

Cross-Party Group on Culture and Communities

28 February 2023, 7-830pm, online via Zoom

Draft Minutes

MSPs Present:

Sarah Boyack MSP, Jenni Minto MSP, Claire Baker MSP, Foyso Choudhury MSP

CPG Members and Guests:

Lewis Hou - Science Ceilidh, Anne Gallacher – Luminate, Jasmine Main, Neil Gray MSP- Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, Hannah Frodsham - Scottish Government Culture Directorate, Naya Koulocheri - Office of Sarah Boyack MSP, Joseph Peach - Culture Counts, Rhona Stevens - Federation of Scottish Theatre, Amy McNeese-Mechan, Frances Davis, Finbarr Lee, Freya Taylor, Nicola Scott, Orchid Liu, Rosario Blue, Alison Reeves - Making Music, Barb Fraser – Luminate, Caroline Dooley - Scottish Opera, Daniel Serridge - Village Storytelling, David Francis – TRACS, Fiona Dalgetty - Feis Rois, Frankie Toner - Heritage Lottery, Gavin Crichton - Active Enquiry, Graeme Howell - Shetland Arts, Heather Stuart – OnFife, Helen Mill - Village Storytelling, Jessica Reid - Dundee College of Art, Julia Amour - Festivals Edinburgh, Kathryn Welch - Culture Collective, Katie Weldon - Science Ceilidh, Sarah Cameron - Community Enterprise

1 Welcome

Sarah Boyack MSP (convener) welcomed attendees to the meeting.

2 Group Purpose

Sarah introduced the purpose of the Culture and Communities Group.

To encourage the exchange of knowledge and understanding between the Scottish Parliament and arts, culture, heritage, and historic environment communities.

The group will focus on the impact of the public sector, for example the social, health and educational impact of access and participation in the arts, heritage, libraries and museums.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were moved by Joseph Peach and seconded by Foyso Choudhury MSP.

4 Any Other Business

No additional business was raised at this stage

5 Meeting Theme: Culture and the Cost of Living Crisis

Sarah introduced the meeting's theme – Culture and the Cost of Living Crisis. Sarah also updated those present that the Scottish Government's planned cut to Creative Scotland was reversed on 21 Feb.

6 Presentation – Lewis Hou (Science Ceilidh)

Lewis Hou gave a presentation on his work facilitating a series of sector-wide discussions on Social Inequalities, Culture, wellbeing and libraries.

The aim of these discussions were to discover what is happening across libraries and culture to support social inequalities including the cost of living crisis, and collaborations that are developing in real time to respond to these needs.

These discussions led to a series of developing recommendations for improving community based culture and wellbeing in Scotland:

- Working inclusively and intentionally with communities to support cultural democracy and wellbeing
- Valuing workforce mental health, wellbeing and diversity during the cost of living crisis
- Sharing learning, resources and connections across sectors locally and nationally to support more integrated culture and wellbeing activities
- Reimagining what a more sustainable funding and ecosystem nourishing culture and wellbeing could look like
- Building an informed wider movement advocating for culture's role in mental health, wellbeing and social inequalities.

7 Presentation – Anne Gallacher (Luminate)

Anne gave a presentation on Luminate's work with their Dementia Inclusive Singing Network, which helps people affected by dementia take part in singing groups and choirs across Scotland.

Anne began by highlighting the benefits the group brings to participants, before going on to discuss landscape challenges affecting the network's work.

Luminate take a rights-based approach to delivering all their activity, including the dementia inclusive singing network.

In terms of the Dementia Inclusive Singing Network, the work is underpinned by research finding that community-based activities are integral to dementia support.

In the current context, the network faces a number of challenges:

Volunteer numbers dropping.

Groups that are part of the network are struggling to raise core funds – this landscape is very different to pre-pandemic.

Accessing appropriate spaces is also proving challenging – as a result of further cuts, many Local Authorities are increasing venue hire charges to unaffordable levels.

Age Scotland (the organisation which hosts Luminate) are finding that this difficulty is being experienced by groups right across the country.

Most singing groups employ musicians and are now struggling to do so.

8 Presentation – Jasmine Main

Jasmine's presentation focused on experiences from her work as Creative Engagement co-ordinator with the Ayr Gaiety Theatre, including delivering the Ayr Gaiety partnership Culture Collective Program.

Previously, Jasmine had worked with Toonspeak Young People's Theatre and other organisations in Glasgow and South Ayrshire.

The Ayr Gaiety partnership delivered six projects in its first year of funding. Jasmine's role included managing a team of thirteen artists, working on projects including dementia friendly theatre, a theatre company for adults with additional support needs, a board for young people with care experience and a creative writing project in Wallacetown, South Ayrshire.

The creative writing project was delivered in partnership with the Riverside Community Trust, working weekly with participants.

The group became a way for participants to access a number of different services: A food bank, clothes bank, community meals and NHS dentistry.

Jasmine raised the vital point that when asking participants to work on stories and write about their lives, consideration of wider circumstances is vital. She highlighted that imagination and play are privileges, and not as accessible as people might think. Factors such as mental and physical health, addiction, isolation, hunger and financial inequality are so immediate that creativity might be an impossibility. You can't eat art.

To facilitate working with communities, it was essential to provide access to more immediate needs – food, warmth, shelter and medical treatment. This is not

something that an arts organisation can necessarily support, so partnerships were essential.

Jasmine concluded by illustrating that when working in context such as the above, getting people through the door is only the first barrier. Once in the room, there will likely be multiple additional barriers to overcome. At the time of the meeting, Culture Collective funding hadn't yet been extended, leaving a cliff edge for projects such as the Ayr Gaiety Partnership's creative writing project.

9 Update – Neil Gray MSP (Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development)

Neil Gray MSP joined the meeting to provide a short update on the Scottish Government's perspective on the cost crisis experienced by the sector.

He outlined that the Government are doing all they can to respond to the issues facing the sector. He described the Government as being in "listening mode" to the concerns of the sector, while highlighting that due to inflation the 2022-23 budget is worth around £1.7 billion less than when it was introduced to Parliament in December 2021.

He re-iterated his determination to do all he can for the culture sector.

10 Discussion with minister and guest speakers

Below are a summary of questions and proposals discussed by the minister and guest speakers

The access to community space issue is worsening, how can we re-imagine a system for access to community space that isn't based on reactivity?

Would Scottish Government consider convening a short-term working group to better understand the potential of cross-portfolio working? I.e. engaging with govt health team to share understanding of possibilities for culture to contribute to health outcomes.

In the context of fiscal pressures, what approaches are organisations taking to balancing the need for income generation with the need to make services free at point of use?

Is there potential for community spaces such as libraries to be more creative about insurance policies – there is an issue at the moment where some community spaces can't be insured for use at night – could something be done to change this?

The essential nature of regular, consistent activity and engagement with participants was highlighted. Consistent provision is what has positive impacts on wider health outcomes.

Many artists and community workers delivering the sort of work discussed at this meeting work part time or freelance – what more can we do to ensure sustainable employment opportunities in this area?

More research is needed into social prescribing – both looking at approaches taken in different countries, and into what is already being done and what is possible in Scotland.

There is work to be done to join the dots between culture, wellbeing, sustainable development and community wealth building.

11 Actions

Convener and secretariat to meet to discuss how best to continue these conversations in the next CPG meeting.

12 Date of Next Meeting (Sept 2023)

The date of the next meeting is proposed for September 2023 (date TBC), with the aim of holding a hybrid meeting. Attendees were encouraged to send suggestions for future topics to Culture Counts.