



# Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 5 February 2026

Session 6



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### CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

#### 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2026, Session 6

##### CONVENER

\*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

##### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

##### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

\*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)

\*Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

\*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

\*Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)

\*attended

##### THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Alastair Evans (Creative Scotland)

Iain Munro (Creative Scotland)

Angus Robertson (Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture)

##### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

##### LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

# Scottish Parliament

## Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 5 February 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Clare Adamson):** Good morning, and a warm welcome to the fifth meeting in 2026 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee.

Our first agenda item is a decision on taking business in private. Do members agree to take agenda item 3 in private and to consider the draft report on the inquiry into a legal mechanism for an independence referendum in private at a future meeting?

**Members** indicated agreement.

### Budget Scrutiny 2026-27

09:00

**The Convener:** Our next agenda item is evidence taking from Creative Scotland on the draft budget for 2026-27. I welcome to the committee Iain Munro, chief executive, and Alastair Evans, director of strategy and planning.

We move straight to questions from the committee. The report of the review of Creative Scotland was published in November, and the committee took evidence from the chair and vice-chair of the review in December. How are the review's findings being implemented? What changes have been made in Creative Scotland following the review?

**Iain Munro (Creative Scotland):** Good morning. We have welcomed the review. We are always open to feedback, and our approach has been to embrace both the way in which the review conducted itself and the report. There is a lot in the report, including a lot of good ideas, suggestions and feedback. The approach that we take with our audit work is to embrace it, and our response to the report is another version of that.

We understand that the way in which the review was conducted meant that it was a tight piece of work, but the feedback and pointers that it gives us to improve our organisation for the future are undoubtedly welcome. It contains a range of things. You will have seen that it includes 36 recommendations, 30 of which are directly for Creative Scotland. The other six are to be finalised in a broader conversation with the Scottish Government and others, but we are keen to move quickly, and we have already started to address some of the simple points that are about openness and transparency. We have been doing work on opening up our website.

We have been doing a lot of thinking about the recommendations, which we have had the opportunity to discuss with the Scottish Government, the lead of the secretariat for the review and the review chair, who came to our board meeting on 19 December. We have done a lot of deep-dive work with the senior leadership team of Creative Scotland to understand the recommendations and the report as a whole. We will take that into our board meeting—which, following this committee evidence session, will take place over the rest of today—to understand how, with the board, we can move forward on implementation. I will be able to talk about that as soon as we are able to.

Some of the work will take a bit longer. Some of the recommendations relate to work that was already in train or planned for. I refer to work such

as a refresh of our strategy and the reform of our structures to ensure that we are fit for purpose.

There is a lot for us to digest and progress, but we are committed to being able to do that. We have seen a pattern in the recommendations that is born from the structure of the review. We have identified four strategic areas underneath which the recommendations cluster themselves: strategy; our target operating model; governance, data and performance; and relationships and partnerships. We are looking at actions that will enable us to respond to the report and the recommendations under those four areas. Some of the recommendations speak to multiple dimensions of the four areas.

We have done quite a lot of analysis and consideration, and we are taking the recommendations very seriously. We will move quickly on some of them, while we will take time to understand how we can move forward on those that go a bit wider than just Creative Scotland.

**The Convener:** The briefing that the Scottish Parliament information centre has provided us with includes a chart on the multiyear funding that is allocated by Creative Scotland. Multiyear fading is an issue that we have talked about a lot over the years but is now being implemented. The chart shows the amount of per capita multiyear spending by local authority area. There is quite a disparity in provision across the country. In the City of Edinburgh Council area, which we would probably expect to be top, per capita spend is £52.47, while, at the bottom of the table, spend in North Lanarkshire, where my constituency is, is 17p per capita. Below that, Clackmannanshire, East Renfrewshire, Midlothian and West Dunbartonshire receive no per capita funding from the multiyear funding project initiative.

Is there a problem with equity across Scotland? Notwithstanding the fact that the cities generally have most of the cultural activity, is Creative Scotland concerned that there are patches of the country that do not seem to secure multiyear funding because of the lack of opportunity, engagement and cultural activity in those areas, especially as they tend to be the areas of highest multiple deprivation?

**Iain Munro:** We pay close attention to the variety of data sources. The SPICe briefing acknowledges that the per capita measure is an imperfect one, but it is symbolic of something, and I think that we recognise that. Like most of the programmes that we run, multiyear funding is open access funding, so it is born from demand within the area, but we recognise that those data sources appear to show that there are areas that are underserved.

I will give you a bit of context. The geographic base location of organisations is not always the sole area of impact. Many of the organisations that we fund through multiyear funding reach out to, into and across multiple local authority areas, covering the geography of Scotland, as well as having an international reach.

Nevertheless, we recognise that we want to build more capacity in individual areas, which is why we have programmes such as the place partnership work, which seeks to target in an immersive way, with investment, the building of capacity in different local authority areas, to build up confidence, infrastructure and partnerships and networks that can enable more creative ambition to come from those areas and to give them opportunities to access the other funds that we run. Multiyear funding is only one dimension of that, but we pay very close attention to it.

As a national lottery distributor, we also have conversations with other national lottery distributors in Scotland to understand where we can coalesce around opportunities for capacity building in different geographic areas. Those conversations are on-going. We pay close attention to the issue.

Alastair, do you want to add anything on place?

**Alastair Evans (Creative Scotland):** Yes, I might answer the question that is in the SPICe briefing, which is about where the organisations that work nationally are. Forty of them are in Edinburgh and 39 are in Glasgow, so you can see that weighting there. They are national organisations that are headquartered in Edinburgh and Glasgow, but they are also sector development organisations that work across the country. For example, Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland, which is a traditional arts organisation that has a huge impact across Scotland, is headquartered in Edinburgh.

The chart shows only multiyear funding. Success rates are better across the piece. We publish that information. The rates are between 31 per cent and 68 per cent across the local authorities, with Stirling being the highest.

That does not mean that we do not recognise the issue as one that we can work on. As Iain Munro said, that chart gives us a sense of where we can do development work. Clackmannanshire is towards the bottom of the list. It is one of our newer place partnerships, through which we are working with local authorities and other local organisations on a culture strategy. It is helpful to consider that.

Across the five or so authorities that you highlighted, we had just one application for multiyear funding. That is why they are at the

bottom of the chart. Building capacity and infrastructure capability in those areas is important to us.

**The Convener:** That is of concern. I look forward to seeing developments in that regard. A lot of those areas have excellent colleges, many of which offer courses based on the creative industries, in areas such as the arts, dancing and screen. Perhaps that is something to consider in future in relation to entrepreneurial output in local areas.

We now move on to questions from committee members.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** Good morning. I want to ask you about the recent announcement of the closure of the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow. There is obviously real concern about the impact that that will have on the cultural ecosystem, not just in Glasgow but over a much wider area. What discussions has Creative Scotland been involved in about saving that cultural asset?

**Iain Munro:** The challenges of the CCA have been well reported for some time. We bring organisations that exhibit or express fragilities into a closer form of contact with us through the relationships that we have with them, and that will have been the case with the CCA.

We supported the organisation to reform from within, and we enabled it to bring in external expertise to progress that work. Unfortunately, over the course of the past year, that did not prove to be successful. As the fragilities of the organisation deepened, we remained in close contact with it, in conjunction with other partners, in order to understand the challenges and what it was planning to do about them.

To be absolutely clear, we do not run such organisations, and we do not police or regulate them, although we have a scrutiny role through our funding relationship with them. We wanted to support such an important organisation to find a pathway through some of the challenges—that is what we tried to enable it to do, in conjunction with partners.

It became increasingly apparent, in particular in what has played out over the course of the past few months, that the organisation's financial, governance and leadership fragilities, combined with external factors, coalesced, and, ultimately, the organisation itself realised that it was insolvent and notified us of that. The situation has been playing out publicly since last week.

On the question of saving the organisation, it is technically and in real terms insolvent, and it is moving to liquidation. That decision was taken by the board of the CCA. As I said, we do not run it.

Because of the circumstances, it is important for us, as guardians of public funding, to understand that continuing to invest in that scenario is not viable. That is what is now progressing, unfortunately, based on the decision by the board of the CCA.

**Neil Bibby:** A decision has been taken to fold the organisation, but there are real concerns about the need to save jobs—people are losing their jobs as a result of what has happened. There is also the matter of saving the building—the cultural asset. It is important that every action necessary is taken to try to save the jobs and to save the building as an asset.

This week—like many members, I am sure—I met the Scottish Contemporary Art Network, which is exhibiting in the Parliament. It has rightly talked about the CCA's importance to the cultural ecosystem in Glasgow and across Scotland.

09:15

You mentioned the discussions that took place between Creative Scotland and the CCA before the decision. What discussions have you had with the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and the Scottish Government about it? Is Creative Scotland willing to convene or take part in a meeting with the Scottish Government and other interested parties to try to find a route to save the asset and jobs in the sector?

**Iain Munro:** We are clearly very concerned about the situation and very disappointed about what has happened, given the ramifications for the people there and those who use the building and love it. We own the building, and we have said publicly that our intention is to ensure that we work appropriately through this complex situation and work with others to find a pathway through that will enable the building at 350 Sauchiehall Street to reopen.

The current company is insolvent and it is going into liquidation. That decision was taken by the board. That very particular legal and technical process is being progressed, and the responsibilities for that lie with an insolvency practitioner and the remaining trustees of the board of the CCA.

We are committed to finding a way, with others, to enable the re-emergence of the building on Sauchiehall Street and to enable it to come back into use as a cultural asset, which is key for the city but, importantly, for Scotland, too. We will focus our attention on enabling that to happen.

**Neil Bibby:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** I think that Mr Harvie wanted to come in.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Thank you, convener.

Good morning. You will appreciate that, as a member of the committee who is a Glasgow MSP, I want to pursue the same issue. We are looking at the budget for 2026-27, which allocates nearly £1.3 million for the CCA. You are the landlord—the owner of the building—and you have money allocated to support the building. It seems to me that, notwithstanding the failure of the CCA as an organisation, you are in a very strong position to move forward and to ensure that the facility—the building—can be brought back to life in some form or other as rapidly as possible. I would be really concerned if a post-mortem on the CCA as an organisation ended up delaying progress on bringing the building back into use in some capacity.

It seems to me that the best thing that we could do quickly is to reach out to the staff who have lost their jobs and gauge their capacity and their interest in establishing a new worker-led organisation that would retain the skills and experience of that group of people. That would be the fastest way to bring the CCA back to life, or to bring its successor to life, to the benefit of the cultural life of our city. Have you explored that? Would the budget that is allocated for 2026-27 enable a rapid pathway to that?

**Iain Munro:** The budget that is committed in the name of the now-former CCA company remains held, and it will be a factor in enabling us to move forward. We want to do that as quickly as possible, but appropriately, through the legal processes that are taking place. We are not being held by, to use your phrase, a “post-mortem” of the situation. Because we have been in contact with the organisation, we have an understanding of what has been happening and, as I said, we are now very focused on what comes next and on moving forward appropriately with others.

It is fair to say that we have had a lot of interest in ideas around the building and its reopening, and we will need to engage with that at the appropriate time. We will not be able to rush into anything, because it is really important that we get something in place that has solid foundations and that we can be confident is in a position to reopen for the long term.

You are absolutely right—we are a key partner in enabling that to happen. We will not be running the building ourselves, but we will be exploring the procurement of the right organisation with the right governance and business plans to enable that to move forward. We are not there yet; today, we will be having a conversation with the board of

Creative Scotland about the next steps and, after considering those, we will have ideas about how to approach the situation.

**Patrick Harvie:** As I understand it, you have, in effect, provided the building to the organisation at a peppercorn rent, as well as providing funding. Would that still be part of the offer that would be available to a successor organisation?

**Iain Munro:** It is an option. This is a blank sheet of paper. There are lots of roots and tentacles into the past that we can draw on, but it is an option. I cannot yet say with confidence exactly what will happen, but you have our commitment that we are seeking a route through this to achieve the reopening as soon as possible.

**Patrick Harvie:** I am sure that you will keep the committee updated on the results of that work or on the progress in making something like that happen.

Finally, I want to ask for an assurance that, at your meeting with the board to discuss the situation, you will raise the possibility of the staff who have just lost their jobs being directly involved in the discussion and of your being able to contact them to at least explore the possibility that they could have a role in whatever comes next.

**Iain Munro:** I will ensure that, in the conversations that we have this afternoon, the board understands the point that you have made.

**Patrick Harvie:** Thank you.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I want to go back to the multiyear funding question. In our committee papers, there is a map and I can see that the Highlands and Islands, which I represent, is doing quite well out of the multiyear funding—this is an unusual experience for me. You have highlighted that the cities or areas in which the organisations are based do well, too. You suggested that, if there was a map showing impact, it would be slightly different. I take it that you could provide a map showing where the impact of your funding is felt and the detail of that.

**Iain Munro:** It is hard to visualise, but we could provide a form of that; we can certainly do it in writing. The visualisation of it is something that we can take away to understand.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** You have talked about partnerships and, in particular, working with local government. An area that we heard concerns about at last week's meeting was that the pressures on local government funding causes pressures in relationships with museums and the like. Are you concerned that the partnerships that you are looking to promote will be impacted by wider funding issues?

**Iain Munro:** We have spoken before at the committee about our concerns about the position of local government and about the importance of local government as a key partner for us in local authority areas to achieve the best outcomes for local cultural provision, particularly through the organisations but also with the people who are in those different areas.

We closely monitor the 32 local authorities and engage with them right across the country in different ways, and we are increasingly concerned about the extent to which local government funding is under such pressure that we are now starting to see non-statutory services such as culture being cut and, in some instances, the prospect of up to 100 per cent cuts being applied. That is deeply worrying in and of itself, but it risks undermining the good progress from our being able to pass on multiyear funding, in particular due to funding from the Scottish Government—the outcomes of that will be eroded as a result of reductions in budget income elsewhere.

Our multiyear funding is foundational for organisations in so many ways. On average, it accounts for just over a quarter of the organisations' turnover, which means that they are reliant on around three quarters of their turnover coming from other sources, which include local government as well as earned income from ticket sales, bar takings, catering and retail.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Another area that is highlighted in our papers is the planned increase in the youth music initiative's budget to £10 million, which is an increase of £0.2 million. We have all heard stories of local government and schools not being able to provide things such as musical instrument tuition. How does that impact on your initiative? Are you feeling that you have to step in more often just to maintain the status quo when it comes to opportunity?

**Iain Munro:** The youth music initiative is a large component of it; that is targeted funding for all 32 local authorities. There is an annual programme to understand the plans and ambitions for the formula fund allocation to each individual local authority. When we know what the local authorities want to do with their funding, we sign it off and it is delivered through the academic year.

That is one part of provision; instrumental music tuition is another. We are not directly responsible for that; it is provided directly by local authorities. We must also recognise the provision by the formal and informal music education sectors that takes place beyond school in community clubs and so on. It is quite layered. We are seeing the pressures translating through the formula fund, and we are monitoring it quickly to understand how to get maximum impact from the investment in

local authority areas. The local ecology is important in understanding how all the elements knit together, and the networks that are in play in local authority areas are very important.

There is an increasing fragility in local government. There are fewer and fewer cultural strategies locally and fewer and fewer local government staff with specialist cultural expertise who can be part of the infrastructure of support to ensure that we are joined up with them to get maximum impact and value. However, undoubtedly, 23 years on, the youth music initiative is still a very important part of provision in all local authority areas.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Sorry—I am going to dot around a little bit, but there are some areas that I want to cover. One part of the review said that Creative Scotland needs to improve its long-term planning; by implication, the organisation is too short term in its approach. The report noted that you do not have a transformation plan setting out how the organisation will improve. We touched briefly on that during the convener's questions. Where are you with that? Can you give us any further details?

**Iain Munro:** Learning and reflection on feedback is built into how our organisation operates. We did a lot of transformation work early in my tenure as chief executive. That was just before the pandemic, and it stood us in good stead for delivery during and subsequent to the pandemic. We have wanted to continue to build on that work. We have been doing organisational development work, and we are now picking that up more fully through things such as the target operating model. The way in which we respond to the review will, in effect, become an action plan that will not only enable us to respond to the review but contribute to the way in which we express the change in the organisation that we drive forward with.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** There will be an action plan but not a transformation plan. Will it cover the same things?

**Iain Munro:** It will achieve the same outcomes. It will ensure that we look into the future and make ourselves as fit for purpose as possible to enable that future to be delivered to the best effect.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I turn to the leadership aspect. To be clear, I am not trying to make comparisons, but you will appreciate that we have been dealing with the issues and concerns that have been raised around Historic Environment Scotland. The report says:

“Creative Scotland's governance is difficult to navigate and lacks transparency. Although minutes from Board meetings and some Committee meetings are available online others are not.”

Will you comment on that and give us any updates, improvements or thoughts?

09:30

**Iain Munro:** We get audited on governance as a whole and no material issues have been raised in our governance audits. We always get strong audits, so the review reflections are interesting and important.

I absolutely accept the point about transparency and we will want to do more to open up the organisation. I answered the convener's question with an example of something that we are already doing, which is our website being a key interface for people to see and understand what goes on inside the organisation. We will also look at how we do more in-person engagement, with the board being part of that, so that we can open up the organisation in multiple different ways, in writing, through our channels and in person.

We understand what the review is reflecting and we accept that we can and want to do more on openness and transparency.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I will widen the question out to wider oversight. One of the issues that have been raised repeatedly is the opportunities for the cabinet secretary to meet the board. Has the cabinet secretary met the Creative Scotland board or attended board meetings? Have there been invitations or requests for him to do so?

**Iain Munro:** Yes, that has happened. I would need to look back to give you more detail, but the chair of Creative Scotland, Robert Wilson, and I have regular meetings with the cabinet secretary. They are formal meetings that take place at least quarterly, but in between times we not only engage with the officials but have interactions with the cabinet secretary in different settings and forums. There are multiple opportunities, but yes, the cabinet secretary has been to the board of Creative Scotland.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** The cabinet secretary has suggested previously that he has met the board to discuss funding issues. Are you aware of other meetings with the board?

**Iain Munro:** Funding has been a key subject, but there have been strategic conversations with the cabinet secretary, particularly about things such as multiyear funding. Those conversations are big parts of a transformation programme that has been born out of review work that we have done in the past. These subjects are all part of our conversations with the cabinet secretary that will be on-going and necessarily should be.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** This will be my final question, if that is okay—I am conscious of time. I

am dotting around a little bit again. The report says that it was also planned to draw down £10 million from the reserves built up from lottery income. What are the total reserves at the moment?

**Iain Munro:** Yes. The reserves are £3.4 million currently. The plan that is reflected in the papers is what has been playing out. On a technical point, it is not reserves—it is a national lottery balance. That is an accounting point. Just to be absolutely clear, we have £3.4 million in a national lottery balance. That is what is being referred to there.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** So, £10 million was a considerable part of that balance?

**Iain Munro:** Yes, but there was a plan for it that is now being enacted, which is stepping us through the multiyear arrangements. We are down now at £3.4 million.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** According to the SPICe briefing, your organisation's budget for the coming year is going to increase by 26 per cent from the budget that you were allocated a year ago. That is quite an increase. In cash terms, compared with the autumn budget revision figures for the current budget year, it is 13 per cent. How much of the £101 million that you are expected to get is ring fenced?

**Iain Munro:** It is £111 million.

**Stephen Kerr:** Oh, it is £111 million.

**Iain Munro:** Yes.

**Stephen Kerr:** I beg your pardon—I misread that. No, according to this, it is £101 million, but I take your word for it that it is £111 million.

**Iain Munro:** Yes, it is significant growth and I thank the Scottish Government for honouring the commitment from last year to further increase that for multiyear funding in particular.

All of the elements of the budget that we get from the Scottish Government are designated for specific purposes. We are heavily involved in shaping the way in which those funds are used, but there are essentially six things that we get funding from the Scottish Government to do, which I can run through if I can remember them off the top of my head. There is multiyear funding—

**Stephen Kerr:** Can you say what proportion of the £111 million goes with each of those headings?

**Iain Munro:** I will do that, if you give me two seconds.

These are all things that we will be publishing in our annual plan, so you will see the breakdown. Apologies, I have it here.

While I am flicking through my papers, I will say what I can remember. Do you have it, Alastair?

**Alastair Evans:** No, not to hand.

**Iain Munro:** There is £74 million for multiyear funding—

**Stephen Kerr:** Is that of the £110 million?

**Iain Munro:** £111 million.

**Stephen Kerr:** Sorry—£111 million. I keep getting the number wrong.

**Iain Munro:** I have found it. There is £10.9 million for screen—

**Stephen Kerr:** Is that ring fenced?

**Iain Munro:** Yes. Sorry, £11.25 million of the growth is for screen; the YMI is £9.785 million—forgive me, can I rewind. I have looked at the wrong column.

**Stephen Kerr:** That is okay.

**Iain Munro:** There is £74 million for multiyear funding; just short of £10 million for the YMI; £12 million for screen; £6 million for festivals; £4 million for the culture collective fund; and a nearly £5 million contribution towards our overhead. Those are the component parts of the £111 million.

**Stephen Kerr:** The ring-fenced funding is pretty much all accounted for, is it not?

**Iain Munro:** Yes.

**Stephen Kerr:** What does that mean for additional money that might go to independent artists, for example? Is that going up? I do not have the relative figures to compare.

**Iain Munro:** All our flexibility lies in our other income stream, which we get as a national lottery distributor. All our open access funding, including support for individual artists as well as project funding for organisations, targeted development work, international work, further money for screen, and the contribution to our overhead, comes from our national lottery funding. Of course, we help to shape those elements from the £111 million and we deliver on them, but there is limited flexibility within that. That is why we rely on our national lottery income to be able to address the other development needs in the role that we want to fulfil.

**Stephen Kerr:** So, there is not a lot of room for manoeuvre with the grant money, in general terms.

You will know that section 40 of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 says that ministers

“may not give directions so far as relating to artistic or cultural judgement in respect of the exercise of Creative Scotland’s functions under section 37”.

I have a straightforward question that is based on the budget information that was given to MSPs. Have you received any direction, whether that is general or specific, from ministers or officials that you believe comes close to artistic or cultural judgment? If so, how did you respond?

**Iain Munro:** No. It is well understood that there is a separation, given that we are an organisation that is at arm’s length from the Government. As I say, we understand that, for all intents and purposes, the funds are restricted, but we inform and influence the shape and are responsible and are accountable for their delivery. There is no Government direction, although the Government is kept informed about the delivery of the funds.

**Stephen Kerr:** The level 4 spreadsheet for the budget had some specific line items that would, I think, have suggested that there was some form of direction from the Scottish ministers; although the wording may have been clumsy. Are you familiar with what I am talking about?

**Iain Munro:** No, although I might have a sense of it.

**Stephen Kerr:** This is in relation to the Screen Scotland level 4 spreadsheet line. It said:

“To support growth of screen sector and reach goal of £1bn GVA by 2030”.

That was subsequently edited. The cabinet secretary was up front with the committee and said that officials had been concerned that the text against Screen Scotland funding lines might suggest that the Government is directing Screen Scotland how to deploy its grant-in-aid funding. Language can often reveal a lot. In your experience, are the section 40 provisions being adhered to? Have you have ever come across a situation in which you have had to respond to the Scottish ministers making an artistic or cultural judgment in relation to funding?

**Iain Munro:** That statement accords with the intent that we have set out in the Screen Scotland strategy. I do not interpret that as direction over artistic judgment. It is essentially saying that the Government is keen to support Screen Scotland strategy to deliver £1 billion net gross value added by the end of 2030-31. That is not crossing a line—it does not materially translate into the work that we do.

**Stephen Kerr:** What about the £500,000 for film houses in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen?

**Iain Munro:** There has been much debate about that, but it has not come up yet in our conversations with the Government.

**Stephen Kerr:** But you are aware that that is what it says in the level 4 spreadsheet line. It is quite directional regarding spending?

**Iain Munro:** Yes, but that is not our understanding of what is happening.

**Stephen Kerr:** Okay.

Moving on, the transparency issue that Jamie Halcro Johnston raised is well covered in the review—there is a lot of commentary about the lack of transparency. Can I ask you about the issue of transparency, consistency and fairness around funding decisions, which is on page 42 of the review? The review is very specific in its criticisms of the lack of transparency. You have had the report for a while. What concrete changes will you be making to funding decisions, of which there has been a lot of discussion in front of the committee? What specific changes will you make to meet the need for greater transparency, consistency and fairness of funding decisions?

**Iain Munro:** The report does not fully reflect the fact that, for many of the funds that we operate, external sector specialists are involved alongside us in making those decisions. There is a whole range of funds—the touring fund, the expo funds for festivals and so on—that involve those external panel members. We are accountable for the decisions, but we absolutely want to involve such specialists to give their view on what should be supported.

There is more that we can do to ensure that that is understood. The commentary particularly relates to the open funds, so we will be looking at that as we reform those funds, which is part of the work plan that we already have in train. Over the course of this year, we will be reflecting on the point about transparency in the review. We already have a lot of external input into decision making. That is published, and it is well understood who has been involved in those decisions. However, we will look at it more.

**Stephen Kerr:** Do you accept the review's conclusions on page 42, about transparency, consistency and fairness, as a valid critique of the current state of things?

**Iain Munro:** Yes, we understand them and we accept that we can do more to ensure that openness, transparency and fairness are evident and accountable.

**Stephen Kerr:** It is just that you mounted a pretty good defence of the status quo in response to my first question. I hope that other members of the committee might be interested to see what changes you make in order to respond to the review's observations and critiques. Specifically, on pages 45 and 42, it talks about panel membership and how transparency would be helped if you published who exactly was on the panels that are making those decisions. Is that something that you can do immediately?

09:45

**Iain Munro:** That is what I am referring to. The panels of decision makers often involve external experts from the sector, as well as partners and Creative Scotland staff. We already publish a lot of that. There is more to do to make that more prominent, particularly in relation to the open funds. As we redesign those, we will look at ensuring that that is more evident. I accept the point about a desire to see that, and we will ensure that we deliver against it.

**Stephen Kerr:** Obviously, the review landed in a place where you say that you are doing some of that, but that is not the impression that one would get from reading the review. It calls for some pretty fundamental transparency and I will be interested to see how you respond to that in practice. I hear what you are saying about what you currently do, but that is what you were doing when the review was conducted. The outcome of the review was a critique of that and it says that you can do a lot more.

**Iain Munro:** We understand and accept that. In addressing your question, I am just making sure that there is an understanding that we do some of that. I am not seeking to defend the status quo. As I said, this is about feedback to enable us to reflect on how we can continue to improve to address the point about transparency.

**Stephen Kerr:** You are now in receipt of £111 million of public money, so the implementation of the process and the feedback in relation to procedures is critical. Having commissioned the review, I hope that the Government and this committee, whatever shape it might take in the future, will have a close interest in seeing that something happens, rather than it just being another one of those reviews that end up being consigned to the pile of reviews that have been conducted by this Government and this Parliament, and nothing changes.

**Iain Munro:** That is not how we are approaching it.

**Stephen Kerr:** That is not your intent.

**Iain Munro:** No. From our answer to the convener's question, I hope that you understand that we embrace the review and that we want to respond to it proactively and positively, and for change to be evident incrementally and increasingly as we work through the recommendations. We take that particular point very seriously.

**Stephen Kerr:** You take on board the point about the capabilities of the leadership of Creative Scotland, because it was also quite pointed, was it not?

**Iain Munro:** Yes, absolutely, but our leadership has really good people. This is about ensuring that, as part of the way in which we can strengthen ourselves, we are taking care of the future by building on the current strengths of Creative Scotland and making sure that we are organised with the right people in the right way to get maximum impact.

Board recruitment, which will be progressing throughout the year, gives us an opportunity of contributing to that. We have an excellent board with different disciplines, but we have scope for up to five new board members to be appointed. However, just to be absolutely clear, it should be remembered that we are a public body and these are ministerial appointments that are run through the public appointments process.

**Stephen Kerr:** Indeed.

**Iain Munro:** We do not have—

**Stephen Kerr:** You do not have a final say.

**Iain Munro:** Yes, but through our chair's involvement in the process, we can feed in to ensure that we help to address part of the point that you just made.

**Stephen Kerr:** The point that I made about the issues that the review raised about leadership.

**Iain Munro:** Yes.

**Stephen Kerr:** We will keep a watching brief.

**Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** I want to go back to the convener's opening question about the disparity between local authority areas. The convener mentioned Clackmannanshire and West Dunbartonshire, which are noticeable, as those are two areas of the greatest deprivation in Scotland, but they received nothing at all in multiyear funding. I would be interested to know how that has developed over the 16 or 17 years since Creative Scotland was created. I probably do not need the specific detail, as that would be hard to recollect, but has there ever been a period of bounty for Clackmannanshire, for example, or has the situation been pretty consistent?

**Iain Munro:** To pick up on Mr Kerr's point about transparency, and as a reflection on the review, there is more data that we hold that we can and want to publish and that will enable an understanding of the picture, because multiyear funding is only a singular view. It is an important one, but it is only a singular view.

I will reflect on the use of multiyear funding and former equivalents of it, such as the funding for regularly funded organisations. Through the capacity building and development work that we do in places, the early iterations of multiyear

funding covered 18 local authorities with base locations of organisations. With the former RFO funding, that grew to 21 local authority base locations and now, with multiyear funding, we have 28 base locations of organisations. That illustrates the progression of work that is paying dividends, albeit that we all want to go faster, to enable organisations to build their capacity locally and to access funding routes.

We want to do more of that, and we are committed to doing more of it. Clackmannanshire is the area that we are focused on most significantly at the moment in addressing that. To again respond to Mr Kerr's earlier point, our development activity is born out of our national lottery funds, and there is a lot of community-based national lottery funding through small grants, such as those from the awards for all scheme, as well as the place partnerships, which are more strategic, and the open funds that support individual artists and organisations doing project activity in local areas. We want to build on that and get to a position of strength so that people in local areas can apply more to our funds than they can currently.

**Keith Brown:** I take it from that that you cannot give an account of the shape of Creative Scotland funding in Clackmannanshire. Was it in 2010 that Creative Scotland came into being?

**Iain Munro:** Yes.

**Keith Brown:** Can you give an impression of what the spend has been like over the past 16 years?

**Iain Munro:** Yes, we can. We have data and, as I say, we are keen to publish more of it. Members might be aware, in their constituency capacities, that we provide local area briefings. I am keen for us to do more of those, to enable us to paint more of the picture. Those are not just about funding; they are about the resources, networks and the key players and partnerships that exist in different areas. We monitor those very carefully. We can absolutely look back in the records and understand what that direction has been in different areas over time.

**Keith Brown:** It would be useful to get that information. If possible, it would also be good to get information for Stirling. I represent quite a chunk of Stirling and hope to represent a larger chunk of it after the election. It would be interesting to see what the pattern has been there. I see that the figure sits at around £12 per capita, which is still below the average, although it is an awful lot more than nothing at all, as we see in Clackmannanshire. I want to try to understand why that is. It is hard to judge until I get the information on how the different patterns have emerged.

You have said that you keep a close eye on the situation, but we are now 16 years into Creative Scotland, and its investment in Clackmannanshire, at least through multiyear funding, is zero. That is an area of substantial deprivation, so I find that hard to understand. It is no consolation to folk in Clackmannanshire to say that 28 other local authorities now receive funding. They are not receiving it, and their need is substantial.

**Alastair Evans:** It is important to note that the figures are for multiyear funding, and that Clackmannanshire and West Dunbartonshire receive funding through other routes. We can give you a note on the trajectory of that funding over the past 16 years. Across all our funds, Clackmannanshire's success rate for applications sits at below 40 per cent, which is at the lower end. As I said, it is an area in which, through the place partnership programme, we are working on doing development work with the local authority and others to build the soft infrastructure that is needed for people to feel confident that they can make compelling cases to us for funding.

Over time, we are seeing that start to happen. For some local authority areas, that process might then translate to an application for multiyear funding, which might be successful. However, a small number of local authorities are not there yet.

Stirling's journey is fascinating. As happened in other areas, including Paisley and, at one time, Dundee, the plans for the city of culture bid brought people together locally around the table. That built local energy around culture as something that can define and help to build the story of Stirling. Stirling has a good success rate across all the funds—68 per cent—which brings the area up to about £15 per head. The logic of that suggests that several smaller awards are being accessed. That might be through schemes such as awards for all, which, as Iain Munro said, we run with our national lottery partners.

The culture collective fund is another route that we have available, which involves working intensively and locally with artists who are based in communities. There are a lot more routes that are available than just the multiyear funding route, but we appreciate that it is important for local authorities to be seen to have access to the multiyear funding route as well.

**Keith Brown:** It is not just about being seen; the experience of the arts and culture sector in Clackmannanshire also concerns me.

You mentioned Stirling. I would have thought that Stirling would be relatively vibrant due to the creation of Creative Stirling and some of the activity that has been associated with that, but, at £12, the figure for Stirling is still well below the average for multiyear funding, which is £17. The

discrepancy in that chart is striking. You have said that you will provide a pattern over the past 16 years for Stirling and Clacks. In some ways, they are cheek by jowl and pretty hard to disentangle, but can you give us an idea of how many RFOs there are in those respective local authority areas?

**Iain Munro:** We will need to come back to you on that question, because I do not have that information to hand at the moment. We will be able to answer that for you when we respond to the point about the trajectory.

I hear the point that is being made. Multiyear funding and, previously, RFO funding were based on applications that were made to us and the responses that we were able to give. We are talking about how we work to build the capacity that is needed to get the applications to us, as well as the direct applications for project and individual funding that are made in an area. The funding is responsive, and we try to take a strategic overview. We are trying to build opportunities and future mechanisms for organisations to come to us for multiyear funding through things like the place partnership programme, the culture collective fund and our project-based work.

Multiyear funding is only one view, and I am not, by any means, saying that it is perfect. There is a lot more that we want to be able to do. However, a lot of that is about building capacity in local areas to enable there to be opportunities to come forward for funding.

**Keith Brown:** It is far from perfect—with regard to Clackmannanshire, it is as far from perfect as you can get. Given your comment that Creative Scotland is a responsive organisation, I say that it must do a lot more than respond; it must be a body that encourages applications. I could list the number of people in Clackmannanshire who no longer make applications to Creative Scotland because they have been beaten down over the years by defeats, and who feel that there is no point in doing that any more. That has had a big effect in a small local authority area.

Creative Scotland must surely have a bigger role to play than just waiting to see who makes an application or implying criticism of those who do not have the capacity to make an application. It has to be a bit more than that if Creative Scotland is to properly represent the whole of Scotland.

10:00

**Iain Munro:** Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying at all that it is a criticism. I am just reflecting on the way that the open access processes, such as multiyear funding, work.

We are working strategically with direct intervention into Clackmannanshire, for example,

through work such as our place partnerships, with funding and investment over an extended period of time. We engage with people in the local community, organisations and partners to understand what the needs of that area are and to present opportunities to those in that area to access the other funds that we operate. It is a combination of people coming to us and our absolutely going into areas to support, encourage and strengthen opportunities for them to enable applications to be made.

We would be very happy, through that place partnership work, to continue that dialogue. We take part in funding fairs around the country as part of presenting some of those opportunities. There is a combination of strategic work.

**Keith Brown:** Are there events in Clackmannanshire?

**Iain Munro:** I would need to double-check, but where they exist, yes, we absolutely take part.

The Clackmannanshire example is an interesting one, because we have identified it as a specific area that we want to work with. We have gone in with expertise and investment to unlock opportunities with local people, organisations and partners in order to build that confidence and capacity to access other funding that we can offer. We also want to strengthen local opportunities with local partners so that, when the place partnership itself comes to an end, there is an opportunity for it to continue in some way through the legacy of that work.

It is an immersive, very strategic programme that we can illustrate has worked well in other parts of the country, but it is only part of something. We are keen to do more, but there are resource limitations in all this. The areas of the country that deserve to have cultural opportunities are very much in our minds as we do the work that we do.

**Keith Brown:** You have, quite rightly, over the years, pushed and pushed for multiyear funding, because of the particular advantages of multiyear funding for organisations. For all the work that you said you have done, you have ended up in the situation in Clackmannanshire, as well as in three other local authority areas, where there is no multiyear funding.

Perhaps it is time to have a wee look at what has been going on and whether it is the right approach. Perhaps a different approach is needed for those authorities. North Lanarkshire is not much better—17p per head. Such a discrepancy should be a very urgent issue for Creative Scotland. I will leave it at that.

**The Convener:** The committee would be interested in where the workshops have taken place across Scotland.

You mentioned the pressures on local authorities in relation to culture budgets and losing expertise in those areas. Have you done any analysis on, or do you have a feel for, how working with a local authority that does its culture within the local authority area differs from dealing with, say, Glasgow Life or other cultural arm's-length external organisations?

**Iain Munro:** Many staff are engaged in different ways with people, organisations and local authorities across the country. We learn a lot from that, and we are keen to ensure—again, this is a point in the review—that the profile and presence of the work that we do in local authority areas is more prominent and more felt, and, notwithstanding capacity limitations, that we are able to properly ensure that that is consistent over time in different local authority areas.

We have done joint pieces of work with sportscotland and others that have been published in the form of research. That has helped to inform conversations with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which the cabinet secretary has also been in dialogue with, to ensure that the very particular needs of individual areas are understood in order to inform how we can best respond in those areas.

**Alastair Evans:** We have shared with you before, convener, the research that we published at the end of 2024. That is a look across mapping, in the sense of mapping the strategies that are in place and the funding that is available to culture and leisure services locally. That research gives a sense of where and the extent to which we feel there have been funding reductions. SPICe has also published research for you and its number is somewhere around 29 per cent. From our research, we think that it is more like 20 per cent, but there is certainly less funding available to culture and leisure services.

I have said before to the committee that one of our concerns is that there are fewer arts development officers to work with—effectively, those are people who work in communities with community arts organisations. There are other organisations in that space as well, and we work with many of them. Some of them are funded through multiyear funding and other routes. That is one thing that we have highlighted. Off the top of my head, from that research, I do not have a sense of whether you could break that number down into what the reduction has been for ALEOs or local authorities, but it was not a key issue in the work, and the research did not pick up a clear difference.

**The Convener:** We have run over the time that we thought this evidence session would take, so I will have to bring things to a close. Thank you, Mr Munro and Mr Evans, for your attendance this

morning. We will have a short break to allow for a change of witnesses.

10:06

*Meeting suspended.*

10:12

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** A warm welcome back. For our next evidence session on the draft budget 2026-27, we are joined by Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and, from the Scottish Government, Jamie MacDougall, deputy director, culture and historic environment; Iain Waller, team leader, Creative Scotland sponsorship; and Nastassja Beaton, team leader, national culture collections and capital projects.

Cabinet secretary, you will have seen the committee debate on the budget a couple of weeks ago, at which I expressed—I feel that it is the feeling of all the committee—our disappointment in the initial response to our budget report and the fact that we did not get that response until after close of business the night before the debate. We have since sought further information from you, but will you address why that initial response did not answer many of the questions that were raised by the committee?

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Convener, I would always want to be able to provide you with the information that you require, so I offer my heartfelt apologies if we have not been able to provide you with everything. In relation to that and in this evidence session, if there is anything that I or my colleagues cannot answer, I will want to provide the committee with all of that afterwards.

I understand that the usual timescale for the Scottish Government response to a committee's pre-budget inquiry report is within two weeks of the publication of the draft budget bill. The bill was published on 13 January, and my letter to the committee was issued on 20 January, which is well within the two-week deadline.

The level of information in the letter is very much in line with what has been provided in previous years: we set out what we will achieve through the draft up-coming budget. No issues had been raised in past years about the format or level of detail, but clearly you wanted to see more. That is absolutely fine, and we are happy to provide that detail. If there are any learnings to be taken on providing more information, we are happy to take them.

10:15

**The Convener:** Thank you—and I have to say that we also received a response from Creative Scotland that went into some detail on what we were looking for.

I want to turn to the additional arts and culture funding that has been assigned to Creative Scotland, specifically the multiyear funding programme. In our earlier evidence session, we were looking at the per capita spend across Scotland from that funding, and the SPICe paper for today's meeting shows quite a discrepancy across Scotland. For example, per capita funding from multiyear-funded projects is £52.47 in Edinburgh, while four local authorities are receiving nothing, and North Lanarkshire is receiving 17p per capita. The ones at the bottom of the table are those of highest multiple deprivation in Scotland.

Does it concern you that multiyear funding has not touched the whole of Scotland and that its first awards have not made a bigger impact?

**Angus Robertson:** The first thing to say is that, with the introduction of multiyear-funded organisations, we have been able to reach a significantly larger number of organisations and venues than would have been the case in the past. The number of local authority areas with such organisations or venues has gone up from 21 to 27. However, as you have just noted, that means that, in a small number of local authorities, there are venues or organisations that have either not been successful in their applications or not made applications at all.

Does it concern me that there are a small number of local authorities that have no multiyear-funded organisations or venues? Yes, it does. I should point out that in other areas where we seek to support culture and the arts—and I would point to the youth music initiative as a good example—funding is disbursed to all of Scotland's 32 local authority areas. However, the difference between the two funding streams and programmes is that one is disbursed through education and the educational infrastructure that exists in all local authorities. That is not the case with multiyear-funded organisations; that funding stream depends on organisations applying for money.

One thing that really caught my attention in the review of Creative Scotland was the opportunity to do more using data—on, for example, which grants are being disbursed, where they are being disbursed, and who they are or are not reaching—to inform exactly that kind of understanding. In the small number of local authority areas where there are no multiyear-funded venues or organisations, is it because that none applied, or did some apply

and were not successful? If they were not successful, why were they not successful?

That is actually a responsibility for Creative Scotland, not for me, and there are very strict rules around the role of Government and the role of Creative Scotland in that regard. Nevertheless, I am sure that everybody will aspire to seeing cultural organisations and venues being supported right across the country.

It is also important to bear in mind that the multiyear funding programme is not static, as has been evidenced by the additional number of organisations and venues that have gone from a supported status—in other words, they did not make it through the initial process—to being supported by Creative Scotland, and now to becoming multiyear-funded organisations.

Perhaps members have examples that they can highlight; I do not know, but I would be very interested to hear them. Indeed, I have been asked in the chamber before about why there are no multiyear-funded organisations in certain areas—I have in my memory Willie Rennie asking me about North East Fife. I asked him to provide me with information about any organisations in North East Fife that have sought to be funded but have not been successful. We need to get a better handle on the issues. Is it the fact that organisations have been unsuccessful? In which case, what can be done to support them?

Support has been available. I have in my memory 13 additional organisations or venues that went through that phase. If there are others that are worthy of support and development, particularly if they are in areas where there are not multiyear-funded organisations, that should definitely be considered.

It is also fair to put on the record that many multiyear-funded organisations operate outside the local authority area in which they are headquartered. An organisation in Glasgow, Edinburgh or rural parts of Scotland will also be touring, performing, hiring and so on in other parts of the country, including in those local authority areas that do not currently have a multiyear-funded organisation.

It is also worth having a look at the reach of the creative communities programme and the culture collective, which are two other funding streams that involve projects in different parts of the country and local authority areas.

There is a picture that needs to be understood and I agree that, when more organisations are being supported in this way than has ever been the case, in more local authorities than has ever been the case, we should better understand what we can do next to ensure that success in the

overwhelming majority of local authority areas can be enjoyed in all local authority areas.

**The Convener:** My clerks have given me a point of clarification that you might want to take back with you, cabinet secretary. It is not something that I want to dwell on today. Ministers are required to respond to pre-budget reports within five sitting days of the publication of the budget. I do not think that we got it in that timescale, but I will leave that there for now.

**Angus Robertson:** Understood.

**The Convener:** My final question is about the national performing companies that have received standstill funding this year. This committee cannot speak highly enough of them and their contribution to the arts and culture.

The Royal Scottish National Orchestra recently did an economic impact report showing its vital contribution to the economy in Scotland, but it says that, as a result of the standstill funding, it might have to move from permanent orchestra members to temporary contracts, which it feels will have a dramatic impact on the orchestra's ability to perform at the level that it is currently at. I therefore want to explore why the standstill funding was given this time.

**Angus Robertson:** I join you and other members in paying tribute to the national performing companies, but I point to the fact that there has been a shared uplift of £1 million, which follows an uplift of £700,000 in the previous year. That is a 9.4 per cent uplift since 2023-24.

There is an awareness of the scale of the support for the national performing companies because it is significant. It is almost £25 million shared across the five companies, with Scottish Opera receiving £8.64 million, followed by Scottish Ballet on £4.86 million, the National Theatre of Scotland on £4.53 million, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra on £4.398 million and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra on £2.187 million. The level of support for the national performing companies is significant, and I understand their ambition to do more and not to have to make any decisions that do not match their ambitions for the years ahead.

As I have said to them already, we are now effectively 70 per cent through delivering the additional £100 million in the culture space, and the most significant part of that 70 per cent increase has gone towards the delivery of multiyear funding through Creative Scotland. That is where this year's £20 million increase has been focused. Were that not the case, multiyear funding could not be delivered. It is important to understand that the priority has been to ensure that that foundational intervention in Scotland's

culture sector—successfully delivered through Creative Scotland—is paid for.

That puts us in a position in which we are able to think about the remaining 30 per cent of the £100 million uplift, which is £30 million. Had I been able to deliver the £100 million uplift, which is the biggest increase in culture funding outside Covid since the onset of devolution, in one financial year, we would not be having the discussion that we are having today. Our position reflects that we have been able to increase incrementally, year on year, towards that £100 million.

I am keen to deliver an uplift in spending for our national performing companies—I have said that to them and to this committee. I have also said that I wish to explore providing multiyear funding, which I keenly support, to the national performing companies. Multiyear funding does not only deliver financial certainty; it also allows cultural organisations to get on with what they wish to deliver creatively, rather than spending their time, year on year, on annual budget rounds. It is a distraction from what they want to achieve, and it also means that they cannot open up potential new income streams. One of the exciting areas that our national performing companies are exploring is how to be imaginative and make more money. What the RSNO is doing in the film sector is a really good example.

I have made it clear to the national performing companies that we are in dialogue about how we can best support them with additional funding—we will deliver this year's budget and then think about the allocation of the final £30 million of the £100 million uplift. We want to understand how best they can be supported as part of that.

I want to deliver additional funding to the national performing companies, and I understand that they are disappointed that that has not happened this year. I wish that I was able to deliver the £100 million increase in a single year, but that was never a realistic prospect or one that we committed to. We are delivering the £100 million increase in the timeframe that we set out, and we have already done so with the Creative Scotland multiyear funding allocation. I am very focused on ensuring that, as part of that final stage of allocation, we include the national performing companies.

**The Convener:** Thank you, cabinet secretary. I will bring in members to ask questions.

**Keith Brown:** You rightly mentioned the huge uplift in culture funding in Scotland, not least as it compares to England and Wales. We have all supported that. You also mentioned the extent to which you are focused on multiyear funding, but that is utterly irrelevant in places such as

Clackmannanshire, which receives no multiyear funding.

In the previous session, we had a little hint about why Creative Scotland believes that to be the case. It implied that it was down to those areas, because they cannot get their act together and make applications, which is an explanation that I find completely unacceptable. I hope that Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government will consider that because, although I understand the constraints on the Government when it comes to specific applications, it cannot be acceptable for those areas to get no funding whatsoever. More applications are being granted and more money is being given to organisations outwith Scotland from that funding, than to four local authority areas in Scotland.

**Angus Robertson:** I agree with Mr Brown that we should aspire to have funded organisations and venues in every single local government area. I want to better understand why some parts of the country have more supported organisations and venues than others, especially when some local authorities have none, and others are in single digits. For me, that is one of the big takeaways from the Creative Scotland review, which pointed to information that can inform us all—the committee included—as to why that is the case in different local authority areas.

10:30

Mr Brown, you will have a much better idea than I do about the lie of the land. Did venues and organisations in Clackmannanshire apply—yes or no? Did they put in unsuccessful applications, and if so, what is happening with those applications and were they potentially viable? If they were potentially viable but for some reason failed to pass the initial round of adjudication, what has been done to help and support those venues and organisations?

As I mentioned, such a development phase was undertaken by Creative Scotland as part of the initial round. A range of venues and organisations that were not successful were deemed worthy of support to help them into a position where they would be successful. Therefore, it is absolutely right to ask why Clackmannanshire and the three other local authority areas were not successful. We should now have the data that can help explain the reasons for that. If it is because there is a lack of infrastructure but the application is on the cusp of being successful, what support do we need to provide to ensure that there is that level of cultural support in every local authority area?

I agree with Mr Brown on the premise of his question. I agree that both the Government and Creative Scotland need to look at the issue. It is an

area of the Creative Scotland report that the Government has not formally responded to yet. However, I have already signalled to the committee that it is an area where data can be used. Creative Scotland will have a lot of data, for example, on who all the applicants were; where the applications were from; what projects had been supported in the past; and whether, in Clackmannanshire, there are arts workers, venues or organisations that apply for support through other funding streams and might aspire to become multiyear-funded organisations. If there are not, we should be asking why not and what can be done about it. That is one part of the equation.

The different attitudes of our enterprise companies towards the culture and arts sector were signalled to me, through the Creative Scotland review, as another area that we need to think about. There is a significant difference between the approach of Highlands and Islands Enterprise or South of Scotland Enterprise and that of Scottish Enterprise to the organisations and venues in the areas that they cover. I am not suggesting that Scottish Enterprise must become a vehicle for cultural funding. However, I think that we all understand that culture in itself has intrinsic value but that it is also a part of the economy, so why is it treated as a priority by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise, but not by Scottish Enterprise, which covers Clackmannanshire? Questions need to be asked of a number of organisations that have responsibility in this area. The Scottish Government has a role in that through its conversations with Creative Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and others.

I am—and I am sure the committee would also be—keen to see the data in order to understand where there might be an underprovision of culture and the arts and what can be done about it. To my mind, doing nothing is not an option.

**Keith Brown:** Having previously been responsible for the enterprise companies, I will say that there is a difference in their remits. I am not arguing with your point, cabinet secretary. There might be a role for Scottish Enterprise to view cultural initiatives more broadly, that is, as also being economic initiatives. I understand that point. However, from memory, HIE was set up with a specific remit to do that, and I am not sure that Scottish Enterprise was.

However, it goes to the point that we made. The committee requested information about cross-portfolio working in relation to that, but precious little detail has come back to us about any initiative—there is a little bit, but not much.

To go back to the point about Clackmannanshire, it is not down to individual

members to provide such information. I could cite a number of people who have grown weary of making applications to Creative Scotland and no longer do it. In a small place such as Clackmannanshire, it is very difficult to maintain an infrastructure without at least periodic success.

My point is that we are not in year zero. Creative Scotland has existed for 16 years. What does it know? What has it done in relation to Clackmannanshire? That area's next-door neighbour, Stirling, has been relatively successful, but is still well below average in what it gets. What is Creative Scotland doing?

I do not know what the Scottish Government can do, but it should be seized of the need to do something urgently in that area. I have been talking about Clackmannanshire but, for example, West Dunbartonshire probably also comes at the bottom of most Scottish deprivation indices and is getting nothing at all. This is a pressing and urgent problem and the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland especially should show a bit more urgency in dealing with it. Culture is important and is no less important to areas of huge deprivation.

I am keen to hear about that. I have asked Creative Scotland to provide a pattern of its grants and support over the 16 years of its existence, for both Stirling and Clackmannanshire, and it has undertaken to do that. However, it would be nice to see it taking a joined-up approach with the Scottish Government to considering how the issue can best be addressed urgently.

**Angus Robertson:** Again, I agree with Mr Brown. It is good to hear that Creative Scotland will produce those statistics, and I think that more data can be provided beyond that specific 16-year period. We need more information. What then follows is to ask why that situation is so, and to understand whether it is because the institutional memories of organisations are, unfortunately, marked by a lack of success—although that is not a reason not to support cultural organisations and venues.

In fairness to Creative Scotland, it did exactly that with a number of organisations that did not make the initial multiyear-funding round. The fact that there is experience of helping organisations and venues to get to a place at which they can apply successfully is a sign that there is a willingness to do it. I do not think that the situation is because there is no willingness to intervene and make it happen. However, Mr Brown is absolutely right to put a marker down to say that, if there is nothing or next to nothing in four local authority areas, we need to understand why, what will happen as a result and when, within a reasonable timescale, people in Clackmannanshire, West

Dunbartonshire and wherever else can have confidence that local organisations or venues will be funded through those streams.

However, as I have mentioned, there are other funding streams through which organisations are supported, and one has to look across the piece at all of those. I wanted to satisfy myself on whether that had been the case in relation to Culture Collective and the creative communities programme. However, if Mr Brown were to raise that point, I would have to say to him that I am not aware that any projects in Clackmannanshire had been funded through those routes.

Having that overview points to the fact that there is no support through multiyear funding, Culture Collective or the creative communities programme. To me, that looks like the beginnings of a flashing light to ask, “why not”?

**The Convener:** On the situation in North Lanarkshire, I was glad that there was a successful effort to save Cumbernauld theatre. In my constituency of Motherwell and Wishaw, we have lost our concert hall and theatre—which, for years, was absolutely precious to those living in the area—because of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete in the roof space. It comes down to capital. I do not want to rehash the capital issues at the moment but, as you know, that issue is having a dramatic impact on venues across the country.

**Angus Robertson:** It is.

I will briefly use Cumbernauld as an example. It is a very strong example of funding not being in place for an organisation or venue and the need to understand the impact on the county. It was put to me very strongly by the constituency member, Jamie Hepburn, that the impact of the closure of Cumbernauld theatre would be that much of North Lanarkshire would not have any provision of that sort, which is much the same as what Mr Brown said about Clackmannanshire. We were very seized of that.

However, as the committee would expect, due diligence needs to take place. There needs to be confidence that organisations or venues that are making applications have plans for how to trade and that they are able to sustain themselves. Those are very important considerations in the process, because it is public money. One has to have confidence that the venues or organisations will be able to deliver what they are applying for.

However, situation in Cumbernauld is a very current case in point about the importance of appreciating the consequences that a closure or a lack of funding for venues or an organisation have for particular parts of the country. That is why significant efforts were made to support a future for

Cumbernauld theatre, and that is exactly what happened. I have given the commitment to the committee, and it is my wish, that we have exactly the same focus on parts of the country where there is an absence of multiyear-funded organisations or venues.

**Stephen Kerr:** Cabinet secretary, you rightly paid tribute to the national performing companies, but you seem reluctant to acknowledge the consequence of what the convener rather generously called a standstill budget. In fact, the amount of money that has been given to the national performing companies has been at a standstill since 2008.

I did not catch all the numbers that you recited during an earlier answer, but I have the 2026-27 numbers for Scottish Opera. For 2026-27, it will get £8.6 million. In 2008, it got £8.5 million. This year’s number for RSNO is £4.2 million. In 2008, it was £4.3 million. By any measurement, that is a dramatic cut over time in the money that the national performing companies are receiving.

I know that you appreciate all the aspects of the world-class standard of performance that we get from our national companies, so surely you recognise the damage that has been done in recent years, and which is now going to be further inflicted on the national performing companies, particularly in the light of what the convener disclosed in relation to changes in the nature of the performers’ contracts. I do not think that, philosophically and politically, you would agree with those contract changes. What are you doing to the national performing companies through the approach that you are taking to their funding?

**Angus Robertson:** I hope that Mr Kerr will acknowledge that any cabinet secretary or portfolio goes through the budget process seeking to draw down as much as is possible. As I have already said to the committee, it would have been an absolute dream to be able to deliver a £100 million increase in the culture and arts sector in one year. That would have been tremendous, and it would mean that we would not be having this conversation.

However, we have been able to deliver year-on-year increases to the culture and arts sector. As I hope Mr Kerr will appreciate, introducing multiyear funding through Creative Scotland, for the record number of organisations that it has, is a foundational change, which has a very big ticket price. The challenge is to continue to deliver the funding for more than a year, because we have not been able to do that before. That would presume that a Parliament would vote for it and that, if people wanted me to redirect funding from one part of the culture budget to another, they would outline what they think is not worthy of support.

As I have pointed out to the committee, the biggest single item that we are delivering in the increase in this year's culture budget is the part that is absolutely necessary to deliver multiyear funding. If we were to redirect resources towards the national performing companies in this financial year, it would most likely be at the cost of multiyear funding, and I am not prepared to do that.

10:45

Mr Kerr asked whether I acknowledge that that causes challenges to the national performing companies, and that they may have to make decisions that they consider to be disadvantageous and not do things such as touring and reaching different parts of the country that they would want to do if they had the resources in place. I accept all of that, because I am in regular dialogue with them. I understand what they do, and I am a big supporter of it. I want to be able to give them the resources that they require, to do what they want to do, to reach their full potential as quickly as possible.

**Stephen Kerr:** I want you to acknowledge your decisions in relation to that funding. It is a continuation of the cash amount, which has stayed the same since 2008. In fact, it went backwards for a number of years and is now catching up, almost, with 2008. I know that you take a lot of interest in world-class cultural output from our country, but your decisions are leading to damage to those esteemed national performing companies.

Before you respond to that comment, can you tell us how much money is in the international touring fund for 2026-27, or has it been closed? I accept that you may need to ask an official.

**Angus Robertson:** Colleagues will look that number up as I begin to answer your question, Mr Kerr, then somebody will row in and give me a number.

First, on the challenge for the national performing companies, in the wider context of what we are trying to do to transform culture funding across the piece, I have said before that it is a bit like turning a tanker. It takes time. I agree with Mr Kerr: I would love to be able to do it all in a go, but it is just not possible to do that. If anybody were to say to me, "Here's the route that we could use to make that happen quicker", I would be all ears. I was called on to deliver a £20 million increase in one recent year—not that long ago—because that was what was required. I was pleased to be able to deliver more than £30 million that year, which has helped to deliver the change that we have seen through multiyear funding.

I acknowledge to Mr Kerr, as I have acknowledged to the national performing companies, that they have not yet seen the

increase that they, and I, would wish. Our national performing companies have not seen the introduction of multiyear funding that they, and I, would want to see. However, I give Mr Kerr a direct assurance that that is absolutely at the top of my list of priorities as we move towards the delivery of the last 30 per cent of our committed increase in culture funding. I will be delighted to come back to the committee when we are doing so.

**Stephen Kerr:** I point out to those who might be watching, listening or reading the proceedings of this committee that you are responsible for a budget of £416 million. I would have thought, given your personal interest, which I acknowledge, that you might somehow have been able to be more generous and break the cycle that has lasted almost the entirety of the period that the Scottish National Party has been in government. During that time, the national performing companies have basically been shortchanged, even in the context of base increases, such as the employer national insurance contribution increases, which we both bemoan. The money that they have had in increases last year and this year does not even cover that. That is the reality.

Do you have an answer to my earlier question?

**Angus Robertson:** I do have an answer: it is £471,000.

Going back to the point about delivering increases in culture funding, I am committed to doing that, and we are doing it. The national performing companies are at the top of my list.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am making a special plea, for reasons that I think you and I might agree on: fundamentally, I am talking about the standard of excellence that the national performing companies give us, which is inspirational to the whole sector. Those companies therefore play a leadership role in the sector.

**Angus Robertson:** I agree.

**Stephen Kerr:** Cutting off or reducing that funding, which is effectively what we are doing, is to the detriment of the global reputation of Scotland's cultural sector, in my opinion.

I know that we are running out of time, but I wish to ask the cabinet secretary this.

**The Convener:** Please be quick, Mr Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr:** There are lots of questions that I would like to ask. Like last week, I will probably have to write a letter.

I wanted to talk to you, cabinet secretary, about the level 4 spreadsheet for the budget, and specifically about the narratives against the numbers. I also wanted to check and confirm with you that the amounts of money mentioned at level

4 that I queried in the chamber back on 14 January are correct. I ask you to confirm that there will be an additional £100,000 for the Scottish Library and Information Council, £500,000 for film houses in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, £1.2 million for something called an expo fund—perhaps you can say something about that briefly—and £600,000 for the proposed new museum of empire, slavery, colonialism and migration. Can you confirm that funding, along with the funding that is identified in the spreadsheet for Screen Scotland?

I ask that because you rightly pointed out in a letter to the convener, in response to the point of order that I made, that you were at risk of breaking legal provisions in the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 by becoming involved in giving direction in relation to artistic or cultural judgment through the money that you are awarding.

Who wrote the narratives?

**Angus Robertson:** Responsibility for what appears from the Government rests with ministers. However, as I have acknowledged in communication to the committee, and having heard Mr Kerr's point of order, those numbers—the numbers that he mentions now—are correct. I am happy to confirm the others, but I think that the committee has the full list. I expected those numbers to be published as part of the budget process, and they were. Edits were made not to the numbers but in terms of the presentation—

**Stephen Kerr:** The narrative.

**Angus Robertson:** Yes. Those edits were undertaken by civil servants. I was unaware of the necessity for the edits to take place. They took place, and the numbers and the detail were restored.

Would I have wished that that was not necessary? Yes, because members such as Mr Kerr quite rightly ask why. That was done for an administrative reason, however; it is nothing to do with the allocation of resources through the other arts budget line, which totals just over £16 million.

On the question of artistic and cultural judgment, it is not the place for me, as cabinet secretary, to involve myself in the work of Creative Scotland and its responsibility around the funding of organisations. It is for Creative Scotland to make such decisions—and that is what it does.

However, the Scottish Government quite properly undertakes a range of other directly funded interventions that impact on all sorts of cultural areas. There is a balancing act. One gets advice from officials on what is required and then considers whether one feels that the balance is right to ensure that we are covering all the areas

that we want to cover. Then, no doubt, there will be a view that there is too much in one area or not enough somewhere else but—

**Stephen Kerr:** I just want to make a point, convener. Given the time and the need for brevity, I will conclude with this. Because of the way that the narratives are written, there was a clear risk, which you acknowledge, cabinet secretary, of the situation being interpreted in the way that I have suggested, in relation to section 40 of the 2010 act. It is the fact that you mentioned that section that led me to ask those questions.

We all know that we are in the business of words, and that the way that we talk and write about things often betrays the way that we think about things. I will leave it at this, but I wanted to test, as I have done, whether the section 40 legal requirement not to give directions has, even subconsciously, been breached in the way that the budget is presented. I hear what the cabinet secretary says, but I want to put this on the record. There is a clear legal responsibility on the cabinet secretary not to get to that level of specificity, but there is a risk of the narrative in the level 4 worksheet leading one to presume that that happened.

**Angus Robertson:** Forgive me, convener, but, with your permission, I want to answer part of Mr Kerr's question that I did not answer. He asked about the festivals expo fund, which supports Scottish artists to showcase their work and develop international connections through Scottish festivals. Creative Scotland has distributed more than £30 million through the festivals expo fund. Since its inception in 2007, that has been to festivals in Edinburgh and, from 2018 onwards, to festivals in Glasgow.

**Patrick Harvie:** Good morning. I want to ask about three separate issues, so I will try to be quite tight on each one. We have just had Creative Scotland with us, and I and another member asked about the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow. You will obviously be very aware—in fact, according to press reports, you were aware some days before the news broke—that the CCA has gone into liquidation.

I put it to Iain Munro that, although there will obviously be questions about the CCA as an organisation and how things got to where they are, that must not be a barrier to bringing the building back into use as a cultural facility for Glasgow and giving it a new lease of life. Mr Munro seemed to agree with that. I would argue that parachuting in management consultants and the like has not been very successful, and that an organisation that is rooted in the cultural and artistic community and its values is far more likely to navigate some of the pressures, including some of the external

tensions that have been problematic in recent times for the CCA.

I asked Mr Munro whether he would explore with the board the option of a worker-led approach that involves reaching out to staff who have just lost their jobs and exploring their interest and capacity in taking something forward and being directly involved in a new organisation that would bring the building back to life. As Creative Scotland is both the funder and the landlord, it is in a very strong position to help to make that happen. I ask for your support in at least exploring the option of a more worker-led future for the CCA to consider whether that would be more successful in navigating some of the pressures that have been problematic in recent years.

**Angus Robertson:** I am in favour of Creative Scotland exploring all options to make sure that the CCA reopens as soon as is realistically possible. It is a matter of public record that it has had financial and governance challenges.

However, Creative Scotland and authorities in Glasgow have made significant efforts to see that what is a very important artistic institution—for Glasgow, Scotland and beyond—continues. They will have to find a way forward. I am sure that Creative Scotland will be listening to this evidence session, or that its staff will read the *Official Report* of it, because this is a matter for Creative Scotland to take forward—we know all the provisos about it being arm's length and all of that. I am certain that it will want to explore all the options to best understand what the viable future is for that very valued cultural institution.

11:00

**Patrick Harvie:** As a Government that believes in fair work and recognises the challenges and difficulties of creating a fair work culture in the creative industries, surely you think that there is a strong argument for saying that there ought to be some prominent role for the people who have just lost their jobs, not only in order to do justice for them but for the sake of retaining their skills and experience. At least there should be a reaching out to them to see whether that can be made possible.

**Angus Robertson:** Anything that will help the viability and sustainability of an organisation such as the Centre for Contemporary Arts should be considered, and none of the experience that there is in such an important institution should be lost. As we are talking about people's jobs, Mr Harvie, I am sure that you would agree with me on that, and given the precarious nature of many people's work in the freelance sector in culture and the arts, I agree that that has to be a priority.

However, given the history around governance issues and finance, if one seeks the reopening of

the Centre for Contemporary Arts as a priority, one must look at all the options to ensure that it will be viable. Despite the priorities that Mr Harvie has raised with regard to the very talented people who have worked at the CCA, it is also the case that, at the end of the process, the organisation must be financially viable. I am sure that everybody at Creative Scotland who is taking this forward will be seized of that fact. I say again, as I did in my initial answer, that I would be very keen for them to explore all options, because it is in everybody's interests that the venue reopens and that the talented people who work there are able to continue what they do. I wish to be as supportive as I can be in that endeavour.

**Patrick Harvie:** I will follow up on some of the points regarding the national performance companies that were raised already. I do not think that there is any need for defensiveness on the issue. I think that everybody who is taking it seriously recognises that the £100 million was never going to be delivered in a single tranche and that, even for a portfolio with a rising budget, the demands rise every bit as quickly such that there are more ways in which that budget could be used than the money that is available. There will always be pressures, even with a rising budget.

To me, the big issue is the lack of clarity about the trajectory for the future. I would love to see a funding increase for the companies in the current year, but, even if that is not possible, my understanding is that greater clarity about what is coming in the years ahead will help to avoid them being forced into some very damaging decisions. I put that argument to you in the chamber when I asked whether you would

"offer some concrete clarity about the funding trajectory" and you said:

"I can give Mr Harvie that assurance. Those conversations have already been had with the national performing companies ... I agree that they would wish to have as much clarity about that as possible, and that is what I want to give them."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2026; c 12.]

Last week, we heard recognition of that discussion from Steven Roth when he said:

"I am glad that"

Mr Harvie

"received that assurance from the cabinet secretary, because it gives us a bit of assurance, too."—[*Official Report*, *Constitution, Europe and External Affairs Committee*, 29 January 2026; c 38.]

Therefore, I ask you specifically what assurance have you been able to give to the NPCs about what they will receive in the coming years? If the current Government is returned and continues with the funding trajectory that is set out in the spending review, what level of increase can they expect?

How can they build that into their financial plans for the year ahead?

**Angus Robertson:** Mr Harvie is absolutely right to recount that the conversations in which I am involved with the national performing companies have already taken place. In fairness, however, my officials are also having on-going discussions with the companies.

It is not just about clarity on the direction of travel. I have made very clear my expectations and where my priorities lie in relation to the increase in next year's budget to the national performing companies, and I have made clear that I am a very keen supporter of multiyear funding. On both those counts, I want to give as much clarity as I can that that is the direction of travel.

I cannot make a commitment today about exact numbers and the exact format, but I have said to the national performing companies that that has to emerge from a process in which they are involved. We are at the beginning of that process involving the different companies, which have different needs, interests, concerns and expectations.

Yes, there is the general question of what the baseline is and what that means year on year—in a changing environment, incidentally, in which some of our national performing companies have become very much more commercially successful. Nevertheless, we need an ordered process through which we can understand how support can be best allocated to the national performing companies, and that process has begun.

**Patrick Harvie:** Are you confident that that process will enable them to avoid making immediate changes of the kind that we have been warned about, such as moving to a freelance model instead of a salaried model?

**Angus Robertson:** I very much hope that that is the case. This type of discussion is exactly the same as discussions that we have had in recent years as a result of the pressures elsewhere in the culture sector. For example, the national collections, national museums and others have perhaps not had the allocation that they require in year, but they need assurances—in the case of some organisations, around staff and staff pay—to be able to report to board members, trustees and people who have fiduciary responsibilities.

As I am sure that Mr Harvie will appreciate, it is not simple for the Government to commit to something in a forward budgetary process. For example, with multiyear funding, we were able to confirm what we were going to deliver in the first year of multiyear funding, and what the intention was in year 2. That was very much about giving people a degree of assurance, in as much as a commitment can be given for the next year. Mr

Harvie pointed to an additional reality that we need to recognise, which is that we have an election coming up.

I can speak only for my party in relation to what commitments might be given, but I encourage all colleagues in all political parties, in their manifestos, to give the same degree of commitment that my party will provide. That will help to give companies maximum clarity and assurance, so that no decisions that are avoidable need be taken by those companies or by anybody else.

**Patrick Harvie:** Thank you. I am sure that you will want to keep the committee updated as those conversations progress.

**Angus Robertson:** Absolutely.

**Patrick Harvie:** I have one final question—I will try to make it brief. It is on the external affairs part of your portfolio.

The committee is obviously not unanimous on the Scottish Government's external affairs engagement; there are those who seem to question whether it should happen at all. However, I think that there is a clear majority in Parliament for the backing of a strong and assertive approach to external affairs by the Scottish Government.

I would like to understand what is going on with the budget, not just in 2026-27 but in the spending review as well. It is going up from the £26.7 million that was budgeted for—it is slightly lower in the outturn—to £34.5 million in the budget for 2026-27. However, the spending review shows a decline for each of the subsequent two years. The spending review is a bit of a first draft—it is not a fixed, committed budget, and it might change over the next couple of years. However, can you give us an understanding of why there is an increase in one year, followed by a couple of decreases?

**Angus Robertson:** I fear that I will have to write to Mr Harvie about the spending review period. In the external affairs budget, there are some minor changes that relate to property and lease arrangements as part of the network. That can cause in-year changes to what is required when there is a roll-over of a lease, for example, which means that one has to pay something in the first year but not the same amount in the second year. My memory is that that is one of the contributing factors to some of the changes to the external affairs budget. Mr Harvie will be aware that the Scottish Government has a very strong presence in London, and facilities in Brussels are not on platform—as it is known—because they are part of the UK embassy set-up, which is also the case in the other places where the network is located. I will write to the convener, so that Mr Harvie and the

rest of the committee have some details about that.

**Patrick Harvie:** That would be appreciated. We are in a changing world, and Scotland faces changing pressures, opportunities and threats. It is clear that, in future years, the Scottish Government should retain a strong commitment not only to things such as international development aid but to ensuring that Scotland's voice is heard on the world stage.

**Angus Robertson:** I agree with—

**The Convener:** I will move on, because three other members are still waiting to come in. I am sure that you can address those points in your letter to the committee.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I will be quick and I would be grateful for brief answers. I will follow up on some of the areas that Patrick Harvie covered. In giving evidence to the committee last week, Steven Roth talked about "managing decline". He warned that the current funding settlement means that Scottish Ballet will potentially only operate in the central belt in the future.

Lucy Casot, from Museums Galleries Scotland, said:

"It is really challenging and pretty dire in some cases."

I asked her whether museums were focused on literally just

"trying to keep the lights on and the doors open as far as possible",

and whether she saw any change in the situation. She said:

"If there is change, it has been going in the wrong direction and it is getting worse."—[Official Report, *Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 29 January 2023; c 41-42.]

There is not a huge amount of confidence in the sector. Do you recognise that picture, given the concerns of some pretty senior people?

**Angus Robertson:** I have no reason to disbelieve the concerns that colleagues in national performing companies and elsewhere have expressed, and that was the case in other parts of the culture sector in preceding years. That is why the Government has committed to the biggest increase in culture funding since the beginning of devolution and outwith Covid recovery. I want to be able to deliver resources to the national performing companies and others, and we have been doing so for the museums and galleries. For example, the museums fund, which has been introduced and very warmly welcomed by the sector, is already making a difference. Interventions are in place in some of the areas that Mr Halcro Johnston referred to.

I acknowledge—I have said this to other members of the committee—that the national performing companies look forward to an increase in their funding for reasons that I totally understand, and I am committed to helping to deliver that increase.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Do you recognise that the confidence that such an increase will be delivered—you have highlighted that it will be over a longer period—is somewhat impacted by the fact that promises that were made in the past were occasionally followed by sectoral budget cuts and later reinstatements? How has that approach impacted on confidence?

**Angus Robertson:** The fact that we have delivered 70 per cent—£70 million in total—of the £100 million increase should give people confidence that we are delivering on the aspirations of the culture sector. However, that in itself is only the revenue side of the picture, as I am sure that Mr Halcro Johnston would acknowledge.

One can look at other specific projects that are a major boost to confidence in the sector. Look at what is happening with the Dunard centre, the art works project and the King's theatre and at what has already been delivered for the Citizens Theatre. The Scottish Government has made significant intervention in a load of areas that are giving people confidence and providing amazing venues. The art works project, for example, will be absolutely groundbreaking in relation to how Scotland's national treasures are housed and opened to the public. Those things are happening.

Do I acknowledge that we are not there yet? Have we delivered 100 per cent of the £100 million increase that we committed to? No, we are not there yet, but we are 70 per cent of the way there, and with the encouragement of the likes of the national performing companies, members of this committee and others to make sure that we get there, we will do so.

11:15

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I do not know whether you saw Iain Munro's evidence earlier, but he highlighted the youth music initiative, which is one of the areas that you highlighted, and we talked about the impact of the squeeze on local government. He talked about a fragility in the local government side of cultural funding and the fact that there are fewer cultural strategies in local government than there were before.

Iain Munro also highlighted, with particular regard to MYF, that the squeeze on local government budgets is deeply worrying and could be undermining the progress of the youth music initiative. Do you have concerns that, outwith your

own budget, squeezes on local government budgets are impacting on the cultural sector? How will you work across Government to ensure that those cuts do not impact as badly as some in the sector are concerned about?

**Angus Robertson:** The first thing to say is to assure Mr Halcro Johnston that work with local government is indeed on-going. Not that long ago, I met the culture conveners of local authorities—the people who are responsible for the provision of culture by local authorities, of all parties and none—and there was a shared commitment to maintaining cultural infrastructure, which is delivered currently—

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** What concerns did they raise with you?

**Angus Robertson:** Among other things, that funding is important for local government. I was able to point to the increased funding that is being delivered for local authorities. We have to work in partnership with local authorities to ensure that the entirety of the country has a provision of cultural service, which goes back to the initial question by Mr Brown.

Mr Halcro Johnston began his questioning with the youth music initiative and that is a good example of cultural intervention by the Scottish Government leading to delivery in every single local government area. I also draw Mr Halcro Johnston's attention to the new youth arts open fund, which is based on the YMI model but is for other art forms. Not only do we have a model that the Scottish Government is delivering right across the country; we are trying to broaden its range to include other art forms.

Is there an on-going conversation with local authorities and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about making sure that provision is retained right across the country? Yes, there is, and that will continue, but I am happy to confirm that that conversation is a positive one, with a commitment on both sides that we want to deliver across Scotland.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Given the evidence that we received from one of your SNP colleagues who was representing COSLA about the impact of the settlement, I am not sure that they necessarily agree with that positivity.

My final question is on Creative Scotland. We spoke to its representatives earlier about how there is no transformation plan, and they spoke about the action that needs to happen. Are you confident that Creative Scotland has taken on board the review's recommendations and that it is working to address the issues with transparency, strategic priorities and so on? Are you confident that you can see what is going on in that

organisation and that you are happy with its direction?

**Angus Robertson:** The review is relatively new to the desks of colleagues at Creative Scotland, as it is to me. I have already had conversations with Creative Scotland and received assurances about the approach that it will take to the review and its proposals. It will be working on it, as the Scottish Government is working on what we can do. It is not all on Creative Scotland—most of it is, but some of it is on the Scottish Government.

The question is whether I have confidence that colleagues in Creative Scotland are taking these things seriously. I take everybody at their word with regard to the assurances that I have had. They are able to embrace the opportunity that the change offers them. Now that multiyear funding is up and running, there is the exciting prospect that significant staff resource will be freed up in an organisation that has previously been geared towards an annual process.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** This is my last question. How will you oversee and benchmark the process, and how will you publish information on those benchmarks and that oversight?

**Angus Robertson:** That will be done in partnership with Creative Scotland. On how we can report back, I will need to take a view on our response to the review. As I said, I have received the review positively, so that is a strong signal to the committee that we will try to do as much of what we have been advised to do as we can. I look forward to seeing Creative Scotland's detailed feedback on those points—

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** When would you expect to see that detailed feedback?

**Angus Robertson:** I do not have a timeline in front of me, but it should not take much longer. The review has already concluded, so I definitely hope that I can share my views before the election—before we get into purdah. That is my personal hope. If there is any reason why that is not possible, I will let the member and the committee know. I agree that momentum is important as part of the process.

**The Convener:** I will bring in Neil Bibby.

**Neil Bibby:** I will raise the issue of the national performing companies again, because I think that there is a great deal of cross-party support for them, and concern about the potential impact that the funding situation will have on them.

Cabinet secretary, there was quite a lot of spin in your statements earlier about the funding situation. Mr Kerr made a comparison with the situation in 2012. In this year's budget, a real-terms cut is proposed for Scottish Opera, the

National Theatre of Scotland, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. Would you accept that that is the case? You did not mention it earlier, but four out of the five national performing companies are facing a real-terms cut.

**Angus Robertson:** I acknowledge that there has not been a substantive increase in the funding for the national performing companies—

**Neil Bibby:** Can we just cut to the chase? You said that there has been no “substantive increase”—I know that that is your spin. There has been a real-terms cut to four out of five of those organisations. We do not need a lengthy answer. Do you accept that?

**Angus Robertson:** I already outlined to the committee the numbers and the amount of financial support, and where there have been increases. I have already said that—

**Neil Bibby:** But you did not say that there was a real-terms cut, cabinet secretary—

**Angus Robertson:** I am not going to have words put in my mouth. I have said to the committee what the numbers are.

**Neil Bibby:** Four out of the five organisations have had a real-terms cut—

**Angus Robertson:** I think that Mr Bibby was here at the start of the evidence session when I confirmed the numbers to the committee—

**Neil Bibby:** Yes, and they represent a real-terms cut.

**Angus Robertson:** I also took the opportunity to say that, in delivering the remainder of the £30 million uplift, which we are delivering in excess of the calls from those from Opposition parties, including Mr Bibby, my focus—

**Neil Bibby:** Do the numbers represent a real-terms cut?

**Angus Robertson:** My focus in the next budgetary cycle is the national performing companies.

**Neil Bibby:** Do the numbers represent a real-terms cut for four out of the five organisations this coming year—yes or no?

**Angus Robertson:** I have already answered the question—

**The Convener:** My Bibby, I do not think that you are going to get a different answer.

**Angus Robertson:** I have provided the detailed numbers, and that includes increases for the national performing companies. Is it everything that they, or I, would wish it to be? No. However, am I focused, in the budgetary cycle, on providing

an increase for the national performing companies? Yes, I am. Is it under discussion with the companies? Yes, it is. Am I trying to do that in a multiyear funded context? Yes, I am.

**Neil Bibby:** Last week, Steven Roth of Scottish Ballet said that your comments in Parliament around increased funding did not reflect the reality. The reality is that four out of the five organisations are facing a real-terms cut, and Scottish Ballet is surviving on static funding with escalating costs.

Obviously there is a great deal of support for the national performing companies and what they do. You said that you pay tribute to them, but I think that they want you to pay them cash, not just tribute.

You said that you are keen to provide them with an uplift, which I welcome. You said that you are looking at multiyear funding. I welcome that, as I am sure that colleagues across the committee would, but it is not happening this year. This budget settlement is done—there will be no revisions to the budget given to the national performing companies this year. Is that correct?

**Angus Robertson:** The Government does not have any plans, and it has not received any detailed proposals from any political party, including the Scottish Labour Party, for there to be a change to the budgetary process. If Mr Bibby wishes to confirm a detailed proposal, I would be happy to look at it. If Mr Bibby wants to send me his workings as to where he would wish to see cuts elsewhere in the culture budget and how it could be reallocated, I await that with keen interest.

**Neil Bibby:** On that—

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** He can bring out the fag packet—

**Neil Bibby:** I will bring out the budget, George.

The budget line for external affairs advice and policy is increasing by 31 per cent, from £5.4 million to £7.1 million, and £7.1 million is more than all the national performing companies get except for Scottish Opera. There has been a significant increase in external affairs advice and policy.

You said earlier, cabinet secretary, that the national performing companies are top of your list, but the amount of money that you are spending on external affairs advice and policy has gone up by 31 per cent, and that suggests that that is top of your list, not the national performing companies.

**Angus Robertson:** I think that this is the subject of correspondence—

**Neil Bibby:** Do you really need to spend £7.1 million on that?

**Angus Robertson:** This is the subject of correspondence that I have had with Mr Bibby—

**Neil Bibby:** Yes—it is.

**Angus Robertson:** I think that Mr Bibby did not understand where the funding was going to, but now he does know.

If Mr Bibby is saying that we should be cutting provision on population services and migration—something that matters to the Scottish economy—or if he is asking for us to cut civil service capacity to deal with climate change issues, it would be very interesting to see the detail of that. What Mr Bibby is drawing attention to is a change in civil service accounting from one portfolio to another. It is standard practice, as you will be aware, convener. For example, events moved out of the culture portfolio area, and the two particular areas that I have mentioned moved into the accounting provision for the portfolio. To suggest that it is some sort of bloated administrative area that should not have money spent on it will be new to people who care about issues related to policy on population, migration or, indeed, climate change. If Mr Bibby wants to write to me with the detail of how he proposes to deal with the ending of that important provision for the Scottish Government, I would very much look forward to seeing that, rather than soundbites or a press release.

**Neil Bibby:** It is interesting that you have talked about the need to protect civil service capacity. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, your colleague in the Cabinet, has talked about reducing the head count of Scottish Government officials.

Can I take it from your answer that external affairs, advice and policy will be totally protected in terms of civil service head count numbers? I just want to be clear on that. The finance secretary has suggested that the overall numbers are going down. You are saying that that budget cannot be touched at all.

**Angus Robertson:** We have already gone through a process, as we do right across Government, in trying to be as efficient and as effective as we can be without cutting core areas of responsibility in which the Government has to have capacity, because we have a responsibility to deliver on those things. We have already made such decisions, including in this portfolio area.

If members and their political parties would wish there to be changes in the process, I point out that we are going through a budget process. If Mr Bibby or other colleagues want there to be changes, they should account for those and they should bring proposals to the chamber. Let us talk about that. Let us see the workings. Let us see what areas other political parties do not want to go forward as part of the process. I am here to give evidence about the Scottish Government's proposals in the budgetary process, and those can of course be

amended. Let us see the proposals and then have a vote on them.

I am confident that we have managed to reach a balanced solution in my portfolio area that is delivering on the responsibilities that I have and that, in the most significant part, is delivering the biggest single increase in culture and arts spending in Scotland since devolution and outwith Covid. I want to ensure that we complete the process, and I have acknowledged that the national performing companies are at the top of my list as we move towards the completion of that process.

If other members wish to have different priorities, please make the proposals. Let us see their workings, and we can then take a view on them in the Parliament.

**Neil Bibby:** Cabinet secretary—

**The Convener:** Mr Bibby, I am sorry but this will be your last chance. I want to bring Mr Adam in.

**George Adam:** I have only one question.

**The Convener:** Mr Bibby, do you have any more questions?

**Neil Bibby:** I have many more questions, but I will take the opportunity to ask one final question. Cabinet secretary, you repeated that the national performing companies are at the top of your list, but it does not look that way at the moment. You also challenged other parties to provide their workings and details. You said that the national performing companies can expect to get additional money if and when you fulfil your commitment to the extra £100 million. How much of that money can they expect? If they are at the top of your list, how much money can they expect from that?

**Angus Robertson:** I am delighted that Mr Bibby is predicting a Scottish National Party victory in the Scottish—

**Neil Bibby:** I said “if”.

**The Convener:** You are verging on political point scoring, Mr Bibby.

**Neil Bibby:** The *Official Report* will show that.

**The Convener:** I think that you have made your point, Mr Bibby. I am sorry, but I am going to move to Mr Adam.

**Angus Robertson:** Thanks for the question.

**The Convener:** I am sorry, Mr Adam. You wanted to ask a supplementary earlier, but I forgot to come to you, and then Mr Harvie moved on.

**George Adam:** Mr Bibby saw an oncoming truck and walked right in front of it.

I do not claim to be a culture vulture. I am a big daft boy fae Feegie in Paisley. When I heard about

the national performing companies coming along, I thought that there was a balance to be struck. I had dealings with the RSNO many years ago, when I worked for a car manufacturer that sponsored it and it was doing a lot of movie work at the time. There is a balance to be struck between the money that companies get from the Scottish Government and the external money that they get.

We heard last week from Scottish Ballet that it could end up doing “The Nutcracker” all the time. I suppose that Scottish Opera would be doing “Madama Butterfly” all the time. The Scottish proms are probably one of the most successful things that the RSNO does. Surely, those are entry points for people to get involved in the work of various organisations and, at the same time, they can be quite profitable.

My concern is that, although things are challenging for everyone out there and you have been able to prioritise the companies in the budget, surely there is a two-way street. Last week, in the evidence, I never heard any ideas about what the companies can do differently. Much like the Labour Party, Mr Bibby is not putting forward any budget ideas.

There is a commercial aspect here. I find it quite difficult when someone says that they will be doing “The Nutcracker” every single time, because that is probably what many of my constituents would want to go and see. It is an entry point for them.

**Angus Robertson:** Mr Adam is right to talk about the wider benefits that the national performing companies provide and to say that they have the commercial opportunity to grow. We have not addressed the wider benefits of culture and the arts and the national performing companies play a leading role in that. Look at what they do in education and outreach, for example. All of them are best in class in what they are aspiring to and in what they are already delivering.

I will go through a couple of examples, just so I can acknowledge them on the record: Scottish Ballet launching itself as a national centre for dance health, Scottish Opera providing long Covid resources, the RSNO’s schools programme, and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra’s residency in Craigmillar—we are talking about communities that might not traditionally feel that they have a connection with the national performing companies or what they perform. I should also mention the National Trust for Scotland and its schools programme.

Our national performing companies do a lot to reach out educationally, culturally, societally and in the health context. Last night, Mr Harvie and I were at a meeting about the benefit of the intervention of our cultural sector on the health of the nation.

There was a contribution from an academic in London who spoke about the environmental impact that that has in terms of people feeling a bit better, as well as about metrics that demonstrate the impact of culture. Our national performing companies play a leading role in that. That is one of the reasons why I am so seized of the importance of delivering the resources, so that they are able not just to do that but to do more.

**The Convener:** Cabinet secretary, I am really sorry, but we are over time and people need to get to the chamber, so I am going to draw things to a close. You have offered to give considerable extra information to the committee. We look forward to receiving that. If members have any other requests for information regarding today’s session, can they please feed them through the clerks, because we do not have time for a private session this morning?

On that note, I close the meeting.

*Meeting closed at 11:34.*

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