

Pre-Budget scrutiny 2026-27: funding for culture

The Committee is undertaking pre-budget scrutiny of the culture spending portfolio ahead of the publication of the Scottish Government's Budget.

The Committee will hear from individuals, groups and businesses involved with and operating in the culture sector. These views will help the Committee to make recommendations to the Scottish Government ahead of its Budget for 2026-27.

The Committee agreed to take a cumulative approach to budget scrutiny over Session 6.

Some of the issues that have emerged over the course of the current session of Parliament include:

- Funding challenges for the culture sector, contributed to by long-term budget pressures, reduced income generation, and increased operating costs
- Sectoral confidence, and the need for greater clarity regarding future funding
- Multi-year funding outlooks
- Preventative spending, mainstreaming culture and cross-portfolio funding for culture, and the potential for culture spending to progress other Scottish Government priorities such as health and wellbeing
- Strategic approaches to culture spending, which maximise the impact of increased funding and support the long-term resilience and stability of the sector
- Alternative funding models and the opportunities presented by such models for additional support for the culture sector

Questions

Planned budget increases

1. Have budget increases over the course of this Parliamentary session been effectively prioritised to generate improved cultural outcomes, and what lessons can be learned to ensure further planned budget increases maximise outcomes?

We warmly welcomed the Scottish Government's uplift to the arts and culture budget. However, the increased spending for museums does not go far enough to address systemic underfunding and the extra costs museums face, including increases to employer National Insurance contributions and the National Living Wage and rising operating costs.

The £4 million Museum Futures programme is extremely welcome and will provide capacity to museums to be adaptable and innovative in how they approach challenges, helping them to build resilience. As the programme has only recently launched, the outcomes and lessons are unknown but the programme provides confidence to the sector that there is support available to take risks to do things differently. Sector-wide

strategic change will take time so we would strongly recommend the continuation of the Museum Futures programme to maximise outcomes.

We would like to see continued funding for the delivery of the Empire Slavery and Scotland's Museums (ESSM) recommendations. More investment is needed to create a dedicated space to address Scotland's role in empire, colonialism and historic slavery. The ESSM steering group suggested £5 million would be required to deliver the recommendations.

Museums require core funding to support the care of collections and the running of day-to-day operations which can be costly. This work is fundamentally important to give museums the infrastructure to be able to do impactful work with communities that delivers the actions in the culture and museum strategies.

Alternative funding models

2. What progress has been made towards implementing alternative funding models to support the culture sector?

Last year, we raised that non-accredited museums, which make up 40% of the museum sector in Scotland, did not have access to funding. We are delighted that since then, thanks to investment from the Scottish Government, Museums Galleries Scotland's Small Grants Fund has opened to non-Accredited Museums for the first time.

We are also pleased that the new Repair and Adaptation Fund has been announced to address the need for capital funding in the sector and alleviate some of the pressures museums are facing. While this is very welcome, we believe more capital funding is needed for museums. We would like to see an equivalent to the Museum Estates and Development Fund that exists in England introduced in Scotland and geared towards supporting sustainable buildings

Museums in Scotland still do not have access to core funding or multi-year funding in the way that other parts of the culture sector do through Creative Scotland.

We are not aware of any progress on the "percentage for the arts" scheme which would generate revenue for the sector by requiring a small percentage of spending on all new public buildings and spaces to be channelled into support for culture and community art commissions.

Some Local Authorities are introducing a tourist tax which could bring in additional funding. Scotland's museums attract visitors from all over the world who want to see objects of national and international significance and learn about Scotland's stories. Museums drive economic development by encouraging secondary spending, creating jobs and making areas more desirable for investment. However, despite this, museums are often overlooked when it comes to the distribution of funds raised from tourist tax.

We would like to see the role of museums in driving tourism recognised and for the museum sector to receive its fair share of funding from such tourist taxes.

3. Going forward, what alternative funding models should the Scottish Government consider to provide support to the culture sector? How could these models be implemented, and what barriers may exist to implementing them?

We believe there should be a target of at least 1% of overall Scottish government investment in culture. This would strengthen the culture sector and demonstrate that the value of culture is understood.

We would like to see multi-year funding distributed to the museum sector through Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) to give museums the ability to plan ahead. Multi-year funding is already available to arts organisations in Scotland through Creative Scotland and museums in England through Arts Council England.

Preventative spending

4. Has progress been made towards mainstreaming culture across the Scottish Government, and if so, what impact has this had on Scottish Government priorities and outcomes? How should the Scottish Government prioritise preventative spending in its 2026-27 Budget?

While there has been some progress towards mainstreaming culture across Scottish Government, more needs to be done to ensure that the culture sector is being included in strategic conversations around the delivery of government priorities and outcomes. There needs to be better cross portfolio working and improved understanding across government about how culture can contribute. Additionally, there needs to be sufficient funding for museums that deliver wider priorities and outcomes for the government.

Museums contribute to a wide range of government priorities including climate action and net zero, education and health and wellbeing.

Museums enhance health and wellbeing and preventative spending in museums can have important social benefits. Many museums are already working with specialist health organisations and a wide range of people and communities on health and wellbeing and social prescribing initiatives. For example, the Skylark IX: Recovery Through Recovery project at the Scottish Maritime Museum supports people with addiction issues, using heritage and skills development to build confidence, resilience and self-worth. Through restoring the Dunkirk rescue boat, 'Skylark IX', project participants gain structure, a sense of purpose and routine.

Art Fund's Calm and Collected report found that 63% of UK adults have visited museums or galleries to deal with stress and anxiety. When asked about social prescribing, 53% of Scots said they were likely to engage with the historic environment if referred by a medical professional which is more than those interested in being

recommended to engage with sports. MGS' Creative Minds Fund, funded by the Baring Foundation, support museums and partnering organisations to engage people experiencing mental health issues in creative activity. The MA's Health and Wellbeing in Museums Fund, funded by the Julia Rausing Trust, enables museums to build on their existing, leading health and wellbeing work. It is important to the MA to fund museums who are already delivering successful health and wellbeing work as initiatives are most impactful when they are truly embedded into an organisation rather than a one-off project.

Museums provide a vital role in supporting education and life learning. Many museums run early years interventions that can support school readiness, deliver school workshops that align with the Curriculum for Excellence, and offer apprenticeships that support skills development and pathways into employment. Museums Galleries Scotland's 2024 Survey of Scotland's Museums and Galleries found that visits to museums numbered 15.4 million in 2023/24. However, museums are facing financial challenges with many at risk of cuts and closure. When cuts to museum services take place, learning and engagement roles, which directly support education priorities, are often the first to go.

Museums are supporting the Scottish Government priority to tackle the climate emergency by using their exhibitions and learning and engagement work to explore climate and ecological issues and encourage audiences to take action for climate justice, working with partners to implement regenerative policies in their local area, and committing to targets for reducing energy and water consumption, waste and carbon emissions.

Museums are doing great work to contribute to government priorities but much of it is project based due to the nature of funding. Dedicated investment to the culture sector to deliver against these priorities is needed. Multi-year funding in these areas would support museums to build on the successful work they are already doing. Short-term funding often leads to fixed term roles which means that relationships between the museum and communities are lost when a projects end.

Net Zero and the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan

5. How is the culture and heritage sector addressing its own operational emissions in line with the Scottish Government's net zero ambitions?

The MA's climate justice campaign empowers museums to be bold and brave in taking action, putting forward a systems change approach which focuses on climate and social justice. The campaign supports museums in tackling the climate and ecological crisis through sharing good practice and resources.

Many museums are addressing their operational emissions. For example, National Museums Scotland has committed to a sustainability strategy, so that by 2030 they will be "well advanced on the path to net zero carbon and a respected resource for

understanding climate and biodiversity challenges.’ Within their exhibitions they strive to reduce and reuse materials wherever possible and aim to work with contractors who use sustainable methods and look to minimise the carbon emissions and environmental impact of the work they do.

In the “Waters Rising” exhibition, Perth Museum challenged itself to reduce the carbon impact of the exhibition and only used sustainable materials in production. The museum used 100% recyclable cardboard labels and created the displays using existing material from past shows (apart from one sheet of MDF). They only accepted loans from UK institutions, with a majority coming from Scottish institutions nearby, and asked for digital reproductions of works from further afield. They commissioned mounts for objects to be made from offcuts of Perspex and held more nature-based events in collaboration with their sustainability officers in the libraries.

Thanks to Museums Galleries Scotland Capital Resilience funding, Gairloch Museum has installed PV (photovoltaic) panels onto their museum roof which convert light—not heat—into electricity. The museum has also taken the approach of selling unused electricity generated to the National Grid, creating an additional income stream for the organisation.

Museums could do more to address their operational emissions if there was dedicated funding for this work as many are facing financial challenges and simply do not have the funds to choose more sustainable suppliers or upgrade their heating systems.

6. What is the role of the culture and heritage sector in shaping and informing public attitudes on climate and sustainability, and in scrutinising and challenging the political response?

Museums are uniquely positioned to share stories that raise awareness and understanding of the climate crisis and encourage audiences to take action. Museums can also work in partnership with community groups in their local area on climate and ecological issues.

Museums are ideal places for people to have big conversations about complex issues. They work with community partners to research collections, to challenge assumptions, foster debate and motivate people to contribute to positive change in the world.

Museums are helping people to understand future climate change scenarios and the impacts of their actions. The University of St Andrew’s Wardlaw Museum “Rewrite the Future” exhibition encourages visitors to consider how the decisions they make today will impact society and create a more sustainable future.

The “Waters Rising” exhibition at Perth Museum explored the impacts of flooding on local communities, global storytelling and biodiversity with a strong focus on the climate crisis and climate action. It portrayed an authentic picture of environmental activists by working with the individuals to demonstrate their impact across Scotland and the UK.

The museum collaborated with groups to gather stories, ephemera and experiences to include in a central display of posters and placards.

Funded by the Scottish Government's Climate Engagement Fun, Sewing Hope: Quilts for Climate Change at National Museums Scotland used collection, artist led workshops, and scientific research to inspire people to share what climate change looks like and their messages of hope for the future. Evaluation showed the messages to be "both urgent and hopeful, calling for immediate changes while encouraging long-term commitment to preserving the planet."

While many museums are helping to inform public attitudes towards climate, it is important for information in museum exhibitions to be informed by evidence-based research and led by partnership working with communities, rather than government priorities.

7. What impact might the Climate Change Plan have on the culture and heritage sector, and how could funding streams better support culture and heritage organisations to contribute towards net zero outcomes?

The Climate Change Plan will be a useful resource for recognising the contribution of museums and the wider culture sector to addressing the climate emergency.

The museum sector is committed to working towards net zero but more information, capacity and investment is needed.

The Glasgow Women's Library, the UK's only accredited museum dedicated to women's history, has a Net-Zero Handbook which is a practical plan setting out the changes it will make to its building to reach "operational net zero" by 2030. While the museum is dedicated to achieving this goal, it took nearly five years to fundraise for the first phase of the plans which included secondary glazing, LED lighting and a new boiler. This demonstrates the barriers museums are facing to making meaningful change.

Strategic investment in de-carbonising, retrofitting, and future-proofing museums and galleries is urgently needed. Many museums now face daily battles against leaks, crumbling buildings, and creaking infrastructure. There is a huge backlog in repairs and maintenance and urgent investment is needed to resolve these issues as museums do not have the budget to fund this essential work. Support is needed to adapt these buildings so that they meet net zero requirements. If no action is taken, there is a risk that historically significant buildings could fall into disrepair.

Many museums are encouraging visitors to use active travel options and public travel options when they visit by offering discounts or other incentives to visitors who do. However, many rural museums are unable to do this due to the lack of public transport infrastructure. Building this infrastructure in rural areas would encourage

people to make sustainable choices and support rural museums to build new audiences.