

Cross-Party Group on Music

7 March, 2023, 6pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Michelle Thomson (Convenor), Clare Adamson

Non-MSP Group Members

Adam Behr (Newcastle University), Ailsa Macintosh (BBC), Alan Morrison (Creative Scotland), Donald Macleod (Hold Fast), Alison Reeves (Making Music), Carol Main (Live Music Now Scotland), Caroline Sewell (MU), Chris Sherrington (Music Venues Trust), David Nicholson, James Cunningham (HITS), Jess Abrams (Sound Sense/ Edinburgh College), Kenneth Taylor (St Mary's Music School), Mae Murray (MEPG), Matthew Terras, Paul Macalinden (Glasgow Barons), Robert Kilpatrick (SMIA), Sam Dunkley (MU), Trish Strain (EIS), Lisa Whytock (Active), Dougal Perman (SMIA), James Biggar (Music Broth)

In attendance

Chelsea Taylor (Scottish Parliament)

Apologies

Diljeet Bhachu (Musicians Union), John Wallace (MEPG), Matthew Whiteside (The Night With), Jenna Main (ABRSM), Nick Stewart (Sneaky Pete's)

Agenda item 1: Consultation on Restricting Alcohol Promotion

David Francis: Outlined the Scottish Government's case for proposing the legislation: one quarter of the Scottish population drinks in excess of the guidelines, 24 people die every week from the effects of alcohol, despite unit alcohol pricing and lower drink driving limits. Ireland, France and Norway already restrict advertising. The main motivation for the proposals is concern over exposure to young people of alcohol advertising and the effect that this will have on their attitudes to drinking.

At the Round Table on the topic convened by Health Minister Maree Todd, the point was made by several participants that the overall trend is that young people are drinking less. When talking about events like festivals, where the audience is predominantly adult, the responsible use of

alcohol is part of the experience of the event. Several festivals are sponsored by local breweries and distilleries, making craft products that contribute to the perception of Scotland's quality food and drink offer. Sponsorship can often make the difference to a festival's financial outcomes when margins are tight. The argument is that advertising and marketing are not at the heart of Scotland's alcohol problem, which goes much deeper.

Michelle Thomson MSP: I am happy to write to the Minister on behalf of the CPG reiterating the arguments. My sense is that the Government is listening.

Donald MacLeod: There is general unhappiness that once again it seems that it's our industry that is being singled out. There is a lack of trust that the consultation process is a genuine listening exercise, and that the facts are properly grounded. In my role as Convenor of the Licensing Forum of Glasgow we've identified a link between alcohol problems and over-provision, but no link it seems with young people drinking more. Around 25% of young people, as I know from my own business experience, are going to clubs and not drinking. That fact is not being applauded. The alcohol industry is the most regulated in Scotland already. We are working with health bodies, local communities to bring down alcohol harm in licensed establishments. The argument that children and young people are more likely to drink alcohol because they see it doesn't bear any correlation to what is happening in clubs and pubs. What I would say is that there is definitely a correlation between deprivation and alcohol harm. It seems like broad brush approach without reference to the facts and the evidence. The Scottish Government needs to listen to the trade. We are employers. Whisky is a major export. It's a success story! Collaboration is key and works. Ostracising an entire trade doesn't.

Lisa Whytock: Folk music is an asset for Scotland in terms of cultural tourism. When Scottish artists tour they are often supported by whisky companies in particular, which has a knock-on effect for tourism to Scotland. For example, one of a series of concerts in an Australian season in 2020 was a Burns Supper – the first to be held there – at Sydney Opera House, which was sponsored by Glen Turret whisky. Scotland's presence at Lorient Festival, Europe's largest, was partly supported by Belhaven Brewery, partnering with financial support from Scottish Government. Belhaven were so impressed by what they saw that they launched a bursary for career development worth £25,000 per annum to the artists awarded the money. The current folk band of the year, Breabach, had a whisky labelled in their honour last year. The Visit, which brings international promoters to Scotland and which has a return on investment of 349%, could not have taken place without the support of Belhaven and Glen Turret. How would all of these initiatives have fared under the proposed restrictions?

Scotland as a small nation cannot sustain its artists with home-based performing so it's essential that they are able to perform overseas, at the same time promoting Scotland as they do so – something the Scottish Government likes to take credit for. This wouldn't be possible without grants from Creative Scotland or sponsorship from drinks companies. These well-meaning proposals could paradoxically result in a cultural desert if the funding gap isn't plugged.

MT: would be happy for the CPG to write and make these points.

Chris Sherrington: Also attended the Round Table. One of the things that the Minister mentioned was that this is an early stage in the consultation process. Our key concern is the lack of research as has been mentioned. The models that are being proposed for Scotland, are based on models from countries which provide much more support for culture than we do, often through a variety of tax or rate reliefs, so we are also concerned about the lack of investment to plug any gap caused by the removal of alcohol sponsorship.

Clare Adamson MSP: Unfortunately this measure will not come before the Culture Committee as it's a Health matter. It is important that everyone responds to the consultation. I can, however, make the Minister aware of the culture sector's concerns. The involvement of drinks companies is so intrinsic to so many festivals, Islay for example. The measures are mainly aimed at young people so they may be targeted more at advertising for young people in sport rather than places where you would expect alcohol to be served. The way that young people source information now through platforms like TikTok and through peer pressure make matters more complicated. There are other health concerns too – vaping for example.

MT: Measures like these are invariably cross-portfolio and it's often the case that other policy areas are not sufficiently taken into account so I would emphasise that responding to the consultation is important.

Alan Morrison: The Islay Jazz Festival's full title is actually the Lagavulin Islay Jazz Festival which shows how place identity is tied up with key industries. From a funding perspective, as costs go up and funding sources such as local authorities and trusts and foundations are squeezed, and musicians' own resources are minimised because of the lack of performing opportunities over the last three years, sponsorship is vital. Creative Scotland, on standstill, could not pick up any shortfall from sponsorship.

Agenda item 2: Music Education

Mae Murray: MEPG met with Education and Culture ministers and met with reassurance about the manifesto commitment to free instrumental tuition. On the We Make Music front music libraries are now in 6 local authorities, the We Make Music Companion, a resource pointing to music opportunities across the country, will be launched in July as will the We Make Music vision, and the We Make Music Schools initiative will be widened beyond its pilot in Renfrewshire.

There have been issues with some local authorities, with some threatening to remove music tuition altogether. It's possible, however, that there has been a misunderstanding about the nature of the funding which allows for the abolition of tuition fees.

There is a need for some research on the economic impact of music education, and for economic information about the music industry in Scotland specifically.

DF: Music UK has this kind of information, certainly for the impact of music on the tourist industry but not sure if they provide country-specific information.

LS: My understanding is that there isn't information about Scotland only. We have information about folk music export but UK Music doesn't break down the information by country within the UK.

Caroline Sewell: The past few weeks have been tumultuous as local authorities have been facing difficult decisions, some of which seem to fly in the face of flagship government policies. For the most part negative decisions have been staved off but it highlights how precarious the situation is. It has been a difficult and challenging few weeks. No matter how difficult the decisions are they shouldn't be made to the detriment of young people and their development.

CA: The instrumental music service, especially with the abolition of fees, is a vital service. We went really far with making tuition free but there is still a way to go to get this right. It is untenable that a pupil in a state school can't achieve the level that they need to attend the Conservatoire

without additional funding or opportunities elsewhere. I also would like to mention that New College Lanarkshire is making available 100 free community places including music and other creative industry related courses.

James Cunningham: Discussion is taking place between GTCS (General Teaching Council of Scotland) and Scottish Government over the legislative timetable required to make the change that will bring instrumental tutors into GTCS. This is a long running process with no end in sight at the moment.

Going back to the situation with local authorities, Midlothian is still looking to make savings, although perhaps not on the scale originally envisaged. There definitely is a misunderstanding in some local authority quarters with some elected members imagining that Scottish Government undertook to fully fund instrumental tuition. This has never been the case. The additional government funding is meant to sustain and develop music tuition. That pot has been increased to £12m.

MT: The perennial challenge is the lateness of notification of any Barnett consequentials – whether the Government will get them and when. This causes a lot of frustration downstream. The current fiscal framework clearly doesn't work for anyone that needs to take a long view of their funding requirements.

Trish Strain: The EIS would really like to push forward the mainstreaming of music education into the curriculum. It should be an integral part of the curriculum and not an add-on.

MM: Finally, John Wallace is retiring as convenor of MEPG, so if people know of anyone who might step into his considerable shoes.

Agenda item 3: Music in the Community

Govan Music Festival

Paul Macalinden: It's ironic that I'm speaking about the Glasgow Barons, a flexible, community-facing orchestra that serves an area of multiple deprivation, at a time when the BBC orchestras are facing demands that they should be more flexible and community-facing. The nature of the orchestra is changing fundamentally.

[Paul Macalinden outlined the events that were taking place in the festival including a song cycle performed by local choirs, local dance and songwriting groups, a symphony concert, an innovative collaboration with the Scottish Recovery Consortium which helps people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction which sees a community meal and gig with major rap artists and a string quartet, Musicians in Exile (immigrant musicians) and Ando Glasgow (Roma musicians), and hip-hop artist Steg G.] A big part of what Glasgow Barons do is work on developing talent hyper-locally at the grassroots of the community.

LS: Active were funded by the Scottish Government post-Covid to the tune of £850k to create Scotland on Tour, which brought 400 new concerts in one year directly into communities across Scotland. It won't continue despite it being a manifesto commitment. Active doesn't have the capacity to run it any longer. When the Government is concerned with developing communities and place, green touring and so on it doesn't seem right to pull that money and not have it reinvested into community touring or artists recovering from the covid shutdown. Could there be

a question? A problem is that all the civil servants involved have left and there is no one leading on this. There is clearly a demand.

MT: Will take that forward as an action.

Music and Dementia

Deferred to next meeting

Agenda item 4: Other business

CS: The Own Our Venues campaign is coming into its final month and is well on its way to meeting its fundraising target.

MT: Could we hear about the latest activity at the BBC?

Ailsa Macintosh: BBC Scotland is still committed to invest £5m per year in the BBC Scottish Symphony, albeit the situation south of the border looks less settled. BBC SSO is already engaged in work in the community as part of its broadening remit.

Re the programme changes which have been the subject of discussion recently, including before the Culture Committee, the classical music programme will still be the same length in the same slot with a remit to play 100% Scottish music and to have the SSO's output feature on the airwaves each week, as well as that of other orchestras across Scotland where feasible. The BBC in Scotland is looking to spend its money differently without cuts, although I do appreciate that the dropping of a well-loved programme will feel like a cut. We are trying to spend our money more effectively in a time of changing audience behaviours and at a time when the organisation has lost 30% of its income in real terms since 2010 – not taking into account the licence fee freeze and inflation.

The programmes under review started before there was social media, iPlayer, Sounds, BBC Alba, the BBC Scotland channel. The media landscape has changed out of all recognition and at a staggering pace. It's not just young people who are affecting that landscape. The biggest rise in people streaming music is in the over-55s. The BBC can't be an island of excellence that no is visiting any more. Money has to be spent where it will the most impact.

There is going to be more impact on competitions, partly inspired by the Young Trad competition. The afternoon show will change with more focus on jazz, for example. The piping programme will be produced by one team making a programme for both Radio Scotland and Radio nan Gàidheal. Some aspects of the current piping programme will be covered in a podcast – live performances and competitions, for example. In terms of the archival role of the BBC in piping, the BBC has a production library rather than an accessible archive.

Jess Abrams: introduced herself as chair of Sound Sense, the UK organisation for community musicians, which has a monthly bulletin board which CPG members are invited to use.

CS: notified of the Musicians' Census, which will provide some very valuable data in future.

DF: Visa costs for musicians touring in the US are set to go through the roof. Could the CPG write to the Cabinet Secretary and ask him to contact his counterpart in the Westminster?

LS: The Cab. Sec. should also write to the US Government. There should also be a general Scottish music industry response, perhaps co-ordinated by SMIA, which should go to Tamizdat and Covey Law, the two main US organisations assisting on visa questions for musicians, who are currently issuing a challenge to the US Government proposals.

MT: The most appropriate route would be for the CPG to write to Angus Robertson asking him to make entreaties to his relevant counterparts. Will undertake to do that.

Next Meeting

Tuesday 6 June (tbc)