

Cross-Party Group on Culture and Communities

1 November 2023 6:00PM – 7:30PM

Committee Room 4, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

Minutes

MSPs Present:

Sarah Boyack MSP, Foysol Choudhury MSP, Claire Baker MSP, Neil Bibby MSP (non-member of the CPG).

CPG Members and Guests:

Robin Strang (Community Leisure UK), David McDonald (Creative Lives), Alison Reeves (Making Music), Lori Anderson (Culture Counts), Helen Frew (Art27), David Francis (TRACS), Fiona Sturgeon Shea (Federation of Scottish Theatre), Gavin Crichton (Active Inquiry), Audrey Wilson (Scottish Council on Archives), Anne Gallacher (Luminate), Carole Main (Live Music Now Scotland), Neil McIntyre (University of Glasgow), Ola Wojtkiewicz (Creative Edinburgh), Lewis Hou (Science Ceilidh), Sai Ragunath (Museums Galleries Scotland), Karen Dick (Creative Scotland), Jean Cameron (Independent), Andrew Hurst (One Dance), Eve Nicol, Helen Moore (SCAN), Jack Gamble (Campaign for the Arts), Janie Nicoll (SAU), Joe Traynor (Scottish Civic Trust), Lucy McDonald (Scottish Government), Lucy Simpson (Scottish Government), Poppy Jarratt (UNESCO City of Design Dundee), Trudi Collier, Nancy Riach (ACHWS), Bryan Beattie, Cllr Amy Reese Mechan (City of Edinburgh).

1 Welcome and apologies.

Foysol Choudhury MSP (convener) welcomed attendees to the meeting and informed the group that the former convener Sarah Boyack MSP would be chairing most of the meeting as he had another commitment during the meeting.

Apologies

Clare Adamson MSP, Michael Marra MSP, Sharon Dowey MSP

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Review and approve the minutes of the last meeting of 2 October 2023 were moved by Foysol Choudhury MSP and seconded by Sarah Boyack MSP.

3 Any other business

No additional business was raised at this stage

4 Presentation - Robin Strang – Chair of Community Leisure Scotland

Community Leisure UK has 26 members in Scotland – all registered charities, 58% are delivering some form of culture or arts services and their portfolios include libraries, museums, galleries, theatres, cinemas, archives, as well as community halls and green spaces.

The current landscape challenges are particularly challenging this year but there is an expectation of worse to come in future years.

- 63% of members forecasting an operational deficit for the 23/24 financial year
- Average loss of one third of reserve levels by March 24 – some with no reserves currently
- Members using reserves to maintain services this financial year which is unsustainable. No reserves = no safety net financially
- Decreasing investment from local authorities, this year 50% of members received flat management fee and 50% received a reduction
- Energy and operating costs higher than in previous years and natural cost growth, yet no financial support to manage these increases
- Two local authorities facing section 95 in Scotland – sense of the scale of the challenge
- Trajectory towards zero funding for some trusts
- Challenge of shorter lead in time for budget confirmation

Service and workforce

- 75% of members at least scoping options around venue closures
- Ageing infrastructure needs maintenance & capital investment to decarbonise
- Pay awards challenge due to level of increase for local authority pay awards and National Living Wage increase
- Currently 75% pay Real Living Wage or higher, forecast for 2024/25 – this drops to 40% due to affordability
- Approx one third reduction in workforce since pre-Covid – increasing pressure on existing workforce
- Hollowing out of services
- Challenge of recruitment and retention of staff – particular areas of shortages of staff
- Inability to compete with other sectors on salaries
- Risk of loss of knowledge and expertise from the sector

- Challenge of having 'culture voice' at local authority as don't have a seat at the table. CPP level – not consistent and risk of decisions being made without full consultation with the sector

Community impacts are evident and there is a real risk of any reductions in service having a disproportionate impact on communities. A Local authority survey in Aberdeen this year on the public's priorities for budget spend identified arts, culture and sport as the second highest priority for residents. Many cultural venues operate as warm spaces through the winter

Asks would be

1. Recognition of the value of services provided
2. Commitment to invest in public leisure and culture at local authority and national government level
3. Capital investment in maintenance and upgrading facilities
4. Closer working with health and cross-portfolio working
5. Financial support for increased utilities and operating costs

5 Presentation - David McDonald – Scotland Policy and Partnerships Coordinator, Creative Lives

Creative Lives was founded over 30 years ago and celebrates, encourages and champions people expressing themselves creatively in their everyday lives and practicing their creativity socially with other people.

Most important aspect is the people and CL provides support to them in their local areas.

10,000 groups in Scotland. Most run by volunteers and don't receive funding. Volunteering is not free and communities cannot thrive without them.

- 74% of groups are impacted by increased costs
- 10% only, own their own space. Average price is £24per hour.

Big Conversation 2022 found that 74% of creative groups are struggling with increased costs, 49% of groups are doing something to help their community with these difficulties, eg providing warm spaces, free hot drinks, waiving costs etc.

Optimism about the future of creative groups has gone from a score out of 4 of 4.35 in 2018 to 4.4 in 2022.

The average number of volunteer hours per week has grown from 6.3 in 2018 to 9 in 2022.

Demonstrated power of creative activity to boost civic pride, support well-being and address isolation as demonstrated by two Creative Lives Awards winning projects, Sewing 2Gether All Nations and Overdrive Dance Company

Asks would be:

1. for a review of the Community Empowerment Act to cut red tape and simplify processes and breathe new life into closed community venues.
2. to take a place-based approach to culture and see a mapping of cultural assets delivered by Scottish Government.
3. for culture to have a voice and place in local decision making and a seat at the table such as in community planning where creative groups play a role in shaping and preserving local assets.

6 Presentation - Alison Reeves, Deputy CEO and Manager, Scotland – Making Music

Established in 1935, Making Music is the UK's membership organisation for leisure-time music and is dedicated to empowering everyone, whatever their background or experience, to come together in their community to make or present music.

They have 4,000 members in the UK – 228,000 + people, 280 in Scotland, 15,000+ people. They are in every local authority area and are made up from 56% Vocal, 29% Instrumental and 14% Promoters. The average group size is 57 and most are voluntary and not for profit.

Most of their income is made up from membership fees and ticket sales. The groups rely on public infrastructure to provide spaces to rehearse and perform in.

Their Big Survey in 2022 provided data on venues finding the most popular (90%) spaces for meetings were churches and church halls, schools and community or village halls.

The hire costs of venues are rising due to: energy price rises, staffing (janitors etc), cost of living crisis, inclusion and access concerns, lower numbers of participants post-pandemic.

Challenges are also caused in the availability of spaces due to church hall mergers and closures (Church of Scotland streamlining), Local Authority owned closures are starting to impact and replaced and refurbished community spaces that are not specced for music activity.

Group music making is in every community in Scotland, it reaches participants and audiences that funded arts do not, it brings many benefits with little direct cash investment from government or local authority, infrastructure needs are not unique.

7 Discussion/Q&A

Following the presentation, the group held a discussion and Q&A with speakers. Key themes and questions that emerged from the discussion included:

- SB thanked the speakers and noted as is typical in the culture sector they all wear many hats.
- SB noted the upcoming Well-being and sustainable development Bill and the importance of culture in that.
- SB noted the Campaign for the Arts petition to reverse cuts to the arts.
- The introduction of the Human Rights Bill will see minimum cultural rights developed which will impact on Local Authorities. To date people have been accessing culture and not asserting this right and we should see activity flourish and there will be obligations to provide the required infrastructure.
- Some Local Authorities have sought to embed culture into all of their strategies.
- Need to look at the language we use.
- There is an essential need for culture as a core aim in an of itself but also its benefits for sustainability, well-being and poverty.
- Venues and spaces needed. Post-industrial spaces most likely to be used for housing.
- Can rethink how we use spaces and get creative about how we access them – libraries as spaces for music, opening spaces normally closed out of hours etc.
- Community archives need support and connections.
- Different mechanisms are required in the Culture Strategy.
- Role for 20-minute Neighbourhoods
- Place Partnership and Culture Collective have had good impacts
- Would like to bring back the lost Art Development Officers. Stil some but

8 Any other business

No additional business was discussed.

9 Actions

The group asked for more opportunities for networking and to continue to find resolutions to the funding crisis through dialogues between the CEEAC Committee, COSLA and Culture Counts.

10 Date of Next Meeting

– TBC February