



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 20 January 2022

Session 6



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Thursday 20 January 2022

CONTENTS

BUDGET SCRUTINY 2022-23	Col. 1
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	28

CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
2nd Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

*Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)

*Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

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

Bettina Sizeland (Scottish Government)

Scott Wightman (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 20 January 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Budget Scrutiny 2022-23

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and a very warm welcome to the second meeting of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee in 2022.

Our first agenda item today is budget scrutiny. On 9 December 2021, the Scottish Government published the Scottish budget for 2022-23. This morning, we will take evidence on the budget in relation to recommendations made in the committee's pre-budget scrutiny report. I welcome to the committee Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture; Scott Wightman, the Scottish Government's director for external affairs; and Bettina Sizeland, deputy director of culture and historic environment division. I invite the cabinet secretary to make a brief opening statement.

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): A belated happy new year to you, convener, and to all other committee members. It is a pleasure to appear before the committee for what I think is the fourth time since my appointment. On this occasion, it is to support your work in scrutinising the Government's proposed budget for my portfolio area for 2022-23.

At £370.5 million, the budget for constitution, external affairs and culture represents less than 0.7 per cent of the Scottish Government's budget, and it is excellent value for money. Committee members are well aware of the fiscal pressures resulting from Covid and the impacts of Brexit. Despite those, my budget will increase by £21.7 million over the next financial year, which will enable us to fully fund, among other things, the 2022 census, at £3.3 million.

At this early stage in the evidence session, I put on record my appreciation to my cabinet secretary colleague Kate Forbes, as well as the First Minister and other Cabinet colleagues, who, during the recent budgetary process, were extremely supportive of protecting the position of culture, in particular, in the budget round. At the beginning, it might have seemed a real challenge to protect our spending on culture, but I am content that we have managed to secure an

excellent deal for the area of constitution, external affairs and culture, which we will go into in greater detail with your questions.

I have some headline figures for the committee's benefit. We are investing £277 million in culture and heritage in 2022-23. That includes an increase of £13.7 million in funding to ensure that Historic Environment Scotland can continue to protect and care for our heritage and communities. We continue to support Scotland's regularly funded organisations, which includes providing £6.6 million in additional funding to enable Creative Scotland to maintain support for the regular funding programme—and that is in the face of a significant decline in lottery receipts. We are also providing £9.25 million for Screen Scotland, which is an increase of £700,000.

During the next financial year, we will expand our network of international offices by opening a new Scottish Government office in Copenhagen, which will increase opportunities for policy exchange and Scotland's economic and cultural visibility in the Nordic region. We will support European Union citizens to ensure that those who have chosen to make Scotland their home can do so. We will invest £18.2 million in major events and themed years, with £9 million to enable Scotland to host the first-ever cycling world championships in 2023.

The pre-budget scrutiny from the committee highlighted the importance of a strong cultural recovery from the pandemic. I am pleased to be able to confirm to the committee that we are directing our spend to protect and maintain existing cultural provision, including continued support for Scotland's regularly funded organisations, the Scottish Library and Information Council, Museums Galleries Scotland and five national performing companies.

We will increase the international development fund by £1.5 million, as a first step towards the commitment in the programme for government to increase the fund from £10 million to £15 million during the parliamentary session. That is happening at a time when the United Kingdom Government has slashed its international development budget by a third.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy and I are acutely conscious of the impact that Covid has had on the culture and major events sector. We are committing an additional £65 million this financial year in support of the culture and events sector, due to the impact of physical distancing and caps on attendance. That is despite the continuing uncertainty over whether the UK Treasury will transfer the outstanding culture consequentials, as it should.

The budget for 2022-23 will enable us to continue to support the sector's recovery. The budgets for major events and external affairs will also contribute to recovery from Covid, the transition to net zero and delivering on our commitment that Scotland will be a good global citizen.

In the letter that I wrote to the convener and committee members, I outlined a lot of the headline numbers, and those are the numbers in the committee's papers. Since then, the £65 million funding support package has emerged. I am happy to go into greater detail on that, although I think that committee members are aware of the breakdown of the funds. I will end on this point, but it is important to put on record that £31.5 million in additional support is going to cultural businesses, organisations, venues and independent cinema support; £10 million is going to trader freelancers; £19.8 million is going to support the events sector; £2 million is going to the national performing companies—that is the touring fund repurposed for Christmas losses—and £1.7 million is going to museums, galleries and heritage. All of that is over and above the previously announced commitments.

I am sure that colleagues will want to know about the disbursement of the funds and the speed at which it is all happening, and I am happy to follow up with greater detail. Where I do not have the information to hand, I will turn to Bettina Sizeland and Scott Wightman, who I am delighted to be joined by. If, between the three of us, we are not in a position to answer immediately, we will of course be happy to reply in writing to any specific questions.

The Convener: Thank you, cabinet secretary. It certainly seems a happier new year now that we know that indoor events are due to continue in Scotland from next week and we can see the culture sector starting to recover a little.

I will open with a question about the mainstreaming of culture, which was a main thrust of our pre-budget report. In your letter to the committee before Christmas, you said that you were starting "a series of conversations" with your Cabinet colleagues to

"identify areas of joint collaboration ... to inform ... the multi-year Resource Spending Review".

Can you update us on that and on any outcomes that might be forthcoming?

Angus Robertson: It is a timely question, as I have been spending quite a lot of my time on that in recent weeks. The background to that is the First Minister's commitment, in the culture strategy for Scotland, that culture is a cross-Government priority. All ministerial portfolios in the Scottish Government have to contribute towards it, which is

something that your predecessor committee in 2019, also drew attention to.

In November, I proposed a recovery strategy to the Scottish Government Cabinet. At the heart of that was an agreement across Government, by all cabinet secretaries, that we should work together to mainstream the importance of culture in our recovery from Covid. To make good on that principle and commitment, during the past week or so, I have met with the cabinet secretaries for finance and the economy, net zero, health and social care, and education and skills, together with officials from our directorates, to begin the process. We discussed, ahead of the spending review later this year, how we can work together to deliver joined-up cross-Government responses to support culture and recovery from the pandemic in a way that accelerates progress against all the national outcomes.

I should say that we are being very mindful that cultural recovery is not top down. It is not simply for the Scottish Government to come up with ideas that will trickle down—that is not the approach that we are taking. Yesterday, for example, I was involved in discussions about the partnership between local government and Government agencies that have responsibility in the culture scene, such as Creative Scotland and Screen Scotland. The voluntary sector is also critical, particularly in areas such as health. We have initiated those conversations.

In addition to that work, the national partnership for culture, which has existed for some time, brings in practitioners who are on the front line in the cultural world. The partnership has been meeting throughout the pandemic, and we look forward to having its recommendations early this year to inform the process that the convener has drawn attention to.

It will be important for us to do everything that we can to prioritise culture as playing a role in all that Government does. As we try to recover from the pandemic, we must marshal all our resources, material and otherwise—they are not all about money, although money is important—to make sure that we help the culture and arts scene recover and bounce back strongly. I know that every member of the committee is massively committed to the cultural sector, and it will take a team effort to help us to do that work. As I mentioned in my previous evidence to the committee, the Government is beginning that process and now that, fingers crossed, we are coming out from underneath the Covid cloud, we will be able to accelerate a lot of that in the months ahead.

The Convener: We move to questions from committee members. I invite Dr Allan to begin.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Welcome back to the committee, cabinet secretary. In the past, the committee has taken an interest in and has spoken to you about the issue of mainstreaming cultural spend. Will you say more about what you have done to interest other parts of Government and the public sector in the importance of culture? For example, I am thinking about the national health service and town planning. Have you been able to advance the argument that, in the longer term, spending on culture saves in many other areas?

Angus Robertson: The good news is that I have yet to come across anybody who does not appreciate the opportunity that we have in that area. I have not picked up any institutional or intellectual resistance to the notion that culture, in its broadest sense, can have a transformative impact in different parts of the work of Government. In my conversations with cabinet secretary colleagues, they have been the first to volunteer that notion, whether it is about prescribing in the national health service, not only for physical health but, importantly, mental health, or the value that culture in its broadest sense can bring to education. For example, we know how much weight the Scottish Government has put on supporting music in hard-to-reach communities, and Sistema Scotland, which has just had increased funding from the Scottish Government, is able to reach into those communities.

It is really encouraging that we are not doing that from a standing start or a position of having to persuade anybody that it is worth doing. However, we are having to do something that might not come easily to Governments anywhere, which is to ask how we make the different bits of Government work optimally together and bring everybody together. I mentioned in my previous answer to the convener the other important actors out there who are already doing great things. Some amazing things are happening at local government level, and great things are happening in the voluntary sector.

I mentioned in a previous evidence session that we are looking at where the best examples are, because it is not just Scotland that is thinking about doing all those things—it has already been thought about in other countries. I am keen to learn how other countries are delivering. Some might be further down the track or further behind, and I am really keen for us to work together. One of my priorities for this year is to use the convening power of events such as the culture summit that is taking place in Scotland this year and the ability to meet face to face rather than just in online conversations with colleagues.

A few weeks ago, I spoke to my French opposite number, the French culture minister,

about the culture recovery. It is about finding out about best practice in other places that are also doing it, and then getting on with it. A lot of that work is happening already, but we need to scale it up and deliver it across Government. Everything that I have heard so far from colleagues tells me that they are enthusiastic about the approach. It is just a case of harnessing the best ideas and delivering as widely as possible so that the benefits are felt across Scotland.

09:45

Dr Allan: You mentioned the challenges that the culture sector has faced throughout Covid. Have those challenges changed? At an earlier stage, the committee would have been hearing about how to shift much of the culture sector online and do things differently. Now, perhaps, the demand is about how to move things back offline and get people back to events and live performances. Does the budget have to be agile enough to cope with the situation and, if so, how does it manage the changing priorities around culture as we come through Covid?

Angus Robertson: We have shown ourselves to be agile. The most immediate example is our response to the latest variant, omicron, and its impact on the cultural and arts sector in Scotland. That came at possibly the worst time of year, because December is an important month for many cultural and arts organisations.

The Scottish Government worked extremely hard to find resources on the required scale. Along with Creative Scotland, we had to be agile enough to work out how to disburse the funds as quickly as possible, and with the due diligence that we need to have, and that everybody would expect, when disbursing taxpayers' money on such a scale. We are in the process of doing that, which gives me the opportunity to put on record my appreciation. A lot of the work happened during the festive period, when civil servants in the Scottish Government and officials in Creative Scotland were burning the midnight oil. They have continued to do so to ensure that our creative sector, including the events and venues, are able to remain solvent, do not lose out and are not without support, so that, as things begin to open back up, they are in a position to reopen.

We have different funding pots to try to ensure that we reach the whole of the affected part of the cultural sector in Scotland. We have the cancellation fund of £31.5 million for cultural organisations, which is opening for applications on 26 January. The guidelines for the fund were published yesterday. If anyone, whether on an organisational or a personal level, is having immediate solvency issues, Creative Scotland is prioritising them.

We were responsive to concerns in the cultural community about the position of freelancers, many of whom do not make a lot of money. A significant number will have lost out as a result of the public health safeguards that were initiated over the festive period. The fund for freelancers opened on 6 January and, as of close of play yesterday, there had been 1,728 applications totalling £2.95 million. It might interest members to know that the majority of those applications—more than 60 per cent—are from music freelancers. So far, Creative Scotland has paid out just over £1 million relating to 602 of the applications received. That underlines the speed with which one has tried to allocate the funding as soon as it has been made available.

In addition, £19.8 million has been made available to the events sector. EventScotland will deal directly with the relevant businesses—we know who they are due to previous funding challenges. Also, the national performing companies are receiving £2 million, and museums and galleries are receiving £1.7 million.

Dr Allan asked about the ability to be responsive. The Scottish Government has been extremely responsive. We have an excellent collaborative relationship with the creative and arts sector, and we have been meeting all the time to discuss its needs, interests, concerns and expectations, and how those can be delivered on as quickly as possible.

As Dr Allan says, it is curious that we previously sought to support arts and culture in getting online and embracing the new technologies to make their art available for as many people as possible, while we are now yearning to get back to theatres, galleries and cinemas. We are just having to go with the circumstances that we find ourselves in.

We have a slight dichotomy. We are emerging from a period of asking people to act responsibly in relation to the pandemic into a period of trying to give people confidence to go back to public spaces. One challenge that we have in the weeks and months ahead will be in helping people to have the confidence to go back to theatres, cinemas and gigs—you name it—but I am confident, knowing what I have heard from people involved in the sector, and they are very alive to that. If anybody needs any encouragement, let us please do what we can to encourage people to attend events, so that those sectors can bounce back from the pandemic.

Dr Allan: You mentioned that one of the challenges that you face has been to establish the UK Government's intentions on consequential in the area. Will you say a bit more about that and how it is affecting what you are doing?

Angus Robertson: I can answer that on two levels. First, we keep on asking the UK

Government, "Where are the consequential?" I am not entirely sure what the rationale is in the Treasury or Whitehall for not being clear or delivering on what is supposed to be delivered on. We will continue to press that point and to encourage those who have any influence over the Treasury to do so, too. In the meantime, we have had to get on with finding the resources to deal with the scale of the challenge that we face.

We have a twin-track approach. One part is to try and get the Treasury to deliver on its consequential. Secondly, we are just having to do what we can within the limited powers of devolution, and that is exactly what we have done. I do not know whether your committee or others will ever take evidence from UK Government ministers who have responsibility for consequential, but I would be delighted to learn why it takes months and months to get any clarity whatever on what is happening. I would like to hear the answer to that; I have not heard it yet.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): This year's budget remains pretty challenging for local government, and we know the reasons why that is the case. It is difficult to see how councils will not be considering how to make savings in areas of discretionary spend. I hope that those savings do not fall in the culture sector, but there is a risk that they will. To what extent have you discussed that with Shona Robison and Ben Macpherson?

The flip side of the budget—the good news—is that it will result in increased funding for local government, particularly in areas such as health, social care and education. Do you see any immediate opportunities in the next year to use that increased budget to mainstream some of the excellent work that cultural organisations do to support health, mental health and wellbeing, for example, or will the increase in the budget be allocated to other priorities and not be immediately available for cultural organisations that do important work on wellbeing?

Angus Robertson: Your question underlines both the opportunity and the challenge of getting that right, because a number of actors are involved. In December, if memory serves me correctly, my colleague Jenny Gilruth held meetings with local government colleagues on cultural questions. In partnership with colleagues in local government and the voluntary sector, we will develop the plans that the Government is discussing. I do not want to prejudice that.

I have yet to meet people in local government who wish for the cultural sector in their part of Scotland to do badly, or who do not understand the advantages that culture can bring for the services that, in many cases, councils provide. It is true to say that there are nuances and differences

between local authorities in different parts of the country. That opens up the question of local democracy and local priorities versus a centralised and top-down direction on priorities. That is why I am keen to make sure that we have as much buy-in for, and common ownership of, what we are doing.

Yes, money, planning, frameworks, priorities and so on are very important. However, I draw attention to the myriad third sector organisations that, in many ways, will be on the front line, particularly when it comes to the point that you have raised—I know that you have raised it in previous meetings, Mr Ruskell, and that it is important to you. I imagine that much of the prescribing element will involve recommendations for people to take part in services that are provided by voluntary organisations, not by local government, the Scottish Government or anybody else. The services will be provided, at a community level, by local groups that do all kinds of things that would help people with mental health challenges and so on, if they were able to take part.

Again, I do not want to prejudge what will happen, but by working together with umbrella organisations for the voluntary sector, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and any local government services or voluntary organisations that have a particular locus or experience in the matter, we will be able to build an approach that gets maximum value.

This is happening at a time of cultural change. How do we make sure that there is early adoption of such services as pathways to treatment? I do not know how long that will take. It will be new for many of the people who will be prescribing the services. We want to be able to give them maximum assurance and reassurance that the services that they refer people to will have the beneficial advantages that we think they will have.

I will finish where I started: I have yet to have a conversation with anybody, at any level, who gives me the feeling that they are not keen to try to make it work.

Mark Ruskell: Everybody knows that what you have said is a good idea, but the issue is how to pin down such funding in long-term core budgets so that it does not necessarily need to come from discretionary spend, with which councils are struggling. That is what I am interested in.

To what extent is the national partnership for culture looking in depth at that type of funding? I notice that NHS 24 is represented on the partnership, and I am sure that that is welcome, but where is the discussion with health and social care partnerships or with COSLA about nailing down the matter, to ensure that, when the

Government is prepared to increase investment in councils—under very difficult circumstances; I understand that—by providing what we could say is ring-fenced funding, the value of that investment is shared with the cultural sector so that it is able to deliver on those objectives? We always think that that is a great idea, but it feels as though we do not know how it will work in terms of core funding.

10:00

Angus Robertson: You have put your finger on an area in which either we will get things right and will succeed or we will not, in which case we will be back here in a year or five years talking about how we are not quite there yet. I cannot prejudge that, and I do not want to, but I acknowledge entirely that the point that you make is at the heart of the ability to deliver across Scotland.

If there is a danger, it is that some councils, after setting their priorities, might decide that such services are not a priority for them. We might then find that there are excellent pathways and the prescribing of such services in some parts of the country, but not in others. That would be a great shame.

Having said that, I think that, when people see that such services represent best practice and that they fit within budgets, they will realise the value of them. If they do not do that already, they will be persuaded that they should be getting on with it. There should be a mixture of pull and push, and carrot and stick—although I do not want to put “stick” up in lights, because I think that it is such a good idea and that, if we work in partnership with the organisations that you and I have identified, that process will be able to begin to take place. By keeping us all on our toes, as the committee will do, you will make sure that the discussions about strategies, frameworks and policies lead to delivery on the ground, so that people have the benefit of the things that we know can benefit their lives.

Mark Ruskell: Okay—here’s hoping.

I have a couple of specific questions on the budget. One is about Historic Environment Scotland, which obviously has challenges because of the reduction in the number of visits, although it is to be hoped that it will recover. Are there any projections for how it will recover? Perhaps a crystal ball is required.

My second question is about the opening of the Copenhagen office, which you mentioned in your introductory remarks. How is that progressing? There is a budget allocation for that for next year, so can we expect the office to be opened this year? Are there any details that you can share at this point?

Angus Robertson: I will start with Historic Environment Scotland, and I give Scott Wightman a heads-up that I will ask him to add to my contribution about the Copenhagen office, as he and I were talking yesterday about how things are progressing with that. I will say what I have to say about it, and he will add more detail.

In the budget, we are providing £70.1 million for Historic Environment Scotland, which is an increase of £14.2 million on the current financial year. Some £60.6 million of that funding is resource allocation, £3 million is for depreciation and £6.5 million is for capital funding. I think that most committee members are aware of the reason why that uplift has been required, although we should not take it for granted, because at one stage we were looking at the potential of budgets being squeezed. However, we managed to secure an uplift for Historic Environment Scotland's budget because of the drastic reduction in its commercial income as a result of the pandemic. In essence, over many periods in the past few years, we have not been able to go out, so we have not been able to visit the properties for which Historic Environment Scotland is responsible, so it has not been getting that income.

You asked whether I have a crystal ball. I have a crystal ball that tells me what the Scottish Government funding will be, but I do not have one that tells me how the public will respond to the opportunity to visit facilities after they reopen. I am keen that we do all that we can do, which is to encourage people to support cultural organisations in the broadest of senses—but specifically organisations such as Historic Environment Scotland that have been exceptionally challenged.

I use the platform of the committee to appeal to anybody who is interested in culture and heritage to please sign up and visit such sites. When you have the opportunity on weekends or days off, take the family. By paying to visit sites, we will be doing everything that we can to help Historic Environment Scotland to find its feet again. I do not have a crystal ball, and I cannot make accurate predictions on that. It will take time. We will do the best that we can to help Historic Environment Scotland to recover.

We are setting up an office in Copenhagen in spring 2022, so that is a new budget line for the next financial year. We have an indicative budget of £598,000, which includes a contribution of £148,000 towards corporate running costs. Once staff have been appointed and the office is open, we will be clearer on the full-year running costs that are required for that location.

I am hugely encouraged by the idea of having an office in Copenhagen. Having a direct link to northern Europe is a great thing. As I have said to the committee before, we can learn great things

from Denmark, in particular in relation to public service broadcasting and its screen and television sector. One of my hopes is that the office in Copenhagen will help us in our transformation of film and production in Scotland.

Scotland house in Copenhagen will open this year, and we have allocated budget for it. Scott Wightman might want to add to what I have said.

Scott Wightman (Scottish Government): I have one additional point. We are in the process of appointing the head of the office; the recruitment exercise is under way and should be completed shortly. I expect that we will be in a position to finalise the appointment very soon.

Mark Ruskell: Excellent. Thank you.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Good morning, cabinet secretary. I want to focus on the challenge of recovery, which you have mentioned a couple of times, and the importance of enabling people to access culture, which is necessary to health and wellbeing and as part of who we are. As you mentioned in your opening remarks, one of the challenges of recovery was not being able to have events at Christmas and Hogmanay, which for many venues and cultural organisations are a key income generator. Can you say a bit more about that and, in particular, the issue of retaining people in the sector? In my case work, I have heard from people who have left the sector either because they cannot afford the bills or because of the uncertain nature of funding.

I want to link that to the community side of funding. We heard some really good examples at last night's cross-party group on culture and communities of individual projects employing people locally in the cultural sector and giving them much more certainty in relation to income generation. What are your initial thoughts on retaining people in the sector and changing the way that people work to give them the opportunity of more work in communities? How can we bring that about?

Angus Robertson: We could probably discuss that hugely important issue for the rest of the meeting. My thinking on the first point relates to the financial support package that we have secured and ensuring that it covers all the areas where there has been a financial loss in the culture and arts sector. That is not the same as saying that one will be able to cover every single lost bit of income. However, the scale of the funding that has been secured and the way that the fund is constructed means that it will have a maximum impact on people, whether they have those with a smaller income or are larger organisations with significant outgoings—especially during the most recent lockdown—and are going to lose a lot.

I have been keen to stress to officials throughout the process the requirement for us to have flex in our funding response to the problem. I will give an example: the £10 million allocation towards freelancer funding. I will use the opportunity of a public audience to say to anybody who works in the cultural or arts sector and has lost money that they should ensure that they apply for the funding, because it will make a difference to their financial situation. I say that also for the reasons that Ms Boyack mentioned: we do not want to lose people from the cultural sector who have found it increasingly difficult to make financial ends meet.

To go back to the point about flex, we have a number of limits on spending allocations. For freelancers, it has been £2,000. I have said that if, once we have gone through the initial allocation round—at the beginning of the evidence session, I gave the numbers for how many applications there have been and how much has been disbursed—we find that we have resource within those funds, we should act sympathetically if we can towards further loss that people may have experienced.

I am trying to say to Ms Boyack and other committee members that I am absolutely seized on us ensuring that we do everything that we possibly can to deal with people's personal or business financial loss in the cultural and arts sector. That is point 1.

Point 2 is that I acknowledge that the period of Covid lockdowns has had a hugely detrimental impact on a lot of people. I am talking not in general terms, because we know about that, but specifically about culture and the arts. It has had an impact on people on low incomes and on people who are just at the start of their careers. It is always difficult to establish oneself in the cultural scene. The absence of the ability to tour has created a difficulty. Brexit has had an impact on people's ability to tour on the continent—as we know, that is where a great many Scottish artists are most successful.

Not all of that is solved by funding support mechanisms for the Covid circumstances in which we have found ourselves, so we will need to consider, and are considering, other measures—support for touring arrangements is a good example; we are working with the music sector on that—to ensure that, as we recover, people who might have been beginning to think that their career was not sustainable and that they could not carry on get the feeling that there is support for them to get back into the cultural sector and, we hope, establish themselves.

Incidentally, there are some straws in the wind about changing visa arrangements, for example. Countries such as Spain are alive to the

challenges that we have been stressing with them that have come about through Brexit.

That is my answer to the first part of Ms Boyack's question. I am happy to come back on any of it.

On the second part, on people who want to go into the culture sector and start doing constructive things at a community level, that is why I am so pleased that we have been able to secure the funding allocation in culture that we had in previous years. Through organisations such as Creative Scotland, the funds are available for a series of different projects that deliver in different ways. I am happy to write to Ms Boyack about projects at a community level.

That is where there is crossover with Mr Ruskell's earlier point about local government and community outreach workers. There is a crossover with culture and the voluntary sector. We know that that works well in some places and is less established in others. For me, that is one of the areas where, in this cultural recovery process, working with local government and the voluntary sector, we will get a much better handle on what will be a mixed picture throughout Scotland, and we will try to establish as much support as we possibly can so that the whole of Scotland has the benefit of it.

10:15

Sarah Boyack: I would be interested in that offer of follow-up of information that you have just given me regarding culture in communities. One of the really striking things—following on from Mark Ruskell's point—is that culture is not a requirement, yet it is critical to people's health and wellbeing and to our communities. Having the funding available at local level is critical. We have taken evidence on that before in the committee, and the benefits to people are critical, as I say.

I return to the point about health prescribing. Some very good evidence has been presented to us directly. Representatives of Art in Healthcare came to the Parliament before Christmas, and work was done in different communities to support people through the pandemic. As we recover, that work will need to continue. It is not a matter of ticking a box and moving on. Community projects have helped to employ artists and other people in the cultural sector, and they have critically supported communities. How do we increase that?

We are living in an era when inflation is rocketing. How do we support people to afford to access culture? I saw an excellent paper from Scottish Opera showing what it is doing in touring around the country. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society is attempting to encourage people to get into the festival and is trying to take the festival

fringe out to them. Affordability will be an absolutely massive issue for culture.

In practical terms, what will be available for community groups and councils to ensure that the venues are there and so that we can see those activities happening?

Angus Robertson: You are absolutely right: everything that you have said is on the money for what needs to happen. As you point out, there are some really good examples—they are not the only ones—involving harder-to-reach communities and younger people living in more peripheral areas being able to take part in the cultural offering. It is not just about culture taking place where certain venues are, in bigger cities, for example; it is also about getting out to different parts of Scotland. That involves Scottish Opera and the other national performing companies, too. It is also a matter of the funding being there for other organisations right across Scotland. On that first point, absolutely: that cannot just be happening in some parts of the country that are particularly well served by cultural infrastructure.

On the second point, affordability, we are all now aware of what is going on with the level of inflation, and we need to be alive to just how disproportionate the cost of certain things might be for people, which could put them off attending cultural events. I know that many cultural organisations are extremely alive to all of that. You mention the festival fringe, which is a really good example. A lot of work goes on there to reach different parts of Edinburgh and different social-demographic groups, with different approaches to admission. We need to encourage the sharing of best practice such as that right across the cultural sector. It will be a constant challenge to ensure that that can deliver.

I never tire of saying to my officials and people in the cultural sector that I am very keen to learn about best practice, whether that is best practice here or elsewhere. I will be keen for my officials to learn the lessons from the evidence that the committee has heard, both written and oral. I am also keen to learn what other countries are doing at present, and about any of their innovative policies that deal with access, cross-Government experience and protecting people coming into the cultural sector. We do not have a monopoly on common sense or good ideas, and wherever those might be, I am keen that we road test whether they can also apply here.

As I said at the outset, I am keen to take a collaborative working approach with the committee. If you are taking evidence and learning about things, I am keen to hear about and see them, to ensure that they influence our thinking about what the Government does, working with the committee.

Sarah Boyack: With regard to health prescribing in particular, there is innovation in the rest of the UK from which we could definitely learn, which would not only retain people in the sector, but make the impact in communities that we all want. There is an appetite to hear more about that, and about looking for innovation.

Angus Robertson: Yes; noted.

Sarah Boyack: If the convener will indulge me, I have one final question.

In your letter, I note the national events in the budget. You highlighted the UCI cycling event that is happening next year. Is there any chance of getting the £9 million or £10 million mainstreamed into the budget, so that we would have the resources for some of the things that we have just been talking about, such as health prescribing, when the policy is developed?

Angus Robertson: I will ask Bettina Sizeland to follow up with some details once I have shared the generality with you. Of all the things that have crossed my desk since becoming cabinet secretary, particularly in the event space, the scale and opportunity of the UCI cycling world championships is the one that is striking in its scale and potential. That is the case not only because people will be able to attend high-level cycling events across the gamut of cycling sports, or because the venues are right across Scotland—which is a good thing—but because the championships provide an opportunity for a cultural change in terms of seeing cycling as a mode of transport and a way of living, and by extension, its impact on health.

You are absolutely right to ask about the net benefit above and beyond the core parts of the championships themselves. I chaired what is called a cabinet meeting of the cycling world championships, in which there was extensive discussion on that point, and on ensuring that the benefits of such an event reach the entire country and do not exist only for the period of the event. It would be helpful for the committee to get in people from the organising side of the event to tell you all about that, because it certainly impressed me.

On the issue of the budgetary allocation for the event, Bettina Sizeland is on the events side of things at the Scottish Government, and can probably fill in some information. I am happy to learn about whether the budget line from which the funding is allocated could have a practical impact on any of that. In my experience, when a third-party organisation delivers an event, the disbursement of funds is its responsibility. Of course, there is an oversight role to be played, so I go back to my point that the committee might want to take an interest in and learn about the issue.

I will hand over to Bettina to share any insights about the budgetary side of the championships.

Bettina Sizeland (Scottish Government): Good morning, everybody. The UCI 2023 cycling world championships is a unique event and the first of its kind. It is a given that it will have a huge international profile and reach, because we will be bringing 13 global championships together for the first time in Glasgow.

Another aspect is that the event has been designed very much with policy at the centre, so that it can be used as a platform for other Scottish Government activity. In a good example of cross-Government working, it is a platform for the promotion and support of active travel. We can get people excited about the event and about walking, cycling and active travel in a way that gives them opportunities to develop such interests in their local area and improve their health and wellbeing. That is very much a part of it.

The overall budget for the event is £50 million, of which £8 million is for the cycling facilities fund. That will ensure that there are local facilities so that people—not just children, but everybody—can learn to ride a bike properly, practice riding and gain confidence in using their bike daily.

Sarah Boyack: I am keen to see that extra money mainstreamed back into the culture budget for 2024, so my question was about pushing at the boundaries a little.

The Convener: Mark Ruskell has a brief supplementary on the world championships.

Mark Ruskell: I think that the event will have a massive impact. The improvement in facilities, which will probably also benefit areas such as the Tweed valley and Fort William, will be incredible. However, in terms of cycling governance, it might still be seen as a Great Britain event. If that is the case, has there been any commitment from the UK Government to support the world championships in 2023?

Angus Robertson: On governance, a special purpose vehicle has been set up as a wholly owned subsidiary of VisitScotland to co-ordinate delivery of the event. The SPV, 2023 Cycling World Championships Ltd, is accountable to the VisitScotland board and to the 2023 cycling world championships cabinet, which I chair. As has been mentioned, we are providing £30 million over five years for the planning and delivery of the event; Glasgow City Council is providing up to £12 million of funding; and UK Sport is providing up to £4.5 million. There is funding from different places, but the governance arrangements for the event relate to the SPV.

When I chaired the cabinet, I do not think—I am trying to remember—that there was anybody there

from the UK Government. There were representatives from Glasgow City Council, the Scottish Government and the cycling organisations, and from the special purpose vehicle that is managing the event—extremely proficiently, from what I was able to see.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): In October, you said that the Government was working on a cultural recovery plan. Can you give us an update on the timeline and when it might be published?

Angus Robertson: I presented a paper to the Scottish Government Cabinet at the beginning of November. The key takeaway from that document—as we discussed at the beginning of this evidence session—is the need to ensure that culture and the arts is seen as a cross-Government responsibility and opportunity.

It is a case of so far, so good. We have started work on that; I do not need to rehearse the fact that conversations are under way and that side of things. Obviously, the latest Covid variant that came along in the meantime has had a huge impact on everything, including cultural recovery, because so many events had to be cancelled in December and into January. We should not lose sight of the fact that events in February and March have also been cancelled. People have been putting off decisions until they have a greater sense of confidence about the health picture and the risk of public health measures reoccurring.

10:30

We are all trying our best to understand where we are in our recovery from the latest variant. There is good news—I do not need to rehearse all the details, but we should be pleased that we have done so well with the booster programme and that, following the First Minister's announcement this week, venues will be open from next Monday, which is hugely encouraging.

What was presented in November remains true. We will now be able to action the budget more, given that things have reopened. Nevertheless, we have not missed the opportunity—if one can call it that—that was offered by the circumstances in recent weeks. While events were unable to take place, we continued to develop the Government's approach, and that is exactly where we are at. We are trying to ensure that we are, at pace, doing everything that we can to help the recovery.

To go back to Ms Boyack's question about flex in the budget, I am very keen for the resources that we have allocated for remediation to also be used for recovery. That is important. Once we know the scale of the drawdown from various funds for events that were cancelled and for venues and freelancers, we can consider whether

we can use any remaining headroom as a springboard into a recovery phase.

I am open to suggestions as to how we can give people maximum confidence as we come out of a situation in which we were appealing to the public to be as cautious as possible. We are not unique in that challenge, and it is not lost on anybody that, one week, we say to people, "Please only meet X groups of people in certain circumstances and not others," and the next week, we say, "You can now suddenly do a whole lot of things that you were not able to do before."

Some people will jump at that opportunity, and I have no doubt that the overwhelming majority will be sensitive and careful about how they act in the company of other people. However, there will still be a group of people who will, perhaps because of their personal health circumstances, be very cautious for a while about going out.

I am not sure that I have the answers to all that. Some things have become politicised, which is different from the situation at the start of the pandemic, when things were less politicised. Perhaps that is just inevitable; it reflects the fact that some people think that certain things should be happening faster than other people do, and some are getting advice from our official advisers and some are not.

I do not doubt for a second that everybody wants the best public health outcomes, but there is a conundrum in saying, "You've been cautious—now please support culture and the arts by going out to events." We have to navigate our way through that and appeal for people to be as responsible as they can.

I know that events organisers are hugely seized of all that. Celtic Connections is a good example of an event that would have involved running an entire festival in person, had circumstances not changed. Following the emergence of the latest variant, the organisers had to be imaginative about how much they could offer online, but they are now able to run at least part of the programme in person again. I take my hat off to everybody in the culture sector who has had to plan for any and every eventuality; we owe those people a huge debt of gratitude.

It is now up to us, as supporters of the arts and culture, to support the events and the venues that we would traditionally have gone to, but we might also need to be better at going to things that we have not gone to in the past. There is a role for us all, as MSPs and as figures in the communities that we represent, to give confidence to people and to promote events that are taking place. Working collaboratively on that will make a huge difference, and I am keen to work with colleagues across political parties to work out how to do that,

so it is over to you—if you have any bright ideas about what we need to be doing more of or less of, or better, I would be happy to hear them.

Maurice Golden: It is important, as you have recognised, to deal with the challenges of Covid, but in a previous submission to the committee, the V&A Dundee said that a multiyear funding settlement would be the single most important commitment that the Scottish Government could make. I think that you have recognised that, but can you give the committee an update on the timetable for implementation?

Angus Robertson: I will give you the first part of the answer and then ask Bettina Sizeland to comment.

You are absolutely right, and the V&A Dundee is not alone. Many organisations across the cultural community have said that multiyear income certainty would help inordinately with planning. Anybody who has had any dealings with management issues in an organisation will appreciate why that would be hugely advantageous. We understand that, we agree with it, and Creative Scotland is working on that. Further information is being worked on and will be forthcoming. Are we committed to providing multiyear funding? Yes, we are. Is that being worked on? Yes, it is. Do we want to deliver the funding as quickly as we can through Creative Scotland? Absolutely. Your finger is on the pulse with this—we are on it and it is happening.

I will hand over to Bettina Sizeland.

Bettina Sizeland: We are currently looking at the multiyear spending review and we are going through an initial exercise to review what is required. We intend to conclude the review by mid-May; that is the current timescale for delivery.

Clearly, we then need to look at the Creative Scotland budget and work alongside it, but until we know what the overall settlement is, we will not be able to determine what should be allocated to organisations such as Refugee Festival Scotland.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): In previous evidence sessions and in previous meetings with you, cabinet secretary, we have heard about the success and vibrancy of the film and television industry in Scotland, in relation not only to the scenery but the increased studio capacity, the skilled people who work in the industry and the ancillary businesses around it. How will the budget continue to support and increase production in that valuable industry?

Angus Robertson: Thank you for asking that towards the end of the evidence session because, if you had asked me about it at the start, I would probably have spoken about the topic for the entire session. As I think I have shared with you, I

am absolutely passionate about what is going on at the moment with Scottish screen and TV production. There is a genuine revolution going on, in case anybody has not noticed. I am sure that people in Glasgow will have noticed, given that Warner Brothers is filming “Batgirl” in the heart of Scotland’s biggest city. We are seeing unprecedented growth in the key building blocks that are needed to aspire to be a significant centre of excellence for screen and TV production.

The biggest single change that there has been relates to the opening of studios. That has allowed commissioning organisations from UK television such as the BBC, Channel 4, STV and others, as well as the streamers Netflix and Amazon and the large commercial film producers, including Warner Brothers in the case of “Batgirl”, to look at Scotland not just as a beautiful country that is a potential backdrop in certain types of films, which was traditionally the beginning and end of people’s consideration of film in Scotland, but as one that has small, medium and large studios and is well suited and situated for producing series, big-budget films and everything in between.

Most recently, since I last gave evidence to the committee, the project at Kelvin hall has been announced. It is a remarkable project through which studios are being built in Glasgow that will allow a certain type of television shows to be filmed there. With all the studios coming online—incidentally, they are right across Scotland, and others are thinking of opening more—we are seeing a proliferation of other parts of the film and TV ecosystem.

All that has happened with the targeted support of Screen Scotland, which is part of Creative Scotland and is supported by the Scottish Government. For example, our production growth fund has awarded £9.9 million since it began in 2015, and it has been calculated that that has generated an economic impact in Scotland of more than £140 million, which is a return of 14 to 1 on investment. We are witnessing amazing things happen with film and TV production in Scotland.

We can do more, particularly on the skills side. We need to ensure that, when somebody is thinking about producing a film in Scotland, they know that they can draw down everybody that is required for such a production. I am in conversation with colleagues in the Scottish Government and with external organisations about the skills pipeline that is required for screen and TV and whether we are doing everything that we can to make sure that that is happening as it should. As an ancillary point, I should say that there is an interrelationship with the gaming side.

The question is well put. Are things to be resourced by the Scottish Government to support the upswing in film and television production? The

answer is unambiguously yes. We are supportive of Screen Scotland. It has excellent people who are doing a great job in attracting films and attracting producers from elsewhere. Towards the end of last year, I spoke to independent European film producers whom Screen Scotland had brought to Scotland, and a number of them were interested in doing projects here. We are now involved in a virtuous circle, although we could do more.

There are black clouds on the horizon. There are things that we need to be concerned about, such as current threats to the BBC and Channel 4. The UK culture secretary, Nadine Dorries—my opposite number, if you want to call her that—announced gleefully this week the freezing of the BBC licence fee, with the implicit threat that it might be cut entirely. Regardless of criticisms that I, you or anybody else might have about aspects of the BBC—I do have them—it is a very important part of the commissioning ecosystem for film and TV, and I would not wish it to be diminished.

The same goes for Channel 4, which, as members will know, has opened a commissioning office in Glasgow as part and parcel of ensuring that there is a greater distribution of opportunity for film and TV in the nations and regions of the UK. We have no guarantees that a privatised Channel 4 would even retain that office.

10:45

It is great news that things are on the up, but there is potential for regressive steps if the UK Government’s ideologically driven attacks on the BBC and Channel 4 continue. We would welcome any influence that you can bring to bear as a cross-party committee to try to protect public service broadcasters and the commissioning of independents, especially through Channel 4. We should all work together and across parties to make sure that we protect that as well as we can.

Jenni Minto: That is a good point that is very well made. Clearly, one of your passions is film and television.

One of my passions is rural Scotland. We had a debate earlier this week about Scottish history being taught in schools and the importance of local museums. You highlighted the world cycling event that will take place across Scotland, and Scottish Opera has been highlighted as a touring company. Can you give us more information about how you ensure that all areas of Scotland are being supported by the budget?

Angus Robertson: That is a very important priority for us. During the current budget round, I asked for a list to be produced of the organisations that are currently regularly funded through the Scottish culture budget, to illustrate to us and our colleagues across Government that budgetary

cuts in the culture sphere would have an impact right across Scotland. That would go down to very small communities, often in rural and remote parts of the country. People were extremely alive to that issue.

You are right that it is a priority. The funding of organisations through the budget, of which Creative Scotland is the best example, and of the regularly funded organisations, for which there are touring funds—there is a promotion that is trying to get them round to different bits of Scotland—is really important for us. That is because it is a way to deal with issues of rurality and the attractiveness of different parts of Scotland. We know that we again have a population challenge in Scotland, with a projected decline in population, so we need to make all parts of the country as attractive as possible for people to live in.

Culture is an essential part of our national life, so people should have access to it regardless of where they live. We are hugely supportive of ensuring that what we do reaches local communities and deals with the challenges of social inclusion and education, which is hugely valuable. Funding streams through Creative Scotland allow organisations that are geographically spread across Scotland to be regularly funded. Core funding of the national performing companies enables them to tour the Highlands and Islands and the north-east. Support from Museums Galleries Scotland and the Scottish Library and Information Council enables museums and libraries across the whole of Scotland to bid for grant funding. Historic Environment Scotland is, of course, responsible for buildings right across Scotland—not just Edinburgh castle but Urquhart castle and many other examples.

Will there always be a perfect matrix for the whole of Scotland? I imagine that there will be places where people say, “We’ve not had the Scottish Chamber Orchestra for a while,” or, “We haven’t seen anybody from Scottish Ballet and we’d really like to see some of their stuff.” Those organisations are keen to ensure that they get to places, especially places that they have not yet got to.

If the member or her committee colleagues have evidence of places that have not benefited or if there are gaps, I want to know about that. I want the member and her colleagues to know that we and Creative Scotland pay great attention to trying to ensure that Scotland’s cultural offering is available to everybody in Scotland, right across Scotland. We will continue to do that, and anything that we can do to enhance it is very important to us.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Good morning, cabinet secretary, and welcome again. You have already touched on and

been asked about the question that I want to raise, but I will persist a little. One objective for many cultural organisations, large and small, urban and rural, will be getting the public back into museums, cinemas, galleries, theatres, live shows and so on. I entirely agree that everyone should do their bit to encourage that, but has the Scottish Government earmarked any specific funding for that endeavour?

Angus Robertson: I talked to one of your colleagues a moment ago about budgetary flex. I am sorry if I am not making this obvious, but I am talking specifically about the latest funding allocation of £65 million, which is a significant amount of money that was found at very short notice to deal with the immediacy of the cancellation of events and the impact on our cultural organisations and individuals, including freelancers. That was a gap for some people in previous rounds, which we wanted to close. For me, that resource is also there to help organisations as we rebound.

We are at the start of the process, with things beginning to reopen next week. There are clearly things that we could consider doing from a budgetary point of view, and I am open to doing that. Incidentally, I say to Donald Cameron and other members that, if you have strong views on this point, please share them with me and tell me what you think would make the biggest difference.

We are working closely with the cultural sector. My colleagues in Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government are talking with people on a daily basis about where they find themselves and how quickly we can get funds turned around. Part of the next stage of conversation is about how we can help people to springboard back to success.

There is the venues and cultural organisations side, and then there is the wider societal aspect of encouraging take-up and supporting what is going on. I think that there is an opportunity for collaborative endeavour in that regard. Will that involve money along the way? Undoubtedly. Are there things that we can do to encourage people to go to events and shows? Yes. Will some of that be paid for through the conventional routes of advertising and so on? Absolutely. Should we be doing that? Yes.

Can we work, for example, with Scottish newspapers? Can we work with social influencers? Can we work across the panoply of communication opportunities to get the message out there that people should be supporting events as they come online? Absolutely. Is there a master plan? Well, we are thinking great thoughts and we are working with our colleagues in the cultural sector. They will of course be doing their own promotional work. I have already seen that, with “The Nutcracker” being available to see again and

Celtic Connections back online, for example. They are advertising themselves. However, we could and should make a wider national effort to encourage friends, families and people in our communities to support things as they come back online.

If anyone has suggestions about how we can best do that, please forward them on something bigger than a postcard. I know where you are and you know where I am, so please let me know if there is anything that you think we should be doing more of.

Donald Cameron: One issue that has cropped up locally is the decision of local authorities not to allow school groups to visit various cultural organisations. There may well be a public health element to that but, as that element hopefully diminishes, working with the Scottish Government, we can start to incentivise local authorities, financially or otherwise, to change that approach.

Angus Robertson: That is right. We have never really found ourselves in this position before as a society—certainly not since the Spanish flu. How does one give people confidence as quickly as one can while we are emerging from strong public health guidance that is well founded on scientific advice about how we should interact safely and be mindful of other people's safety and health concerns? At the same time, how do we encourage people to go out and socialise and be in the company of others? Will that come naturally to everybody immediately? I do not think so, for the simple reason that some people have underlying health concerns and will be reluctant to be at the front of the queue to re-embrace the opening of venues, events and so on.

However, we will have to do our best to reach as many people as possible, give them confidence and give organisations, artists and companies as much assurance as possible that, if we believe that the health picture is improving because of vaccinations and boosters, the risk of mortality and so on will be lower. I do not need to go through the full explanation, because you and other colleagues on the committee already know it.

We are to an extent trying to square a circle, so we will just have to try our best to give people confidence. We can all play a part in that; we can support local performances, performers and events, and we can make the point that we are going to events and encourage others to do the same.

That is a good start, but you are right: there is a budget and it is not just there to deal with cancellations and loss of earnings from December through to March, although it is important that it is there for that. It is also important to have resource in place to help to publicise events that will take

place in 2022. There are amazing cultural events planned for 2022; there is something for everybody, and we should go to as many of them as possible. I might see you there.

Donald Cameron: I hope that my family trip to "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" next month might be such an occasion.

I have a totally different question, on which you can bring in your officials if you like. Why has the budget for the National Records of Scotland diminished over the past three years? The budget document says that there is a diminution in operating costs, but what is the explanation for that?

Angus Robertson: I defer to Bettina Sizeland on that. I suspect that it is best that we send you the detail in writing, because of the technical nature of the question.

Bettina Sizeland: I agree—it is better that we reply in writing to that, so that we can provide the requested detail.

Donald Cameron: That is fine with me.

The Convener: I do not see any indication from members for further questions, but I have a final question to ask the cabinet secretary. In your answer to Ms Minto, you mentioned libraries. As Ms Boyack said, we attended the cross-party group on culture and communities last night and heard from one of the cultural arm's-length external organisations in Scotland about the support that its library staff gave to elderly people, who they knew would be in isolation, and how they were able to continue service by doing things such as moving the bookbug programme online for younger members. Can you give us a bit of information about the support that you are giving to libraries and their future in the recovery?

11:00

Angus Robertson: I am mindful of the time, so I will limit my contribution. Funding has been provided to ensure that libraries continue to play their vital community role. For example, I was reading in *The Herald* newspaper this morning about the reopening of libraries in the city of Glasgow, which is hugely heartening and which has been facilitated and supported by Scottish Government funds.

However, thinking needs to be, and is, on-going about the changing opportunities for libraries as community centres and places that bring in people. Not everybody is reading in the same way as they were decades ago, and people are accessing information and books in different ways. However, I believe that there is still a demand and requirement for places where people can go to access books and information.

Funding has been provided in the recent period to deal with the challenges that have existed, especially in some parts of the country. However, at the same time, it behoves us all to think about how we can provide the best library network for 21st century society, in which we consume books and other written material in different ways. We need to be responsive to those demands, and I know that people in local government library services are thinking about that.

That is my answer at this stage but, if you need more specific information on budget lines in relation to libraries, we are happy to provide that to you.

The Convener: I see an indication of a final question from Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: Thank you, convener; I will keep it swift.

I draw the cabinet secretary's attention to the excellent evidence that we heard in last week's committee meeting about international development expenditure. One of the key themes that came across was the importance of wellbeing and sustainability legislation coming forward, along with a plea for a more joined-up approach to international development expenditure. I do not want to trigger a whole new conversation on that today, but we took evidence on it last week, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will pick it up in the Scottish Government's approach to international development funding.

Angus Robertson: I will give a brief response, although I know that I am taking the committee over the time limits and I am sorry about that.

Ms Boyack will have noted that we are increasing the funding for international development. I am keen to draw my colleagues' attention to the evidence that the committee received on the issue, because we want to be as joined up as possible. I want to be as informed as possible about the evidence that the committee received, in order to ensure that we are doing everything that we can in the most sustainable of ways. Thank you for drawing that to my attention. I will make sure that my officials in the area and I are fully sighted on the points that were raised.

The Convener: That concludes our consideration of that agenda item. I thank the cabinet secretary, Mr Wightman and Ms Sizeland for giving us their time.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

11:04

The Convener: Under item 2, the committee is invited to agree to consider reports on the UK internal market inquiry and the inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work in private at future meetings. Do members agree to take those items in private?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you for your time this morning.

Meeting closed at 11:04.

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