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Affairs and Culture
Angus Robertson MSP



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Our ref: Scottish Government response to the CEEAC Committee's 'Culture in Communities' report

9th November 2023

Dear Clare,

Following the publication of your recent report, 'Culture in Communities: the challenges and opportunities of delivering a place-based approach', I am responding to the Committee's recommendations for the Scottish Government.

Firstly, I would like to put on record my thanks to the Committee for its detailed work in this important area. The rich evidence you have gathered aligns well with the discussions I am having with sector representatives, and will help to inform our thinking going forward.

Your report makes a number of recommendations for the Scottish Government to consider. I will address each of these in turn in this letter, and will provide further details where relevant in the upcoming Culture Strategy Action Plan Refresh, which we will publish in the coming months.

Volunteering

You ask the Scottish Government to ‘explore whether further support can be provided to protect and encourage the vital contribution of volunteers to culture in communities’ (paragraph 63).

We know that thousands of voluntary organisations in Scotland supporting culture and the arts rely on the efforts of volunteers. The Scottish Government values the significant contribution that volunteers make to cultural activity in our communities. Much community-level culture is facilitated by committees of volunteers, and many community-based cultural events rely on the practical support of volunteers to succeed.

We recognise that community-based cultural organisations and their volunteers are facing considerable challenges at present and may need support and advice. Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) provide a single point of access for the third sector within local areas of Scotland. TSIs can help voluntary, community and charitable groups, social enterprises and volunteers. TSIs in addition offer training and other support to strengthen the capacity and resilience of local organisations and community groups. There is a network of 32 interfaces across Scotland: one for each local authority. Local TSI details can be found here: [TSI Directory – TSI Scotland Network](#)

Volunteer Scotland also provide [Training and Workshops - Volunteer Scotland](#) for volunteering involving organisations. In addition [Funding Scotland](#) by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations provides access to up to date, high-quality information on funding opportunities to third sector organisations in Scotland.

Culture Collective

Your report acknowledges the impact of our Culture Collective programme, to which we have provided over £10m of funding to date, and asks the Scottish Government to ‘set out how the foundation and legacy of Culture Collective will be built upon through future place-based initiatives’ (paragraph 76).

While I am not yet in a position to comment on the 2024-25 budget, it is important to for me to be clear that the Culture Collective programme is, itself, already creating the conditions for longer-term change. This was built into the design of the programme, which was intended to provide new models for co-design with communities; better collaborative working and building local partnerships including organisations from outside of the arts; and new, flexible funding criteria that fundamentally supports creative practitioners. We will ensure learnings from each of these elements are incorporated into our work on the forthcoming budget.

Funding of the culture sector

You call for the acceleration of ‘an innovative approach to the funding of the culture sector’ including the establishment of additional revenue streams and a multi-year approach to funding (paragraphs 114-116).

The need for stability and the opportunity for longer term planning and development is absolutely understood. As you will be aware, the First Minister recently announced increased funding for the sector. Through this welcome investment in arts and culture, we will increase opportunities for participation in creative pursuits, support the production of new works, and ensure that Scotland’s cultural output has platforms at home and abroad. The increase will start from next year (2024-25), with further detail to be set out in the upcoming budget through established processes. The priorities for this increased investment through to 2028-29 will be taken forward in line with our Culture Strategy Action Plan Refresh. We will also continue to explore the extent to which multiyear funding could be secured.

You also recommend that the Scottish Government should work closely with Creative Scotland, COSLA and Local Authorities on a ‘strategic, joined-up and complementary approach to funding for cultural activity in communities’ (paragraph 119). We will ensure this is taken into account in our work on the 2024-25 budget and in our longer term planning horizons. We already support a number of programmes and initiatives that benefit from the model of support proposed here and represent collaborative approaches between national and local government, agencies and external bodies, and we will continue to seek to learn from best practice where relevant. Additionally, with regards to your recommendation that we ‘explore the model suggested by some witnesses for community-based culture to be considered and funded separately from professional arts’ (paragraph 121), I can confirm that we understand the rationale behind this recommendation and will take it into consideration within the broader context of our ongoing work on the forthcoming budgets and future funding models for culture.

We will publish further details of our future support for culture in the forthcoming 2024-25 budget.

Cross-portfolio working

Your report discusses the potential for the Scottish Government to utilise funding ‘from across different portfolios for activities that support participation in culture towards their respective objectives’ and asks that we ‘set out how [to] accelerate this work’ (paragraph 122).

Given current and ongoing fiscal restraints, we continue to adopt a flexible approach to budgeting across portfolios to achieve priority outcomes for culture through increased cross-portfolio working.

We have committed in the latest Programme for Government to renewing our focus on engaging across government to mainstream culture in policy making, prioritising health and education in the first instance. This commitment reaffirms our aim to place culture as a central consideration across all policy areas, making clear how it can deliver on a range of priority outcomes; improving health and wellbeing, supporting a thriving economy, raising educational attainment, tackling inequality and realising a greener future. We will, of course, continue to consider other funding models as part of our ongoing review of culture funding and continue to work with co-delivery partners nationally and locally and across the public, private and third sectors to maximise support for the sector.

Local cultural provision

The importance of close and effective partnership working between local and national government is a core theme of your report. You recommend: that the Scottish Government should work with Creative Scotland, COSLA and Local Authorities to ‘assess the ongoing impact of the fiscal environment on local cultural provision’ (paragraph 144); that we should provide an update by the end of this year ‘on what progress has been made on the commitment in the Culture Strategy for the Scottish Government to work with Creative Scotland to map local authority support for culture and explore future models of collaboration between national and local bodies’ (paragraph 167); that we should explain how we will ‘seek to improve collaboration and connection between local government and national agencies in the delivery of place-based culture’ (paragraph 170); and that we ‘should also have an understanding of where across Scotland communities have limited access to spaces for culture’ (paragraph 233).

I can confirm that our forthcoming Culture Strategy Action Plan includes a number of workstreams in relation to local cultural provision, and will set out further details of how we will deliver on these recommendations. Partnership working will be key to the success of our ambitions in this space, and I am pleased that we are already working closely with local government via the Culture Conveners group, co-chaired by the Christina McKelvie, Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, and Councillor Maureen Chalmers, COSLA Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing. The Culture Conveners met most recently on 21 September 2023 and are now in the process of defining a workplan and collective activity for the year ahead, which will also include collaboration with national agencies.

Community Planning Partnerships

I acknowledge your call for Creative Scotland ‘to be a statutory partner in community planning’ and for Community Planning Partnerships to ‘ensure that local cultural organisations are represented in community planning processes’ (paragraph 198).

The Local Government, Housing and Planning committee recently conducted post-legislative scrutiny of Part 2 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 which covers community planning. The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning and officials worked closely with COSLA, the Community Planning Improvement Board and the Community Planning Network to inform the Scottish Government's response to the committee's recommendations. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of Scotland's cultural sector and encourages individual Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) to consider how they engage with relevant cultural organisations. Current legislation and guidance provides flexibility for CPPs to do so and the Scottish Government is not considering establishing any additional statutory partners at this stage.

Cultural assets – capital programme

Your report suggests that the Scottish Government explores 'whether there should be a role for Creative Scotland to deliver a capital programme to support the refurbishment, retrofitting and upkeep of assets that are used for cultural activity' (paragraph 227).

The outlook for the capital budget is very challenging, with high inflation and a projected 6.7% real terms reduction to our capital funding over the medium term. To meet all pressures and spending commitments within the investment pipeline, an additional £1.9 billion in 2024-25, £2.5 billion in 2025-26 and £2.8 billion in 2026-27 is required, against a funding envelope of a circa £5.9 billion. This means that the Scottish Government cannot deliver on all capital commitments, within the funding available and to the original planned timescales.

A capital fund managed by Creative Scotland could be considered and assessed at the next Capital Spending Review.

Community ownership

Throughout your inquiry, the role of community ownership was a recurrent theme, and you ask the Scottish Government to 'engage with the organisations we heard from who highlighted the challenges of community ownership to better understand the pressures on local communities who are taking on the management of local assets that support cultural activity, and to explore what further support or advice could be provided' (paragraph 249).

We know that ownership or control of land and buildings is a powerful tool for communities to drive change and achieve their own goals. It can help to develop the local economy, provide activities and services, and boost community identity.

That is why Scottish Government introduced asset transfer legislation as part of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which is designed to encourage and support ownership and control of assets by communities, and should be considered by community organisations and authorities in situations that recognise the public benefits that community use will bring.

The legislation came into force on 23 January 2017 and is the first of its kind in the UK. It has enabled economic growth, regeneration, and built resilient communities in Scotland. It places new responsibilities on public authorities to deal with requests in set timescales, and it includes new rights for community organisations, including the right of appeal to challenge adverse decisions. Since its introduction, 225 requests have been approved using the legislation for parks and woodlands, sports and recreational facilities, community hubs, and community spaces that celebrate our diverse culture.

Scottish Government continues to raise awareness of asset transfers by working closely with our communities and partners. We are working with the public authorities (known as relevant authorities in the Act) to raise awareness of asset transfers by sharing good practice such as championing single point of contacts, and asking questions in their annual reporting templates on what they are doing to promote asset transfers within their communities and make their processes easy to navigate and accessible for all.

We also hosted the first two National Events for Asset Transfers in September 2021 and March 2022 with over 100 attendees at each event, linking in with partners, community groups, and relevant authorities to help raise further awareness and better support our communities. Scottish Government also formed a National Asset Transfer Action Group in October 2020, that consists of local communities, partners, and relevant authorities who are working together to further support and embed this policy. The group are helping us address the challenges and has now met 8 times.

The Scottish Government also provide support to the Community Ownership Support Service (COSS) to work directly with community-based groups in Scotland take a stake in or ownership of previously publicly owned land or buildings. This includes expert advice, training courses on the asset transfer and asset development process, signposting to other support agencies and produce good practice guides, toolkits and case studies.

We are continuing to explore the impact of asset transfers, and we keep our community empowerment policies under review to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

As part of this approach, Scottish Government launched a review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 on 21 July 2022 at the Loch Ness Community Hub, and work on the review is firmly underway. We have asked our partners to explore and investigate the experiences of those involved in taking on community control and ownership of our public spaces, and what further support could be provided. Work to review the Act is due to conclude in early 2024 and a report will be made available.

Local Place Plans

Your report recommends that the Scottish Government should 'engage with Planning Aid Scotland and others to consider what further support and capacity building can be provided to communities to engage in the planning process, in particular those with fewer resources' (paragraph 272).

I thank the Committee for this feedback. We are listening to and welcome feedback on early experiences about local place plans and will consider this in our support for ongoing implementation of local place plans. We recognise the importance of building capacity within communities to engage with planning processes. We support organisations and partnerships who are delivering planning reform and supporting engagement and participation in communities across Scotland. Our provision of core funding for Planning Aid Scotland (PAS) specifically supports the promotion of their free advice service and their work to increase the capacity of interest groups across Scotland to seldom-heard groups and communities experiencing deprivation. In addition to PAS, we also support Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS). A&DS are a national champion for architecture, design and placemaking and their work includes creating more engaged and vibrant communities and increasing participation in decision making. We have also published a draft 'how to' guide for local place plans and will work with stakeholders in its finalisation.

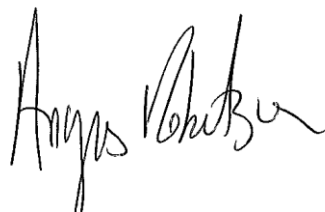
It may be helpful for the Committee to be aware that in the preparation of a local place plan, community bodies must have regard to National Planning Framework 4, which includes policy 31 'Culture and Creativity'. In addition, as national planning Framework 4 forms part of the statutory development plan, planning decisions must be taken in line with it unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In addition we have published '[Local development planning guidance](#)' which supports planning authorities and stakeholders with taking account of National Planning Framework 4 when preparing their local development plans, including for policy 31: 'Culture and Creativity'.

Summary

Once again, I would like to provide my sincere thanks to the CEEAC Committee for its detailed scrutiny and report. As I have set out throughout this letter, your extensive research and recommendations will help to inform the final stages of the development of our Culture Strategy Action Plan Refresh, which will be published in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angus Robertson', written in a cursive style.

ANGUS ROBERTSON

