



Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Tuesday 6 October 2026
7th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Prebudget Scrutiny

1. This is the second evidence session the Committee will undertake on the Scottish Government Budget 2027-28. Last week the Committee took evidence from a variety of stakeholders. At the time of writing the Official Report of that meeting is not available.
2. This week the Committee will take evidence from the author and project partners of a recent report, [Local Culture Scotland](#), and representatives of local authorities and Arms-length External Organisations (ALEOs).
3. The session related to the report is likely to be focused on the findings and recommendations of that report. The report was commissioned by the Scottish Government following recommendations arising from the predecessor Committee's inquiry into ['Culture in Communities'](#) in 2023.
4. The session with representatives of local authorities and ALEOs is likely to cover, among other things, elements of local government and funding and duties which were covered in last week's paper. For ease of access, these sections are reproduced in Annexe A.

Local Culture Scotland report

5. [Local Culture Scotland](#) was published in September 2026. It was commissioned by the Scottish Government which sought proposals in three areas:
 - An overall framework for culture in community settings, including consideration of existing initiatives and, if necessary, options for re-shaping these
 - A working methodology for a national collective leadership approach to culture in community settings, bringing together sector expertise to support the Scottish Government and delivery partners
 - An exploration of potential new funding streams and analysis of where any additional or redirected funding would be most effectively deployed.
6. The report recommends a new national framework, 'Local Culture Scotland', is developed to provide a more strategic and coordinated approach to supporting this work. This is intended to be an approach, a funding stream and a strategic body at both national and local levels.

7. The authors argue that their suggested approach will support outcomes across the country and in the following five “fields of impact”:
 - place-based working
 - social cohesion and connection
 - health and wellbeing
 - Community Wealth Building
 - sustaining creative social practice.
8. The report argues that current arrangements are insufficiently joined up. It identifies a lack of connection between national and local funding and strategy and a lack of local influence over funding decisions.

Culture seen as infrastructure

9. The report argues that community-based cultural activity (“creative social practice¹”) should be viewed as a form of social infrastructure that can support wider public policy objectives, including community empowerment, health improvement, educational attainment, community wealth building and public service reform. The report stated:

“Cultural activities in communities are a critical component of place-based working and have the potential to lead systems change in building a healthy, happy and prosperous Scotland. ... Culture can be the bridge between strategy and delivery with communities.”

10. The paper suggests that creative social practice is also key to wider public sector reform of services.

Local Culture Scotland framework

11. The suggestion in the report is that the Scottish Government adopt a Local Culture Scotland framework and approach. This suggestion is key to the report’s recommendations.

National level

12. The report proposes:

- A national executive team, hosted by an existing but unspecified national organisation. This team would “oversee and manage the Local Culture Scotland network”. This would include “sector development for creative social practice nationally, communications, evaluation and relationship management with national partners.”

¹ This is the term used by the report. It explains that this might be called by different names such as: ‘community arts’, ‘socially-engaged’ practice, ‘participatory arts’, or ‘everyday culture’.

- The national executive team would support an annual convention bringing together representatives from across the network.
- The report suggests a national framework for monitoring and evaluation should be developed, based on the outcomes under the “five fields of impact” listed in a previous section.
- National and local coordination with other sectors
- Career and sector development in creative social practice at local and national levels.
- A national “Enablers” network – funders of culture and communities, national cultural organisations, community venues (e.g. museums and libraries), cross sectoral organisations (education, health, regeneration, CLD, Climate Justice) and researchers/academics - to provide advice, improve coordination between initiatives and funders, and reduce duplication.

Local level

13. The report approaches local delivery from the perspective of the 32 existing local authority areas.

14. The report suggests that each of Scotland's 32 local authority areas would have:

- a Local Host organisation – the report suggests that this could be from any sector with expertise in building local partnerships and “operating with best practice in respect of inclusion, equalities and diversity; and Fair Work”;
- a Local Coordinator – this is a key role in the envisaged framework and is funded centrally – they would facilitate local strategic objectives and support collaboration across different sectors and local partners, such as health boards and local authorities;
- a local consortium of “cross-sectoral delivery partners” which would have a role in supporting an agreed “programme of delivery and funding allocation” and distribute funds.

Funding proposals

15. The report envisages both increased funding for creative social practice and a different approach to how funding decisions are made.

16. The report noted that there are currently two national funds that support community-based arts. [Creative Communities](#) is administered by Inspiring Scotland and is a relatively small fund of £320,000 in the current year. The Culture Collective is administered by Creative Scotland and is a much larger fund (£4m per year). The report suggests building on these funds and potentially rolling those funds into the Local Culture Scotland approach. (see the appendices, p24).

17. The report proposed:

- A guaranteed allocation of £500,000 every two years to each of Scotland's 32 local authority areas. The report proposes equal allocation between areas, arguing this would ensure national coverage and prevent some areas being excluded from national cultural funding.
- Replace competitive funding processes with a non-competitive model. Funding would be allocated through local agreement rather than national competition and bid assessment.
- Devolve funding decisions to local partnerships and communities. Funding allocations would be determined by local consortia and the processes would require community involvement in designing local programmes.
- Ringfence at least 50% of funding for individual cultural practitioners
- Include dedicated micro-grant local schemes
- Move towards longer-term and recurring investment rather than short-term project funding
- Use the approach to leverage additional funding from sources outwith culture budgets, e.g. by developing cross-sector partnerships, developing evidence base of contributions to a variety of outcomes linked to other sectors.

Implementation

18. The authors are proposing a phased rollout over six years, beginning with a pilot and gradually expanding to national coverage. Under this proposal, there would be a pilot over two years with six participating local authorities with differing characteristics. There would be an evaluation of the pilot followed by additional local authorities being brought into the programme in two further stages.

Areas the Committee may wish to explore with the first panel:

- How the current system supports creative social practice – roles for local government, national funders, other national bodies and other sources of funding.
- Strengths and weaknesses of Creative Communities and Culture Collective schemes.
- The rationale for the new structures suggested in the report.
- The rationale for the level of funding and its approach. How non-competitive funding models would work in practice.
- Next steps in the process.

Local government

19. Local authorities play a crucial role in supporting culture in their areas. This includes the library service, funding arts organisations, maintaining both culture-specific and multi-use venues (e.g. community halls). Local authorities have a wider range of responsibilities. Cultural practice can support outcomes in these other areas (e.g. community development, education); equally cultural outcomes are supported by work in areas outside of culture policy and practice (e.g. education, transport). Local authorities should be able to develop policies and approaches that go across different policy and service areas at the local level.
20. Some local authorities' culture services are delivered by ALEOs (Arm's-Length External Organisation) – for example Glasgow Life.

Finance

21. The Annexe to this paper reproduces information from last week's paper on the spending by local government on culture.
22. The [2026 Spending Review envisaged a broadly flat-cash total budget for local government between 2026-27 and 2028-29](#). The table below is extracted from the Spending Review, note that this is total funding: both resource and capital and financial transactions:

Total planned spend (£m)

Level 2 spending line	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Local Government	14,782.60	14,771.80	14,773.30

23. If these spending plans reflect future budgets, the total local government funding would represent a real terms reduction of around 3.8% between 2026-27 and 28-29.

Visitor levy

24. [The Visitor Levy \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) provided local authorities with a power to impose a levy “to be charged on the purchase of overnight accommodation”.
25. [Visit Scotland helpfully draws together information on current and planned visitor levy schemes](#). The current or planned schemes are:
- City of Edinburgh Council - current
 - Glasgow City Council – from 25 January 2027
 - Aberdeen City Council – from 1 April 2027

- Stirling Council - from 14 June 2027
- West Dunbartonshire Council – from 1 July 2027

26. Local authorities have identified culture and events as areas of spend that money raised through the levy will contribute to. A further six councils are in the process of consulting on a visitor levy.

27. [A news release from the City of Edinburgh Council on 15 September 2026](#) stated:

“We have already agreed how to invest over £90 million of visitor levy revenue over the next three years - and this will help us manage the impacts of the visitor economy on the capital and support our world-class culture, heritage and events. Funds have been allocated to support a range of public services and infrastructure projects that benefit everyone – including, of course, our festivals.

“It’s early days, but the levy is already delivering for our city. This includes increased police presence on our streets, investment in our parks and green spaces, new bins - and plans agreed for the delivery of new public toilets and our setted streets renewal programme. Visitor levy funds also allowed us to bring back the Festival Carnival to the streets, an event which was enjoyed by thousands of residents and visitors in July.”

28. The levy is paid by visitors which includes performers. [It was reported](#) that Scottish Ballet has reduced its programme in Edinburgh in December in response to the increase cost of accommodation.

Recent strategic work

29. Given the crucial role of local authorities (or their ALEOs) in supporting cultural activities, there has been work to ensure alignment of its work with national strategic work.

30. There is a public library strategy [Fast Forward](#). This has six aims:

- Championing literacy and lifelong learning
- Empowering citizens to navigate information and democracy
- Engaging communities through co-design
- Promoting wellbeing and tackling isolation
- Strengthening advocacy and investment
- Demonstrating impact through robust evidence

31. The Culture Strategy 2020 said that the Scottish Government would:

“Work in partnership with culture trusts and local authorities, including in Community Planning Partnerships local networks and CoSLA to realise local outcomes across Scotland”

and

“Work with Culture Conveners from Scottish local government and culture trusts including through establishing a joint meeting of arts and culture conveners.”

32. The [2023 refreshed culture strategy action plan](#) included a number of actions which involved local government:

- Advocacy effort within national and local government to ensure the value of culture is understood and maximised. (This included plans for the ‘culture summit’ with local authorities which took place in 2024.)
- Bring together local authorities, national and cultural organisations, via a Local and National Delivery Group, to identify, and commit to working together towards shared culture outcomes across Scotland, in line with the aims from the Ministerial meetings with Culture Conveners and the Culture Partners group.
- Understand local authority support for culture, in the context of the impact of, and recovery from, the Covid pandemic, to identify more effective models of collaboration, and delivery utilising data and knowledge from successful programmes.
- Develop a joint working agreement for Culture between the COSLA and the Scottish Government.

33. The Scottish Government said it would keep Parliament updated on progress on the Action plan. [The only update the Scottish Government has provided on the action plan was a letter to the predecessor committee dated 5 June 2024](#). This noted that a “Culture Value Summit, titled Connections and Partnerships: The Value of Culture in Communities” took place in May 2024. This brought together a range of stakeholders. The letter stated, “officials are evaluating the outputs of the day and considering next steps”.

34. [On 24 February 2026, the Scottish Government and COSLA confirmed their intention to develop a formal Culture Partnership Agreement during 2026](#). An agreed “statement of intent” said that culture services, including libraries, museums, galleries and theatres, play an important role in supporting wellbeing, tackling inequality and contributing to a wellbeing economy, while acknowledging financial pressures on local government and the cultural sector. Pending the full agreement, both organisations commit to working together on issues such as funding, workforce development, governance, strategic alignment and widening access to culture.

Review of Creative Scotland

35. The [independent review of Creative Scotland](#) said that Creative Scotland should incorporate a regional approach into its governance arrangements. [Creative Scotland's response plan](#) said:

“[Creative Scotland] will build on our existing Place and Communities work across Scotland, learning from our Place Partnerships and the Culture Collective programme, to enhance our regional relationships and intelligence, understanding needs and opportunities at a local level.”

Public Sector Reform

36. [On 21 September 2026, the Scottish Government published its proposal for public sector reform](#). This is an initial proposal and the Government said:

“The Government’s opening proposition for discussion is that our current local government arrangements are replaced with a smaller number (6 to 10) of regional authorities focussing on strategic decision-making, with a substantial number (120-160) of community authorities focused on local decision-making. While there may be a general model in most cases, recognising their unique status and needs, our proposition is that this would sit alongside bespoke solutions for island communities.”

37. When discussing the potential distribution of roles and responsibilities between the regional and community levels, the Government placed the “provision and maintenance of local leisure, sport and culture facilities” with the Community authorities.

Areas the Committee may wish to explore with the second panel:

- Views on the Local Culture Scotland report.
- Financial outlook for local authorities and ALEOs – particularly in relation to the funding of cultural services.
- Views on the visitor levy and its likely impact on culture and heritage services in different areas.
- Local government engagement with the Scottish Government and others in taking forward actions in national strategies.
- Views on local government working with Creative Scotland in partnership to ensure a coherent package of support for each area.
- Value of decisions on cultural services being taken at the very local level.
- Potential culture bill: views on whether the current division of roles between national bodies and local authorities could be improved.

Ned Sharratt, Researcher (Education and Culture), SPICe

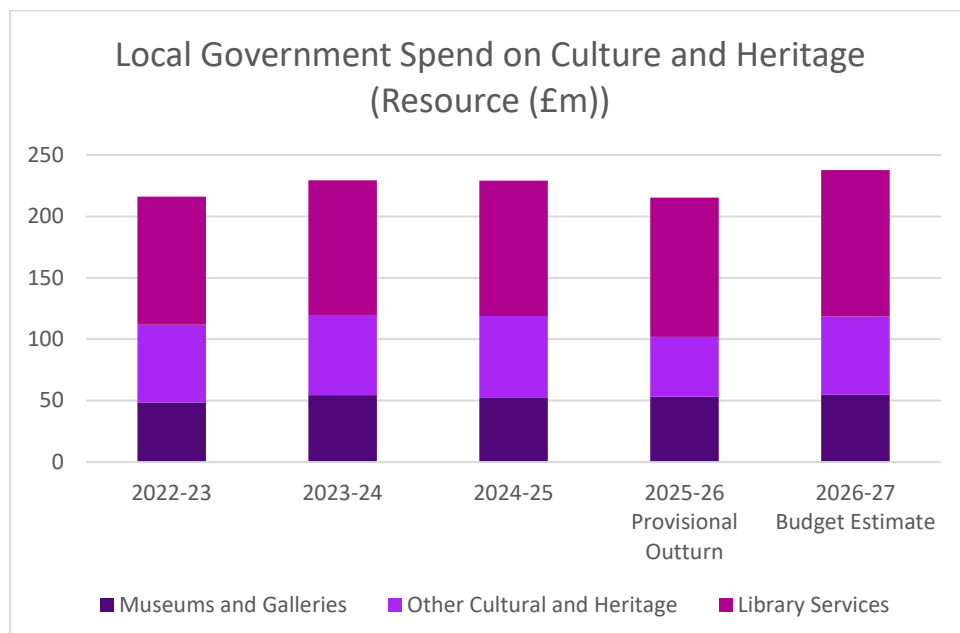
Date: 30/09/2026

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ANNEXE: Local government spend

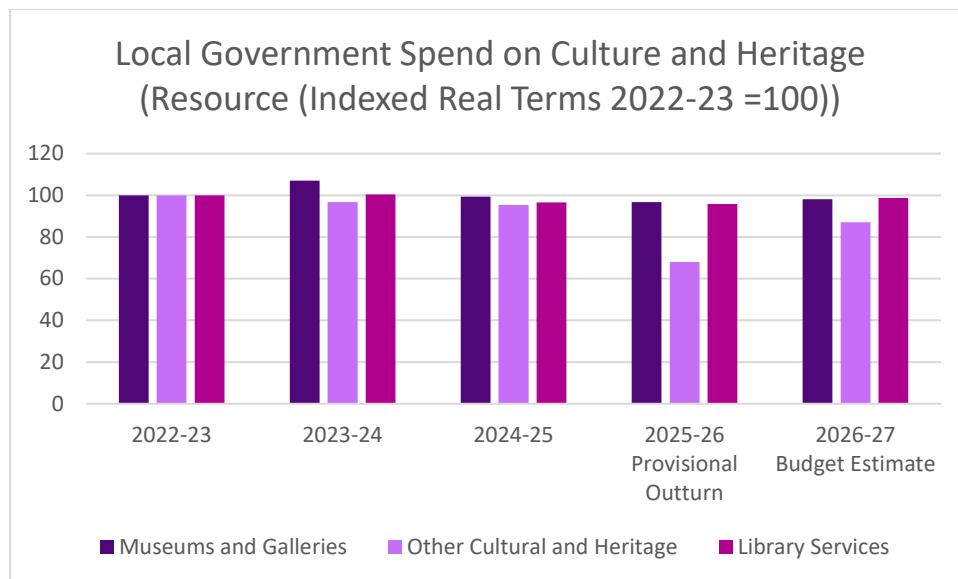
The Scottish Government publishes data on local authorities spend on a variety of areas, including culture and heritage. The chart below shows the net resource² spend (and planned spend for 2026-27) in this area under the categories, Museums and Galleries, Other Cultural and Heritage, and Libraries.



Library Services expenditure is consistently the largest spending category and is to increase from £104 million in 2022-23 to a budgeted £119 million in 2026-27. Museums and Galleries spending is relatively stable across the period, rising from £48 million to a planned £55 million in the period. Spending on Other Cultural and Heritage activities remained broadly stable until 2024-25, before falling to £49 million in the 2025-26 provisional outturn and returning to £64 million in the 2026-27 budget estimate.

The following chart presents the same data in real terms and indexed to 2022-23 = 100 under each of the three areas of spend. This means that each of the years from 2023-24 to 2026-27 shows spend as a percentage of the 2022-23 funding in real terms.

² The data is net of any ringfenced grants or earned income.



In real terms, spend on Library Services has remained broadly stable throughout the period, while Museums and Galleries real terms spending is estimated to be slightly below its 2022-23 level by 2026-27. Other Cultural and Heritage spending shows a more marked decline, reducing by 32% in real terms in 2025-26 compared to 2022-23 before partially recovering in spending plans for 2026-27.

Local authorities' duties

There are a range of duties on local authorities in relation to cultural provision in their areas. The Public Libraries Act 1887 requires local authorities to “manage, regulate and control all libraries or museums or galleries”, and creates restrictions as to how they may charge for these facilities.

Section 14 (1) of the Local Government and Planning Act 1982 required the then district and island councils to “ensure that there is an adequate provision of facilities for the inhabitants of their area for recreational, sporting, cultural and social activities”. This duty of ‘adequate provision’ was transferred to the new unitary authorities under Schedule 13 of the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994. The 1994 Act also confirmed local authorities’ power to provide grants or loans to cultural organisations based outside their areas and to “make such contribution as will support and promote music theatre, dance, opera, visual art or other art forms and museums and galleries”.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 created duties affecting local authorities’ cultural activities, specifically the introduction of:

- a duty to achieve Best Value
- a duty to initiate and facilitate community planning, and
- the power to advance community well-being in the context of community planning.