CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

22nd Meeting, 2023, Session 6

29 June 2023

Culture in Communities

1. The Committee has been undertaking an inquiry focused on the idea of a 'place-based approach' to culture within communities in Scotland, with the aim of understanding good practice and barriers to place-based cultural policy.

2. The call for views on this inquiry opened on Friday 17 February and closed on Friday 7 April. It received 57 submissions which are available to view online. The themes arising from these submissions were summarised by SPICe.

3. The Committee has taken evidence at its meetings throughout April, May, and June 2023. To gather further evidence on good practice and barriers to place-based cultural policy and cultural participation within different communities across Scotland, the Committee also undertook visits to Wester Hailes and Craigmillar in Edinburgh, Dumfries, and Orkney. This is the final evidence session of the Committee's inquiry.

4. At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from—

   - Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture; and
   - Lisa Baird, Deputy Director, Culture Access and Organisations, Scottish Government

5. The following papers are attached—

   - Annexe A: SPICe briefing
   - Annexe B: Notes from the Committee's external engagement visits.

CEEAC Committee Clerks
June 2023

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

29 June 2023

Culture in communities

Introduction

This will be the seventh and final meeting during which the Committee will take evidence on its inquiry on culture in Scotland's local communities. Links to previous meetings' official reports are listed below.

- 20 April – representatives from the local authority/ALEO sector

- 27 April – academics and the National Performing Companies,

- 4 May –arts and cultural organisations followed by members of the Culture Collective Programme Lead team

- 11 May – organisations working with volunteers

- 18 May – organisations working in the planning sector

- 8 June – Creative Scotland

The Committee undertook a call for views earlier this year and responses can be found online. A summary of those submissions was prepared by SPICe and can be found within Committee briefing papers for 20 April (Annexe B, p16).

The Committee has undertaken three programmes of visits and meetings in Edinburgh, Dumfries and Orkney. The notes of those visits and meetings are included in members' papers.

This week the Committee will take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture.

The Committee has been exploring the cultural activities that take place in our communities. These activities have included: volunteer or grass-roots activities (e.g. community choirs); culture delivered through a community development model (e.g.

WHALE Arts); and cultural activities that take place in communities (e.g. National Performing Companies' tours). The Committee has also talked with many organisations whose work that would cover more than one of those types.

The Committee has heard a widespread perception that Community-level work, has been undervalued at a policy level in comparison to larger organisations' more visible work.

Early in the inquiry, the Committee explored the concepts of the Democratisation of Culture and Cultural Democracy. The former is concerned with widening the access to arts, e.g. reducing ticket prices, whereas the latter is more concerned with co-creation of culture with stakeholders or communities.

Many of the themes of the inquiry have been cross-cutting. For example, the planning system, the availability of spaces to meet or public transport options would not sit in the Cabinet Secretary's portfolio directly. However, the committee has heard that issues like these are important for access to culture.

Culture strategy

The 2020 Culture Strategy for Scotland lists the consideration of place as "guiding principle" of the strategy. Members will be aware that the strategy is organised around three "ambitions". The ambition of *Strengthening Culture* is largely concerned with how policy can support the creation of culture through funding or in-kind support to the sector, e.g. training, business support or bringing people together. The ambition of *Transforming through culture* is concerned largely with recognising the value culture can have to supporting outcomes in other policy areas – for example in supporting health, education and tourism. The ambition of *Empowering Through Culture* addresses participation and supporting culture at community levels.

Under the final ambition, *Empowering Through Culture,* the strategy says that the Government would "support Creative Scotland and the other national cultural organisations to realise the potential that culture has to achieve local outcomes." It also said that the Government would work with local authorities, culture trusts and Community Planning Partnerships to seek to "share local knowledge, align resources and work in partnership so that the part that culture can and does play in delivering the priorities that are most important for local communities is visible and valued." The Strategy stated—

> "Places and people underpin culture and communities in and across Scotland and generate a distinct sense of place, identity and confidence. Adoption of the Place Principle can help realise our vision of an inclusive and extended view of culture which recognises and celebrates the value and importance of the emerging, the everyday and grassroots culture and creativity.

> "A collaborative, place-based approach can help create the right conditions for culture to thrive and partnerships between local government, cultural and creative organisations, businesses and organisations in Scotland's most deprived communities can and do realise a wide range of outcomes for

people including improved health and wellbeing, social cohesion and reducing inequality."

The strategy also argued that including arts and culture into wider community planning would help deliver on a wide set out outcomes. It said, "arts and culture can contribute to many of the often deep-rooted and complex themes that Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) typically prioritise in their Local Outcomes Improvement Plans, such as around inclusive growth and improving employment prospects, positive physical and mental health, children's wellbeing and sustaining fragile communities."

In the first session with local authority representatives the Committee heard that in some local authorities the national strategy had been helpful in developing local cultural policy, however the picture was mixed. Kirsty Cumming from Community Leisure UK said—

> "The cultural strategy provides a springboard to enable that conversation to happen, and it gives a sense of legitimacy to the conversation at a local authority level. When decisions are being made about the delivery of services, having that strategy in place gives a sense of empowerment to the conversation about culture and its importance.

> "In relation to how the strategy has influenced delivery at a local level, the picture is perhaps a bit mixed across the country. It depends very much on local authorities' priorities and how they implement and embed the strategy."

The Scottish Government is refreshing an action plan on the Culture Strategy. This was expected to be published in Spring of this year.

Understanding participation

During the evidence sessions, the Committee has heard that defining and measuring participation in cultural activities requires a broad understanding of 'culture'. There has also been an emphasis on recognising the cultural activity that already takes place and is valued within local communities.

The Committee has been looking at how the needs of communities are understood and how these are met or facilitated. In visits the Committee heard how local organisations worked with communities to understand how they could respond to their community's wishes. For example, the Committee was told that for the Stove Network in Dumfries, being a community-run organisation was central to its purpose.

The Committee also heard that there were occasions where larger organisations sought work in the community without working with the community. In evidence to the Committee on 8 June, Alastair Evans, Interim Director, Strategy and Planning at Creative Scotland said—

> "In everything that we see, whether funding applications or work that we do from a development perspective, we try to see […] the organic needs and opportunities that are described by communities for projects that we are going to co-create with them."

During the Committee visits the Committee heard about lots of work that had emerged organically from the communities themselves. For example, in Orkney the Committee heard of the 'bottom-up' nature of the cultural scene there.

On 27 April both Professor Stevenson and Professor Miles provided the Committee with a wide definition of 'culture' and challenged traditional views of what community cultural participation may look like. Professor Stevenson told the Committee –

> "cultural participation is the way in which we define ourselves both as part of a community and in terms of our differences from other communities—communities that we might share common interests with, but from which there are differences. That means that the various groups and communities need equity of access to resources—time, money or space—in order to be able to pursue the cultural participation that they find meaningful." (Col 2)

Professor Miles noted –

> "The working definition of culture draws heavily on official traditional forms and assumptions about what is valuable in respect of how people participate culturally. First, we have to understand better what it means to participate culturally in those place-based circumstances." (Col 3)

The written submission from Creative Scotland also echoed this understanding of cultural participation –

> "Every community has its own unique culture. It is important to recognise that a lack of established traditional artistic infrastructure does not mean that there is a lack of creative or cultural activity or expression – successful national or centralised initiatives need to understand these individual cultures. It is important that local and national government and national bodies recognise the individual needs and requirements of different communities and places, and of different artforms and creative practices."

Rights based approaches

The Culture Strategy lists Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a "guiding principle". Article 27 (i) says—

> Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

Art. 27 of the UDHR was repeated and somewhat expanded on in Art. 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which is one of the instruments the Scottish Government plans to incorporate into a future human rights bill.

A rights-based approach encompasses individuals in that everyone individually is a rights holder. The Human Rights Consortium Scotland produced a paper in March of this year discussing the realisation of cultural rights. This was based on research which included a number of workshops. It highlighted concerns around: the

awareness and understanding of cultural rights; and tensions around what it means to engage with culture including who is enabled to participate effectively.

Measuring outcomes

The concept of participation in the [Culture Strategy for Scotland](#) is broad. Under a subheading of "A broad view of Culture" it stated—

> "People engage in culture in a huge range of different ways: formal and informal; historic; traditional; and emerging and it is often through culture that social networks and relationships are formed. For many people in Scotland, culture is a self-determined part of everyday life and it is often through local, community-led culture and heritage where the greatest transformations can occur."

The [National Performance Framework's culture outcome](#) is—

> We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely

This has four indicators underneath it. Two of which[1] are:

- Attendance at cultural events or places of culture

- Participation in a cultural activity

These two indicators are measured by the Scottish Household Survey. The SHS collects data on attendance in a wide range of places/events and activities. The latest available data from the SHS is from 2021 and [the summary was published on 25 April 2023](#) along with data tables. A longer discussion on the data from 2021 SHS can be found in the SPICe Briefing prepared for the Committee for the meeting [on 11 May](#).

Alastair Evans from Creative Scotland also told the Committee that his organisation also undertakes an annual survey. [He said](#)—

> "We ask people about how they conceive of their cultural lives, and they consistently tell us not only about going to theatres and art galleries but about the gardening, baking and DIY that they do. There is a very strong sense of everyday participation."

The [Culture Strategy for Scotland](#) said—

> "Cultural engagement and participation is currently measured relative to more formal and established forms of culture, many of which are free and accessible. However not everyone participates in these forms of cultural engagement. People engage in cultural activity in many different ways and

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[1] The other two indicators are: Growth in the cultural economy, and People working in arts and culture.

how that is measured and reported must be reconsidered to better reflect the nature and breadth of cultural engagement."

The Strategy did not include a specific Action to reconsideration of how cultural activity is measured and reported.

At a local and more granular level, the Committee has how the success of cultural projects is measured by both local authorities and by funders. On 20 April there was a discussion on this topic and Katie Nicoll discussed a framework that she had created for use in Renfrewshire Council, noting that every local authority measured their cultural strategy differently. Rebecca Coggins stated that –

> "because each local authority's area has a completely different cultural landscape, it can be really difficult to compare them. It is like comparing apples with pears. It would be great to find a simple way to make comparisons—a way that is not too difficult for the arts organisation or community group on the ground." (Col 32)

Measurement of success was also discussed by community groups in terms of funding applications on 4 May. Rachael Disbury said that a 'crucial aspect' of the Culture Collective funding was that the criteria to apply was very simple, and that organisations were trusted to use the funding to deliver successful projects in a flexible way. (Col 21) Kathryn Welch further explained that –

> "we have intentionally stepped away from asking projects to report on how many people came to a session, for example, and to get away from reporting on a scale of one to 10 on things like, "How is your health and wellbeing today as opposed to a month ago?" Metrics such as that have been really harmful, as I think that people will be aware. It has been transformational to shift the conversation from how many people came to a session to how those sessions are going and what people are getting out of them. For example, we might have people coming to those sessions who might not have been able to do so in the past. … I suppose that the question to ask in response to that is: how do we shape policy through storytelling, and how do we recognise not only what metrics can do but what they cannot do?" (Col 39)

Local cultural infrastructure

Importance of local facilities

The access to a variety of local assets has been a recurring theme in the Committee's work. Cultural activity can take place in a wide range of assets, for example, community halls, theatres, cinemas, concert halls, schools, libraries or pubs. These assets may be the responsibility of the local authority or may be owned by the third sector (e.g., churches or clubs), communities or privately.

Alison Reeves from Making Music told the Committee that the main costs for grassroots participative music groups is venue hire. She highlighted some of the challenges faces by these groups—

"More than half our members use churches and church hall spaces, but that is proving a significant challenge at the moment, as the Church of Scotland rationalises its estate. About 20 per cent use schools and educational facilities. That proved a challenge following Covid, because it took quite a long time for some of the school estate to open up to external lets, which meant that our members had to look for other venues—sometimes, those were commercial lets. About 12 per cent use community or village halls."

On 27 April Professor Stevenson argued that there is an imbalance in the attention given to different cultural assets. He noted that the closure of the Filmhouse in Edinburgh had been met with a public response, whereas community centres close without similar "anguish" being displayed. He suggested that in a cultural ecosystem, more attention should be given to community assets. He said—

"The danger is that when we consider what works, we are not also looking at what works but we are ignoring—the places that are shutting. A better idea is to give people just a little—to allow them a little time and a little resource to do things within existing spaces. Also, we need to understand that any space can be a cultural space. That will not always require significant investment, but it does require that we value the things that people are already doing." (Col 8)

The Committee also heard concerns around local authorities rationalising their estates – e.g. community halls. Community Leisure UK's submission also noted that maintaining community assets can be costly. It said—

"Across the local public culture sector, the age and condition of some cultural venues and facilities and associated maintenance costs also require consideration, with investment needed into these venues, particularly reflecting the role of the sector to support progress towards net zero. Where there are listed buildings, planning permission and investment for decarbonisation proves even more challenging."

The National Performing Companies told the Committee that access to spaces affects where they could perform and tour in Scotland.

Jemma Neville from Creative Lives told the Committee that communities could benefit from a reimagining of civic spaces and the creative commons and better using the range of community assets, including parks and pubs as well as libraries and schools, for example. (11 May, col 2) During the visit to Orkney, the Committee was told how some community assets were being used as multi-purpose spaces for different forms of cultural activity. For example, the town hall was used as a concert hall, cinema, and theatre, and different groups using the building were able to share resources.

The loss of local physical assets in communities is likely impact on the access to culture for those communities. Professor Miles told the Committee on 27 April, "if you are looking for practical ways of encouraging people to engage with different types of culture, and if that is thought to be a valuable thing to do, you need to put culture, or interventions, in the places that people normally inhabit—the places of their everyday engagement. People have done that: arts organisers have put work in shopping centres and so on." (Col 7)

Access to community assets and spaces can be reliant on public transport. This issue was raised several times in the enquiry, for example during the visit to Dumfries, the lack of public transport was seen as a big issue that created a barrier to accessing cultural events.

Community asset transfer

One way of maintaining community assets is to bring them into community ownership. There is a trend of more assets being brought into community ownership in Scotland. Volunteer Scotland's submission noted that managing these assets is a challenge. Its submission stated—

> "The Scottish Government is committed to community ownership of such places and spaces where volunteer-led cultural activity takes place. This is demonstrated through ambitions related to Community Wealth Building which holds the 'socially just use of land and property' as a core pillar. However, the community groups that seek to own and sustainably manage community spaces are finding the level of responsibility challenging."

The Committee picked up this theme with Creative Scotland on 8 June. Karen Dick said—

> "Often, if it has come to the point of someone divesting themselves of such assets, that is because they have challenges in managing them. If that challenge is passed on to community groups, particularly if they are volunteer led, it can be extremely challenging for them to take that on without further funding, advice, support or information on how to manage the building. They need continuing support."

However, Creative Scotland does not have a Scottish Government budget for capital grants and National Lottery funds are being used to support open project funds for individuals and organisations.

How do we know what exists?

One of the actions in the Culture Strategy for Scotland was to "work with Creative Scotland to map local authority support for culture and to explore future models of collaboration between national and local bodies". Creative Scotland provided an update on this work on 8 June. Officials indicated that this work had substantially been completed by March 2020 but then was interrupted by the pandemic. Alastair Evans said that this work is looking at the structures and financial channels in the sector and to look at how national bodies work with public bodies, he continued—

> "It is not spatial planning or a register of all the cultural assets across Scotland. We do that kind of mapping in a lot of our work at a local level, but this piece of work is not intended to map everything in Scotland."

Karen Dick said that asset mapping does take place when Creative Scotland develops local briefings to inform funding, development and advocacy work.

Professor Stevenson told the Committee that "we do not have a good data set for all the assets and spaces" and Professor Miles said that during a research project his team collected its own data on assets because "official sources were so inaccurate and did not encompass the wider of definition of culture we use". (27 April, Cols 13-14)

Volunteers

A theme from the committee's submissions was the value of committed volunteers in organising and maintaining the cultural scenes in their local communities. Creative Lives' additional submission stated, "volunteer-led, community-based creative groups exist in every corner of Scotland, but many may operate below the radar."

The Committee has also heard concerns about volunteers' fatigue having faced a number of challenges since 2020. During its visit to Orkney, the Committee was also told about the need for younger people to take on roles to ensure long term sustainability of the volunteer-led culture on the islands.

The roles of national and local government

Local authorities have a duty to ensure that there is adequate provision of facilities for the inhabitants of its area for recreational, sporting, cultural and social activities. Local authorities have a duty to manage, regulate and control its libraries and museums or galleries – and these should be available free of charge. Section 163(2) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 places a duty on local authorities to secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons in their area.

On 20 April the Committee heard from a number of local authorities and ALEOs about their cultural strategy and how they interact with and support community groups. They emphasised the importance of partnership working, the interaction of culture with other policy areas such as health, and the challenges that they were facing in delivering cultural policy.

Kirsty Cumming from Community Leisure UK stated –

> "With some of the changes across local authorities, we are seeing that there are not necessarily people with a cultural remit in the local authority. That expertise is lost somewhere. Where there is a culture trust, there is not necessarily a connection to the local authority with the expertise to really understand and embed some of the issues. There is certainly a change in the level of local authority expertise" (Col 9)

These sentiments were echoed by Karen Dick from Creative Scotland on 8 June. She said—

> "Local authority arts development officers and people in local areas who can be a conduit between businesses, owners, local authority landlords and the creative sector have been helpful in negotiating those relationships because, when the creative community wants to come in and do things, they can help

to translate and explain the benefits of doing so. One impact of the loss of arts development officers in many parts of Scotland is that there is no conduit between landlords, owners and the creative community to explain the benefit."

Other individuals also highlighted a disconnect between local authority strategy and the support provided to community groups. On 4 May Steve Byrne from Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland noted –

"One thing that does not work and which we have found difficult is our relationship with local councils, in respect of council cultural provision." (Col 16)

At the same evidence session, Kathryn Welch from Culture Collective noted –

""Disconnect" is the word that is often used here. Obviously, the situation will vary hugely, depending on where you are, who you know and who in your local authority is doing what, but often the local authorities and ALEOs feel like such huge, faceless, corporate organisations that it is hard to get a handle on who is there and how we might form a human relationship in order to make some good stuff happen."

Creative Scotland's submission noted the work it has undertaken on its Place Programme which is "a strategic programme designed to encourage and support local partners to work together with their creative communities and Creative Scotland … the programme supports local groups to come together to spark ideas promote collaborative working, build capacity and ultimately deliver creative activity which responds to the distinct opportunities and challenges within different localities." This would seem to indicate that Creative Scotland is taking on some of the roles local authorities might undertake or have undertaken in the past. Karen Dick told the Committee that the criteria for Creative Scotland's place partnership targeted programme included places "from which we might have fewer applications and where there might no longer be an arts development function in the local authority".

Predecessor Committee report

The policy alignment between national and local government has considered by the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee in session 5. Its 2019 report, Putting Artists in the Picture said "existing policy framework for establishing the respective roles of local and national government in funding the arts, including opportunities for co-funding, is not working well." That Committee recommended an "intergovernmental policy framework between local and national government" which would include "a requirement for local authorities to plan for culture and to take account of local and national priorities in doing so." That Committee recommended that the Government consider placing this framework in statute by introducing an Arts Act.

The response from the then Cabinet Secretary with responsibility for culture noted that as set out in the Culture Strategy, the Government along with COSLA was establishing a joint meeting of the Culture Conveners from Scottish local government and culture trusts. The letter continued—

"The formation of this group of Arts and Culture Conveners is also a critical first step in giving due consideration to the Committee's recommendation for a new intergovernmental policy framework between local and national government to support the arts. It will require discussion and input from all stakeholders, which this forum will provide as well as allowing for discussion and the development of any required guidance in support of the aims of the Culture Strategy at a local level. The Committee will understand that this work has been paused while the Government concentrates on our response to Covid-19. However, it will be resumed when appropriate."

National Partnership for Culture report

The Scottish Government established a National Partnership for Culture (NPC) to advise and influence Scottish Ministers on the delivery of the Culture Strategy for Scotland. The NPC reported in March 2022 and the Government responded in September 2022.

The National Partnership for Culture made three recommendations under the heading "Community and Place". These were:

- National initiatives should be joined up and both inform and be influenced by local and regional initiatives.

- Equity of access to culture should be prioritised at a national level to support local, grassroots delivery.

- Local authorities should use culture as part of their delivery across wider local authority services.

Members can access the Government response online. The Government responses focused on taking these recommendations forward through joint work across government portfolios, other groups (e.g the Culture Conveners group) and through the "forthcoming Culture Strategy Action Plan".

Planning processes and placemaking

Taking placed-based approaches is a key pillar of the Culture Strategy for Scotland. In 2019 the Scottish Government and COSLA agreed to adopt a "Place Principle to help overcome organisational and sectoral boundaries, to encourage better collaboration and community involvement, and improve the impact of combined energy, resources and investment."

This principle encourages the consideration of the potential of people, physical and natural assets in a place, understanding how these interact, and how planning policy can work within this existing framework to improve outcomes. It says—

"We face significant challenges, fiscal, demographic and socio-economic. More of the same won't do. We must adopt a more common-sense approach that focuses on what is important: people and communities. To maximise the impact of our combined resources we must work better together."

On 27 April Professor David Stevenson stressed that cultural practice and participation is not homogenous. He said to the Committee—

> "Part of the challenge for good cultural policy is that good place-based cultural policy should be responsive to different groups, communities, people and places, so it is vital that it represents the differences that people express in that way. We all experience culture and we all want to participate in and express our cultures. However, there are differences. When we are faced with limited resources and there are discussions about how and on what we spend money and use the spaces that we make available, there are choices to be made. Part of the difficulty can be that we fall into thinking that there is a one-size-fits-all model and that we can invite people into a universal shared culture. Cultural participation is something that we all share, but meaningful cultural participation can look very different for different groups and communities of people." (Col 2)

Community planning partnerships are intended to enable public bodies to work together along with local communities to design and deliver better services. The Committee heard on 20 April that there was a mix of experience in relation to how and whether culture policy and the interests of the creative sectors was represented at the CPP level. Kirsty Cumming from CLUK said—

> "It is not about our members being on community planning partnerships per se but about a mechanism for a cultural voice locally. … For me, it is about having somebody who can give a representative opinion on behalf of the community, as the voice of culture—not necessarily one organisation or one service, but a mechanism through which people can feed into and take things back from those opportunities." (20 April 2023, col 27)

Creative Scotland argued that it should have a role in CPPs. Alistair Evans told the Committee—

> "Creative Scotland is not a statutory consultee in community planning partnerships. It sometimes feels as though we need to knock on the door from the outside just to get into conversations at local level.2

The Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland's submission highlighted the importance of Local Place Plans as a potential to "achieve placemaking objectives but they could also provide a useful mechanism for community-led cultural provision and wider community engagement around the planning of town centres."

However, the RTPI identified three potential challenges to the LPPs working as intended and supporting a thriving local cultural scene. These included:

- ensuring that culture is embedded in LPPs

- ensuring that LPPs are inclusive and representative of the diverse cultural groups that exist within the community; and

- ensuring that there are resources and expertise to support the process.

During the visit to WHALE Arts Centre, the Committee heard that it had been involved in supporting the development of the LPP. On 18 May, Craig McLaren from the Royal Town Planning Institute was optimistic about the potential for planning processes to support local cultural activity and community involvement. He said that planners "can work creatively with communities, stakeholders, funders and cultural organisations to try to pull together the vision and the delivery plan to make it happen."

Funding for community-based activities

In this inquiry, the Committee has not set out to explore funding. However, funding and seeking is central to work of many who work in the sector and it has been a theme in most of the sessions the Committee has undertaken.

Professor Stevenson suggested that there should be better clarity about who is funding what and whether national and local funding streams could have different purposes. He indicated that a key issue is how overheads are met and he said that the "biggest challenge that we face is the persistent and pernicious obsession with short-term funding". (Col 19) During visits, the Committee also heard of difficulties in organisations securing sufficient core funding.

One suggestion that the committee has heard several times is that participative creative work be considered and funded separately from professional arts which are largely intended to be consumed by audiences. Professor David Stevenson suggested that creative and cultural activities could be consider more as we do sport, where the policy aims and interventions to support participatory and community-level sport are not the same as those to support high level or professional sport.

Jemma Neville from Creative Lives had a differing view; she told the Committee on 11 May that—

> "It is a mistake to separate so-called professional creative practice and community-led creative practice, because it is an ecology in which things are inherently linked … Funding streams in the creative sector work best when there is scope for collaboration and flexibility and when there is no hierarchy." (Col 5)

Creative Lives additional submission set out the findings of a survey of people involved in community and volunteer-led creative activity. Some of the challenges included increasing costs and access to venues. It also noted that for these groups a very small amount of money can make a significant difference and set out some examples of the work funded through a "micro-grant" scheme.

During the visits, the Committee was told that organisations had the impression that community-based organisations did not have equal access to funds as other types of arts organisations. Creative Scotland's submission recognised the challenges faced by limited resources as well as the importance of small grants to voluntary organisations, stating that –

"While funding for activity is important, it is also crucial to recognise the role of everyday culture in contributing to the lives of communities and to ensure that these activities are also supported, whether through access to spaces or providing advice on running voluntary or grassroots organisations. Small grants can make a big difference for community led organisations. Reducing barriers to accessing spaces, including addressing high rental costs or supporting community asset transfers (with access to revenue funding, not only building costs) can ensure the sustainability of smaller communities and neighbourhoods."

On 8 June, Karen Dick from Creative Scotland explained that one of her aims is to increase the number of funding applications and funding approvals from areas of the country where there are fewer applications currently. The Committee was also told that their funds are very competitive. Ms Dick said—

"However, as with everything, Creative Scotland's budget has not increased, so when we are going out and doing that development work and encouraging people to apply, are we, in essence, setting them up to be unsuccessful because we cannot support everything? When we encourage and support people to raise applications from a particular place, we are very aware that our funding is not increasing and that we face a difficult challenge to provide the support that we want to provide."

Ned Sharratt
SPICe Research

23 June 2023

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.
The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP www.parliament.scot

Visit to Wester Hailes and Craigmillar (Edinburgh)

2 June 2023

1. On Friday 2 June 2023, the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee visited community arts organisations based within areas of deprivation in Edinburgh as part of its inquiry on 'Culture in Communities'. The Committee also visited Dumfries and Orkney. The aim of the Committee's series of visits was to gain an understanding of good practice and any barriers to place-based cultural policy and cultural participation within communities across Scotland.

2. It visited the purpose-built WHALE Arts Centre, a community asset in the Wester Hailes area of Edinburgh, where it held a roundtable with WHALE Arts, the cultural anchor organisation for Wester Hailes, project participants, the Wester Hailes Community Trust, and Puppet Animation Scotland, which delivers work in partnership with WHALE Arts.

3. It also visited Artspace, a multi-arts venue in the Craigmillar area of Edinburgh, where it held a roundtable with creative organisations working in Craigmillar—Lyra, Drake Music Scotland, Curious Seed, Bridgend Farmhouse and Connecting Craigmillar.

4. The key themes arising from the discussions are summarised below.

Role of cultural organisations in the community

5. The Committee heard that community arts organisations being embedded within communities over a prolonged period was beneficial in supporting a longer-term journey in their cultural participation and engagement.

6. Participants shared that it was important for communities to know that cultural anchor organisations are 'not going anywhere'. Instead of getting communities engaged though a specific project which ends due to the funding concluding, and there being nothing for them to move on to, it was important to continue to support participation through other projects and groups.

7. Members were told of the Creativity Community Hubs project which explored links with a network of community arts hubs across Edinburgh and beyond and produced the report 'Working Better Together'. Embedded community organisations were key cornerstone organisations in communities during the pandemic. The longevity of the organisations' work in communities means that there is trust and appreciation of the organisation in the community.

8. The Committee was also interested in how to reach those least likely to participate. Members were told about the importance of organisations being out and active in communities and being visible outwith their premises. Community development work is key to this—meeting people in their space, but also acknowledging that those spaces are theirs. Instead of 'doing the arts' to the community or seeing people as 'targets', it was said to be important to be 'in and of' the community. Co-production was recognised as important in understanding what community members want, and enabling work to be delivered that meets these needs.

9. The Committee heard that there were significant waiting lists for some projects, which demonstrated an unmet need that could be met with greater resource.

10. There was discussion about how cultural organisations support social prescribing. Members heard that this can involve offering existing activities for referral, but it can also be about using the links with referrers to discover gaps in provision. For example, a gap in provision specifically for men led to a men's makers group being developed. Referrals from social work were also received.

Partnership working

11. It was highlighted that cultural anchor organisations need to be selective about which partnerships to enter into, as there was a view that some larger cultural organisations can "parachute" in and use community-based arts organisations and their connections in order to tick a box of having worked in a deprived community, rather than seeking to work with the organisation and the community to meet shared aims.

12. An example of a lack of collaboration was larger organisations having named WHALE Arts as partners on funding applications without prior consulting them. Participants suggested that the Working Better Together report could be used by larger organisations to understand how better to engage with local organisations. It was argued that Creative Scotland could also support embedding these collaborative approaches.

13. There was a sense that the manner in which some larger organisations worked in communities for a short period of time—for example, through 'gifting culture' and providing free tickets to cultural performances—was often on the terms of those organisations and that communities did not have the agency to choose how they wanted to participate.

Funding for community-based culture

14. The Committee was told that securing core funding for community-based culture was a major challenge, with there being a persistent problem of "donut funding" where funding supports project delivery, such as material costs and freelancers, but not core costs such as the infrastructure, overheads of running a premises, and management staff costs.

15. Participants noted that without these core functions of community organisations, the projects they run for communities would not be able to be delivered. There was said to be an assumption from other funders that core funding is met by local or central government, however that this is not the case. An example was provided of an organisation having been rejected for funding on the basis that it received Regular Funding from Creative Scotland, however that this only covered a quarter of its costs.

16. Another issue raised was that the annual funding process makes strategic planning difficult, and takes up significant time and resource of staff members which drives energy away from delivering work with communities. Members were told that if funding was more secure, there would be benefits throughout the organisations and their participants.

17. One participant who was a member of the community said that people can feel that precariousness of the activities they take part in due to the short-term funding and that this is worrying. Freelancers were said to be feeling the strain of insecurity and leaving the sector for other roles.

18. The Committee was told that the experience of the pandemic had built trust with funders, but flexibility is still a challenge. Participants said that organisations suffered from 'the curse of the new' when seeking funding, with funders looking for new projects and organisations trying to maintain a consistent offer and longer-term interventions and stability for communities.

19. Participants were also of the view that community-based organisations, in particular in more deprived areas, were not equally funded with other arts organisations. Members heard that that it was important to consider who is able to access the culture provided by organisations in receipt of public funding.

20. It was noted that community-based arts organisations often support the fulfilment of government outcomes in areas such as health and wellbeing as well as the delivery of cultural opportunities to a wider breadth of people, and that this should be reflected in funding envelopes.

21. The Committee also heard that where there was a need for cultural spaces to be refurbished or become more energy efficient, capital funding is achievable, however, Members were told that the experience in the sector is that it is challenging to maintain funding for core and project work after large capital projects.

22. Members were also told that small amounts of funding can make a big difference in enabling communities to deliver their own cultural activities, for example one organisation had funding of £500 per month to support small local projects such as open mic nights, which it had found to be successful.

Placemaking

23. The Committee heard about the development of the Local Place Plan (LPP) for Wester Hailes, which had involved a range of community organisations coming together, and had built on a longstanding interest in placemaking at WHALE. Participants suggested that LPPs had been important in introducing a mechanism for ensuring local views need to be considered by the local authority. However, it was noted that while the LPP for the area is "exciting", it is only useful if the local authority takes it on board.

Visit to Dumfries

8-9 June 2023

24. The Committee visited The Stove Network, an arts-led development trust and community organisation based on Dumfries High Street. The Stove building provides a café, meeting place and an events venue with a diverse programme stretching across music and literature, visual and public art, film, and theatre, to town planning, architecture, and design. The Network undertakes place-based work and aims to bring together diverse communities to promote and develop well-being and sustainable local futures.

25. Members took part in discussions with producers and participants of local community-led programmes supported by the Stove Network, including: Open Hoose (supported the launch of 12 new community projects), Creative Spaces (led by and for young people to engage in culture locally), and Community Event Producers (a hands-on training scheme for young people to enter community arts through working at Stove's 'community venue').

26. The Committee then held a roundtable discussion focused on creative placemaking and the role of community arts in regenerating places, with the Stove Network, A' the Airts, and Dumfries and Galloway Council.

27. The final session saw members visit the LIFT D&G project space in Lochside, at the site of the former Lochside Primary School. The building was the subject of a successful Community Asset Transfer in 2020 and now operates as a community hub for the area. Dumfries YMCA was the lead organisation in the Community Asset Transfer and now manages the building.

28. A discussion was held with the LIFT D+G project, participants in the What We Do Now (WWDN) project (a pilot for a Creative Placemaking Network for Dumfries and Galloway) and artists in residence.

29. The key themes arising from these discussions are summarised below.

Role of cultural organisations in the community

30. The idea behind the Stove Network was to see what the community wanted, taking a broad view of projects, not all of them purely cultural. For example, Doughlicious was an initiative which aimed to empower and inspire people to bake their own bread, provide a place to learn, share skills and experiences, offer opportunities for members of the community to get together, and contribute to a sustainable Scottish grain economy.

31. It was suggested that artists tend to have a collective mindset and want to celebrate the place and its people. This was a DIY ethos of building back the town. Each event and project was grounded in hospitality and ideally free or at least not overly expensive (aiming to keep to a £5-£10 limit).

32. There was support for young people as trainees to get experience of the sector and learn not just from work in Dumfries and the south of Scotland but looking beyond – e.g., Dundee and Wester Hailes – and seeing what works and exchanging ideas and experience. Creative Spaces began with an emphasis on word of mouth but has since progressed to engage with schools, colleges, and universities.

33. One of the challenges faced by the Stove in terms of evaluation as a wellbeing service was being in competition with front-line providers like food banks. It was suggested that a strand of financial support that backed culture and community participation was required, rather than the "silo" of the Creative Scotland model.

34. The LIFT D&G project was aimed at changing negative perceptions about Lochside and creating community confidence. The organisers wished to ensure their activities, projects and trips were accessible to all and based on a belief that a postcode should not define you. There was a clear understanding that nothing could be imposed, that ideas had to come from the community. The key

was to build trust and not do anything that would add to what were seen as previous broken promises.

Cultural need in Dumfries

35. The Stove Network worked on the basis of a simple inquiry process: what do you want and how can we deliver it? Autonomy was considered key, the aim being to give people a voice.

36. Rural transport was a huge issue for people in the area and a barrier to cultural participation. Since the pandemic, there's been more awareness of the need for a hybrid approach – recognising the need for direct human connection but also in keeping engaged those who might not be able to travel to events in person.

37. Language needed to be accessible and relatable. There was also a sense of wanting to move away from the "culture's not for me" perception that some people experience from school. It was suggested that the focus ought to be on the quality of the experience and not so much how well it was delivered. It was felt that the pandemic had caused some people to re-prioritise and some cultural activities had suffered as a result.

38. LIFT D&G's work went from a wish for space for local children to play hopscotch and have an outdoor tap to fill paddling pools during the summer to cover things like the ambition to have community art to look at and feel ownership of (whether murals or stained glass), a portacabin that it was hoped could become a creative hub for the area, running art and photography lessons, spoken word sessions, herbalist classes, a Dungeons and Dragons club, bonfire nights, gala days, and trips to the seaside, Blair Drummond, and Comic Con. There was a big appetite in the community for these activities.

Local cultural infrastructure

39. The Stove was both a café and a community arts space, the café part being a good way of inviting people in and starting a conversation / piquing their curiosity. Being community led was central to everything the organisation did and they now ran five buildings in the town, cited as an example of creative place-making.

40. Others would approach the organisation seeking advice on how to approach a community buy-out. You needed to think about spaces, and somebody needed to take responsibility, leading to the question: where was the support structure? The arts couldn't stand along, the sector needed to be connected to the schools and local transport and the community of course.

41. The experience of similar work in Castle Douglas and Stranraer was also shared. In the latter, the loss of the ferry port had hit the town hard, and it took time to build trust and partnerships, to understand what local people wanted and to give them the support they needed, to build momentum in a place that had experience market failure and flowing from that some very negative perceptions. People had to learn about revenue streams and how to pursue what were relatively tiny pots of money. The work of Creative Stranraer, part of the Stove Network, was highlighted, a project based on community engagement and co-creation, including capacity building, and developing a shared vision. The benefits could be demonstrated to those who were sceptical in terms of jobs and investment in the town.

42. The work and support of the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency was discussed in positive terms, the agency adopting a strategic overview and encouraging what was seen as a shift in the approach to community engagement and finding support for individual projects. Stranraer Oyster Festival was cited as an example of where that engagement worked well.

Impact on wider outcomes

43. The work of Doughlicious was aimed at reducing depression and isolation, mingling the generations, and encouraging the fun there was to be had in learning about baking.

44. Another example of what can be achieved for the community was the restoration of the Dumfries Fountain, an important part of the social history of Dumfries (the introduction of fresh water marked a turning point for following the devastating cholera epidemics of 1832 and 1848). Phase One of the restoration process took place in 2021 and included an extensive community engagement programme led by The Stove, offering opportunities to young people and the wider community to take part in a summer programme of events centred around the history of the fountain, the restoration process, and its future as part of a reinvigorated town centre. The project worked with local artists and historians to deliver a wide variety of workshops, walks, talks and activities.

45. Participants talked about the trauma experience by the community over the last 10 years (with the economic downturn, the pandemic, and cost-of-living crisis). What the Stove could offer through its various projects was creativity, social connection, and building people's levels of confidence. An example was given of a key member of one of the writing programmes, who had first become involved when facing serious challenges in their personal life.

46. The Nith river festival was established to explore the town's relationship with the river and its importance to the people and communities that it connects. This celebration of the river became even more pertinent during the pandemic, as an appreciation of nature became every more important to people.

47. On a photography course, part of the WWDN scheme, it was reported that 4 out of the 7 young people who'd done the photography course went on to study photography at college level.

48. There was discussion about the wider benefits of culture and parallel arguments that had been made for grassroots sport. It was suggested SportScotland had made that case brilliantly, and there was learning from that approach for making the case for the health and other benefits culture could bring at the community level. It was pointed out that Active Schools Co-ordinators were still working in schools but not so Cultural Co-ordinators.

49. The view was that the 1950s founding ethos of the first Arts Council of Great Britain, "It is about the best not the most", persisted, and although Creative Scotland did its best, it was still informed by that approach.

50. It was suggested, as set out in a [Stove Network blog](#) from April 2023, that a Participation in Culture Initiative framework could include—

   - Percentage for culture across government departments
   - Accountability/collaboration across departments in implementation of Participation in Culture
   - Regional/place-based approach to implementation
   - Innovation in funding models.

51. Comparison was made with Ireland, which makes distinctions about how it supports different types of culture, and where there were three core agencies supporting culture: the Arts Council (the equivalent of Creative Scotland), Create (an independent agency but one directly funded by the Arts Council, and supporting community-based creative practice), and Creative Ireland (which was understood to run mostly national initiatives for grassroots participation in culture).

52. LIFT D&G set out on its [website](#) the aim to "shift attitudes towards poverty through innovation and flexibility in the designing of events and activities" and with those activities directed at promoting "better understanding and respect between generations, while contributing to building a socially cohesive community". It provided food parcels to the most vulnerable in the area, created a nature and nurture area (the NANA project), promoted the integration of

refugee families and their children, bought a caravan near the sea where 30 families from the area could enjoy a free holiday each year, and ran a shop

Visit to Orkney

18-19 June 2023

53. On Sunday 18 and Monday 19 June 2023, the Committee visited Orkney.

54. The Committee met with a local ranger for Historic Environment Scotland at the Standing Stones of Stenness, and some Members took the opportunity to attend events at the St Magnus International Festival. The Committee then visited various cultural sites in Stromness—the Stromness Museum, Soulisquoy Printmakers and Wasps Stromness Studios, and the Pier Arts Centre—before holding facilitated group discussions with local stakeholders, community groups and cultural organisations.

55. The following groups participated in the discussions: Birsay Heritage Trust, Culture Collective (Creative Islands Network), George Mackay Brown Fellowship, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Hoy Heritage Trust, Orkney Folk Festival, Orkney Heritage Boat Society, Orkney Islands Council (Councillors and officials), Orkney Japan Association, Remembering Together, Soulisquoy Printmakers and Wasps Stromness Studios, Stromness Community Centre, Stromness Community Council, Stromness Development Trust, Stromness Drama Society, Stromness Museum, The Pier Arts Centre, Voluntary Action Orkney, and Westside Cinema.

56. The key themes arising from the discussions are summarised below.

The role of the community

57. The Committee heard that there was an immense commitment from the community to make cultural activity happen in Orkney, with high levels of volunteering and the vast majority of cultural activity run by small organisations. Members heard that there were over 650 voluntary groups.

58. This 'bottom up' approach was owed to being an island community and isolated from the Scottish mainland, with there seen to be a greater onus on the community to be self-starting and sustaining in providing cultural opportunities. Where national bodies come to Orkney to deliver work, it was considered that this works best when they work with the community to develop this.

59. There was a strong sense of pride that Orkney plays host to a range of festivals and has an annual calendar of cultural events. The variety of organisations in the cultural ecology of Orkney and festivals to participate in was also said to support cultural participation across the population, though some festivals were seen to less 'for' local people.

60. The Committee also heard that there is good partnership working between community and cultural organisations, in part due to a strong community spirit, and the nature of many individuals having roles across different groups and projects. Participants spoke of wearing multiple 'hats' in this regard.

61. An arts forum which was set up as part of the community planning process was mentioned by several participants as having had been beneficial in bringing people together to collaborate and to provide a collective voice for the sector.

62. However, participants recognised the reliance on the community to sustain cultural activity as a challenge as well as a strength, with volunteer fatigue and burn-out identified as key concerns. The Committee heard that there was an ageing population, including among volunteers, with concerns raised about the sustainability of volunteer-led culture in Orkney.

63. Members heard that there was a need to encourage younger generations to get involved, and that incorporating cultural activities more into schools could support this. Wider challenges around having the employment opportunities and housing to attract or keep younger people in Orkney were also raised.

Connectivity

64. Members heard that with many community culture groups based in the Orkney mainland and the ferry service often unreliable and unsuitable for attending evening cultural events, it was challenging for groups to engage with those living on the outer isles. This had improved with digital engagement as a result of the pandemic, however there were issues with poor broadband connectivity.

65. The Committee also heard that there were challenges for artists and touring groups to come to Orkney considering the time and cost the travel necessitates.

Funding

66. Participants recognised that the Culture Fund from Orkney Island Council was beneficial in supporting the core costs for community groups, and that this provided good value in terms of its impact despite being a small pot of funding.

67. However, it was raised that the level of funding—around £1 per head of the population—was not enough to support organisations, and it was questioned

whether businesses could be encouraged to match fund this in the absence of additional support from the local authority.

68. The local authority having an Arts Officer, unlike many others, was seen as being a helpful resource for cultural groups. However, it was still viewed that culture was a low priority for the local authority, with the message around the wider value of culture not cutting through over other priorities.

69. Frustration was expressed that many funders only fund projects, rather than core costs, and that these projects have to be 'new' rather than for what is already known to work well. Therefore, having funding from the local authority through the Culture Fund to cover core costs gave organisations the time and space to seek further funding which requires 'onerous' applications.

70. Voluntary Action Orkney was able to support groups with funding applications, but it was still seen as a resource drain on volunteers and staff. Participants identified that it would be beneficial for there to be common practice across funding bodies in what data and evaluation they require from funding recipients.

71. Orkney benefitted from Scottish Government COVID emergency and recovery funding which had enabled artists to deliver projects in the community focused on isolation and wellbeing. However, it had not been possible to continue this at the same level due to a lack of funding. Orkney Islands Council considered that Orkney required a better deal from Creative Scotland and that there was a need to consider how the infrastructure which had been established could be better supported.

Spaces for culture

72. The Committee heard about how some community assets were being used as multi-purpose spaces for different forms of cultural activity. For example, the town hall was used as a concert hall, cinema, and theatre, and different groups using the building were able to share resources. Participants also considered that the hire costs for local authority-run buildings was reasonable.

73. Each community has its own parish hall and these spaces are used extensively across Orkney as places for communities and cultural groups to meet.

74. One participant spoke of there previously being a user group for the town hall which enabled groups to come together to address any issues with the venue that they all used, however that this initiative had fallen away due to a lack of support from the local authority.

75. The physical constraints of venues were raised in terms of capacity and accessibility, which hindered growth. Some venues are in poor condition and in

need of capital funds for refurbishment or have closed down. Where spaces are closing, the Committee heard that it was a challenge for the community to take on the ownership of those buildings, especially historic and listed buildings.

76. One participant shared a positive example of the use of physical assets for cultural activity, whereby three voluntary groups focused on culture, heritage and wellbeing had been given a joint lease of a local authority owned building. This was said to have beneficial for partnership working and to be a model that could be built upon.

CEEAC Committee Clerks
June 2023