welcome the wider discussion about public service reform. For HES, this is not separate from organisational transformation: it is part of the same wider task of renewal, improved outcomes and greater public value. As Scotland's lead public body for the historic environment, HES has a responsibility not only for the assets in its direct care, but also for providing leadership, expertise and support across the wider heritage sector.

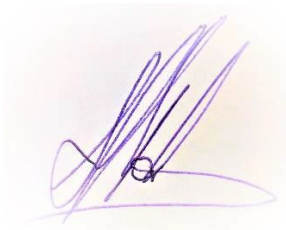
Our new financial framework is central to that future direction. It requires HES to become increasingly financially sustainable through efficiencies, increased commercial and philanthropic income, and reduced reliance on Grant-in-Aid. A milestone has recently been reached, with commercial and charitable income significantly exceeding grant-in-aid for the first time. While financial pressures remain, this demonstrates progress in diversifying income streams and creating greater organisational resilience while continuing to deliver public benefit.

We are also having constructive conversations with other organisations across the culture cluster about shared challenges and where closer collaboration could provide better solutions. Archives and Collections storage is one practical example. Several organisations face similar pressures around the long-term, sustainable storage and management of nationally important collections, and we are keen to explore where working together could deliver greater resilience, efficiency and value.

While the scrutiny of HES over recent months has been difficult, it has provided an important catalyst for change. While we are on the road to recovery, there is still substantial work ahead, and we recognise that trust must be earned through sustained action and demonstrable improvement. However, we are clear about the direction of travel: stabilising the organisation, strengthening governance and culture, and ensuring that HES continues to provide national leadership for Scotland's historic environment. Our ambition is not simply organisational recovery, but renewal, so that HES is better placed to serve the people, communities and heritage of Scotland for the long term.

I am grateful to the Committee for its continued engagement and look forward to discussing our progress when I appear before you.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Uphill

Interim Chief Executive
Historic Environment Scotland