

Joint COSLA and Directors of Finance Section Written Submission to Inquiry into Budget Scrutiny 2023-24

COSLA is a Councillor-led, cross-party organisation which champions Councils' vital work to secure the resources and powers they need. COSLA works on Councils' behalf to focus on the challenges and opportunities they face, and to engage positively with Governments and others on policy, funding and legislation. We're here to help Councils build better and more equal local communities. To do that we want to empower local decision making and enable Councils to do what works locally.

CIPFA Directors of Finance Section works closely with COSLA in leading strategic discussions with the Scottish Government around funding and distribution for the essential services and policy areas that Councils deliver on. Members of the Section are those who have responsibility for the overall financial functions across all 32 Local Authorities.

Summary of Key Points

- ❖ The Resource Spending Review (RSR) prioritises funding for health and social care and social security – directing spending at addressing the problems and not preventing them from occurring. This does little to support the culture and leisure sector which both have strong links to individuals' wellbeing and support for the local economy.
- ❖ Local Government is key part of the culture and leisure sector – real terms cut to funding will have an impact on Councils' ability to invest in the sector and support recovery. Given the pressure to deliver the statutory services, any reductions in budgets are likely to continue to have a disproportionate effect on the more discretionary areas included in 'culture'. Sustainability of cultural and leisure services remains challenging for Local Government and ALEOs.
- ❖ The need to invest in a whole systems approach is not recognised in the RSR.
- ❖ There needs to be fair funding for Local Government to enable ongoing and sustainable investment in cultural and leisure services (both revenue and capital) to support recovery and ensure wider benefits including improvements in mental health and wellbeing are enjoyed by communities.
- ❖ It is unclear whether the effects of changes in library and gallery use over the COVID-19 lockdowns, which saw a drop in physical visits and an increase in virtual ones, will continue.
- ❖ The heating and other costs of running premises are likely to increase significantly, adding to the pressures already being felt across the sector.
- ❖ There is learning that can be taken from the experience of the pandemic, however taking this forward effectively is dependent on Local Government capacity to invest in services and systems.

Introduction

1. COSLA and Directors of Finance Section is pleased to present a joint response to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's call for views on the impact of budgetary decisions, including the Resource Spending Review, on the culture sector in Scotland.
2. Local Government is a key part of the culture and leisure sector. Local Government, and Arm's Length External Organisations (ALEOs) where they are the delivery vehicle, provide a very broad range of cultural and leisure services – from library, leisure, museum and art gallery buildings across all our communities, to operation of theatres and support community halls and other venues. Councils also provide strong support to local third and independent sectors, in the form of direct grant support as well as indirect mechanisms such as peppercorn rents. Some two thirds of the 'regular funded organisations' supported by Creative Scotland have been receiving Local Government funding.
3. The maintenance of, and access to, these services and venues is critical to addressing each of the Scottish Government's overarching priorities – tackling child poverty; addressing the climate crisis; securing a stronger, fairer, greener economy. The culture sector is an important driver in Scotland's local and national economy as a significant contributor to tourism in cities, towns and rural areas. The sector also has a key role in providing local and wider employment, creating a strong pipeline of talent, job and training opportunities. Activities, such as curating and lending collections as well as performing arts also support international relations and understanding.
4. The sector also delivers physical and mental wellbeing benefits, encouraging active engagement and help people to connect with and contribute to their communities, helping to reduce social isolation and loneliness and improve resilience – issues which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Culture also has educational benefits and contributes significantly to developing the confidence and sense of identity in young people, helping to addressing the poverty related attainment gap. Culture has a significant role in removing barriers to learning, for example in Aberdeenshire giving a place for Doric in schools and community engagement has increased the confidence of young people who speak Doric at home, thus helping their overall learning. On a very local level libraries help equalise society and address child poverty through 'book bug' joint reading with children, acting as a venue from which employability services are provided and amongst other things by providing support to people making benefit claims. The importance of these venues may also change and provide different support to communities, for example libraries have been helping very directly in the energy crisis by providing easy access to warm premises for those not able to heat their own homes or those that are homeless.
5. The sector is also key to helping achieve net zero targets. The culture and leisure estate is a huge user of energy and water, making a significant contribution to Councils' carbon emissions. Investment to decarbonise the leisure estate and improve resource efficiency will be crucial to help achieve net zero targets locally; however, with cuts to capital funding this will be challenging. These venues and services are also key to realising human rights, in particular the right to cultural life and the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health which

are to be incorporated into law during this parliamentary term following the recommendations from the National Taskforce on Human Rights Leadership.

6. Local Government invests significantly in cultural services. Local Government direct net expenditure on culture was £185m in 2020/21 (this figure excludes expenditure on leisure). For context, the entire Scottish Budget for the culture portfolio (excluding external affairs) was £339.5m for the same year¹, which demonstrates how much additional and added-value investment is made by Local Government across all communities in Scotland.
7. For Local Government, the biggest area of net revenue expenditure on culture was library services, taking half of the cultural expenditure (£91.3m). The remaining Local Government expenditure on culture was for 'Other Cultural and Heritage' (£51.2m) and 'Museums and Galleries' (£42.3m)². It should be noted that the £185m expenditure does not include significant additional spending which is relevant to the cultural sector, such as community centres and other recreation and sport facilities. In addition, Councils have an important role as a steward of local, regional and national cultural and historical assets, for example Stirling Council operates the Wallace Monument, but also many buildings that house cultural assets are themselves listed buildings and cultural assets in their own right. It needs to be remembered that the cost of preserving and maintaining these needs to be met even if the assets are not accessible to the public. For example, Glasgow Life displays, stores, maintains and preserves over £1.4 billion worth of art and artefacts.
8. The sector has been significantly impacted by the pandemic, with most culture and leisure services unable to operate either at all or at usual capacity throughout the pandemic, leading to a significant loss of income for Councils and ALEOs. Returns have still not reached pre-pandemic levels. The sector is also now impacted by soaring inflation and energy costs.

Q.1. How are budgetary decisions supporting the recovery of the sector from COVID and what should be the Scottish Government's priorities in supporting recovery through Budget 2023-24;

Resource Spending Review Priorities

9. The Resource Spending Review (RSR) prioritises funding for health and social care and social security from 2023/24 until 2026/27. Prioritising health and social care and social security means that 'unprotected' areas like Local Government will see a real terms reduction in funding. This will have an impact on the broad range of culture and leisure services that Councils (and ALEOs) provide.
10. Both SPICe³ and the Fraser of Allander Institute⁴ have recognised the impact of the RSR on Local Government, stating that the proposals essentially represent a **7% real terms decrease in funding** between 2022/23 and 2026/27. This is in contrast to the 4.7% real terms increase that Scottish Government will see overall and the

¹ [Scottish Budget 2020-21 \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

² [2020/21 LFR 02 - Culture](#)

³ [SPICe: The 2022 Resource Spending Review: Budget priorities identified](#)

⁴ [FAI: Resource Spending Review analysis](#)

real terms increases that Health will see. This 7% cut to Local Government will mean that, by 2026-27, there will be £743m less in real terms to spend on the frontline services that matter most to communities – including culture and leisure services. This is equivalent to 20,000 fewer Local Government jobs. This is roughly 10% of the workforce.

11. By prioritising health and social care and social security, the Scottish Government is choosing to continue to direct funding ‘downstream’, at addressing problems, rather than ‘upstream’ in services that help prevent those problems occurring. Simply putting more resource into health is not the answer – recent analysis of the National Performance Framework (NPF) outcomes⁵ shows that key indicators such as healthy life expectancy (illustrated below), drug and alcohol use and premature mortality are not improving, and several official measures of health inequality are worsening⁶.
12. **There needs to be 'whole system' thinking about health and wellbeing** across the public sector, with greater investment upstream to reduce demand rather than just increasing funding for the NHS; prevention is key. The main social determinants of health - education, housing, employment - are all long-term drivers which must be invested in to improve health outcomes and address health inequality. We touch on the need for a whole systems approach in greater detail in our response to Question 4.
13. In terms of covid recovery in general, the COSLA submission to the RSR consultation outlined a concern that recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic was not listed as a driver and that this should have been included. There is a wealth of evidence showing the devastating impact the pandemic has had on the priority outcomes identified in the Covid Recovery Strategy and it is disappointing that this is not reflected in the RSR. One of the key outcomes in the Covid Recovery Strategy is around rebuilding public services. A flat cash settlement for Local Government will in fact mean cuts to services that are fundamental to delivering on the Covid Recovery Strategy priorities and will not enable services such as culture and leisure to recover.

Impact of flat cash settlement for Local Government on communities

14. Local Government is key part of the culture and leisure sector – the flat cash settlement will have an impact on Councils’ ability to invest in the sector, support recovery and preserve our cultural assets for future generations. **The impact of the RSR indicates that sustainability of cultural and leisure services will be increasingly challenging for Local Government and ALEOs.**
15. Local Government has been under significant and sustained financial challenge over the past decade. The core settlement has seen a real terms reduction of 15.2% since 2013/14. Historically the core settlement has been added to over the years for numerous policy priorities that Local Government has been asked to deliver (for example 600 hours of Early Learning and Childcare, period products, teacher numbers). Directed spend and protections in education and health and social care mean that Councils have limited flexibility over local spend and that cuts fall disproportionately on the remaining, unprotected areas, of which culture and leisure

⁵ [SPICe: How is Scotland Performing?](#)

⁶ [Long-term monitoring of health inequalities](#)

is one. 65% of the Local Government budget is directed, meaning non-directed elements account for just one third of local spend – and this one third is constantly being squeezed. The chart below highlights the areas under pressure, including culture and leisure.

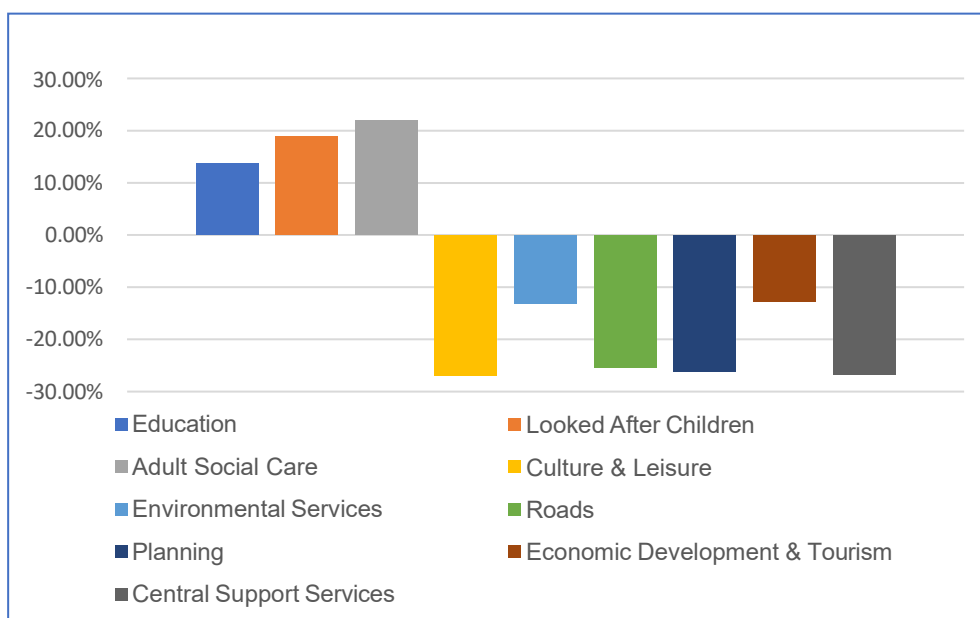


Figure 1: % change in real terms revenue expenditure 2010/11-2020/21 by Local Government Service Area

Source: Improvement Service National Benchmarking Overview Report 2020/21

16. Where costs rise for policy-specific funding or settlements have below inflationary increases on core funding, the core is plundered to meet the gap. This means core funding is constantly being squeezed and as a result, real terms cuts fall disproportionately on services that do not have a statutory basis or policy commitment (e.g. P1-5 Free School Meals) but do have a tangible impact on people’s quality of life (culture, sports facilities, waste, roads, parks, youth work, etc). Councils are also restricted in being able to make decisions informed by local need and priorities. This pressure on core budgets is becoming increasingly visible and leads to Councils making difficult choices.

17. **Culture and leisure services have already seen decreased investment** as a result on pressure on Council’s core budgets. Evidence⁷ shows that over a period of 8 years before the pandemic, the investment in the collective cultural area decreased by nearly a quarter. Councils and the ALEOs that deliver cultural and leisure services have sought to manage these budget reductions in ways that minimise the impacts on services, but the cracks are starting to show, for example some are having to cut back on exhibitions, learning and outreach programmes, reducing opening hours and introducing/increasing charges. During this same 8-year period, satisfaction levels in libraries, museums and galleries all fell.

⁷ [Local Government Benchmark Framework](#)

Continued pressures

18. The sector is still recovering from the pandemic – attendance is still down compared to pre-pandemic levels (currently at 70-80%) and some venues have not yet reopened. COSLA identified the level of income lost across cultural and leisure services in Local Government (including ALEOs) was estimated to be around £200m in 2020/21. Income generation for the sector is likely to be adversely impacted for some time yet as behaviours have been impacted by the pandemic. The pandemic will also have affected user behaviour and service delivery in some, as yet, unquantifiable ways. In addition, there are embedded conservation and management costs for our cultural inheritance whether they are actively visited or not.
19. On top of this, the sector is now faced with soaring inflation and energy costs. Energy costs alone are a significant inflationary factor impacting on the budgets already set, with increased energy costs across the Council estate estimated at £100m for 2022/23. Many culture and leisure venues use a lot of energy, such as libraries, theatres, leisure centres. The sector is also faced with pay pressures and rising costs for materials such as pool chemicals (which are in short supply due to a worldwide shortage, driving up prices). Before the pandemic, expensive pools may have been subsidised by activities such as gym membership. This is more challenging as returns have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Within the funding that is available to the joint sports and culture ALEOs, there is a need to meet the fixed and increased running costs with income remaining low as it is related to use. This forms further, internal budgetary pressures. As a result of these pressures, difficult decisions are already being taken to close pools, reduce opening hours and reduce the level of services and activities available.
20. With the cost-of-living crisis, people may have less money to spend on culture and leisure (particularly if facilities have to implement charging models), meaning the sector may yet see a further impact on loss of income.
21. Given the flat cash settlement and erosion of Councils' core funding, it is anticipated that lost income will need to be addressed through efficiencies, service redesign and considering any fees or charges – meeting future pay awards and inflationary pressures will compound this challenge. Further difficult decisions will need to be made, with the potential need for job losses and/or reduction or withdrawal of services.
22. Councils are also seeing significant inflationary pressures in capital projects, with most reporting increases of c.30% on anticipated costs. This is leading to many Councils reconsidering their capital plans and is having an impact on how much investment Councils are able to make in the culture and leisure estate. The result of fewer capital projects being taken forward will have impacts on communities as the quality of infrastructure is affected and will impact Councils' and ALEOs' ability to further invest in decarbonisation.
23. **There needs to be fair funding for Local Government to enable ongoing and sustainable investment in cultural and leisure services** (both revenue and capital) to support recovery and ensure wider benefits including improvements in mental health and wellbeing are enjoyed by communities.

Workforce Challenges

24. As with the other sectors across Local Government, the culture and leisure sector is also facing significant recruitment issues at all levels which will impact on how well the sector can recover. The sector has been significantly impacted by pandemic, with a historical dependence on high levels of freelance staff, many of whom left the sector due to the financial exposure caused by the pandemic. Brexit has also contributed to recruitment challenges.
25. The flat cash settlement for Local Government gives no scope to recognise appropriately within the context of the now increasing cost-of-living crisis, the essential work of staff and the value placed on such roles. It also further compounds the recruitment challenge as there is limited scope to uplift those on lower rates whilst protecting the integrity of the pay scales further up. There is particularly a challenge in the leisure sector where, as we have protected the lowest paid, this has eroded the pay differential between for example, cleaners and lifeguards and instructors, who must have specific qualifications and checks. This therefore exacerbates the staff recruitment and retention issues that have been increasing for a number of years.

Q.2. Despite an increasing recognition of the established health and wellbeing benefits of culture, the Committee has previously heard that this had not led to transformational change in terms of both a cross-cutting approach within Government and increased budgetary support for culture across a number of spending areas - what needs to change to embed culture and health and wellbeing across government and the public sector;

26. COSLA agree that we are not yet seeing the transformational change that is needed in terms of a cross-cutting approach and increased budgetary support for culture across spending areas.
27. As set out in our response to Questions 1 and 4, what is needed is a whole systems approach and investment in social determinants of health. The sector needs long term, sustainable funding.
28. Further work needs to be done to ensure that all Scottish Government directorates and public sector organisations recognise the contribution of culture and leisure services across a range of outcomes (economic, education, health and wellbeing) and funding needs to reflect this.
29. What we mean by 'culture' is very broad – it includes the high-profile museums and art galleries; the stewardship of the collections that service these; future purchases and sponsorship; concert halls and theatres, support to live performances and creative work; libraries in their broadest roles; community-based arts activities in halls and other venues. As highlighted throughout this response, these all play a significant role in improving a range of outcomes – including reducing inequalities, physical and mental wellbeing, community identity, placemaking, tourism, economic development, cultural diplomacy. There needs to be a greater understanding of culture, the contribution it makes to such outcomes and the impact that reducing resources for culture and leisure has on achieving these outcomes.

30. The broad ranging Culture Strategy aims to place culture as a central consideration across all policy areas including health and wellbeing, economy, education, reducing inequality and realising a greener and more innovative future. The Cultural Strategy has been well received but without joint political ownership and investment it is difficult to see how the Strategy will positively influence provision at a local level in the tight financial climate.

Q.3. The Scottish Government's independent Advisory Group on Economic Recovery in the wake of COVID-19 recommended that Ministers should in relation to the creative sector seek "ways to increase public and private investment across the sector to allow it to recover and compete" – can you provide examples of where this is happening or ways in which it should happen;

31. The sector plays a key role in economic recovery, attracting visitors and investment and providing opportunities for local employment. The sector needs to be supported to continue to achieve these benefits for communities.

32. As highlighted throughout this response, there needs to be fair funding for Local Government to enable ongoing and sustainable investment in cultural and leisure services. Without this, recovery and sustainability of these services will continue to be challenging.

33. The possibility of cross-subsidy has diminished as sports and leisure attendance related income has dropped, as have flows of income from ancillary activity, including catering and gift purchasing associated with museums and art galleries. As an example, Glasgow Life's income dropped by £40m overnight in March 2020 and has still not recovered. This was approximately one third of their budget.

34. More profitable activities (e.g. gym membership) may have previously subsidised other activities (e.g. swimming), however with returns still at 70-80% on pre-pandemic levels this has meant changes to the level of income available to reinvest in wider services and activities. Level of returns and income generation may be further impacted as a result of the cost of living crisis, as people have less disposable income to spend on culture and leisure activities. The cost of living crisis may also impact on charitable donations that ALEOs receive.

35. The result of this is that more services will be forced to operate more commercially, including introducing/increasing charges. This will impact on equality of access and on who can take advantage of the wellbeing benefits these services can bring, further exacerbating inequalities in our communities.

Q.4. The Committee has previously agreed with COSLA that a ‘whole system’ approach is essential to the spending review and that this is consistent with an outcomes-focused and collaborative approach; our view is that it is only through such an approach that the necessary funding can be freed up to ensure that sufficient cultural services are available to meet the increased demand arising from cultural prescribing – what progress has been made in moving towards a whole system approach, what are the main barriers and how do we overcome them;

The need to invest in a whole system approach is not recognised in the RSR

36. COSLA’s response to the RSR consultation highlighted that the priorities seemed to lack a place-based, community wellbeing focus, and so the inclusion of an additional priority, “to ensure that everyone can live well locally” was proposed. It was suggested that this should underpin and link the other priorities and reflect the importance of improving the wellbeing of individuals and communities. COSLA highlighted that to enable people to Live Well Locally it is critical to address the social determinants of health and invest in the ‘whole system’, of which Local Government is a fundamental part.

37. **This priority was not included in the final RSR and the need for a whole systems approach is not recognised.** As set out in the response to Question 1, prioritising health and social care and social security doesn’t resolve the fundamental problems.

38. Without a priority that is focused on the communities in which children grow up, in which local action can be taken on climate change, and in which businesses can thrive, public spending will continue to paper over the cracks. Without a focus on creating vibrant and supportive communities, our public services will continue to plough money into addressing complex and resource-intensive problems that mean poorer outcomes for individuals. Put simply, resource spending that is focused on supporting people to Live Well Locally is cost-effective and aligns with Christie Commission principles.

39. Local Government services – like housing, education, childcare, employability, parks, transport and culture and leisure – are critical in addressing the social determinants of health and play a significant role in preventing poor health outcomes and reducing demand for healthcare services, as well as supporting people into employment and helping to reduce dependence on the welfare system. For example, there is clear evidence⁸ that disinvestment in Local Government leads to adverse trends in healthy life expectancy, resulting in people needing increased care and support at an earlier age. Section 3-5 of this response highlights the specific significant contribution that the culture and leisure sector make to improving outcomes in our local communities. The sector has wide value for our economy, wellbeing and education and should be supported and encouraged at local and national levels.

40. The RSR fails to recognise the need to focus on upstream investment, instead proposing real terms cuts to the areas that can prevent more costly downstream

⁸ [Local government funding and life expectancy in England: a longitudinal ecological study - The Lancet Public Health](#)

intervention (for example investment in preventative approaches like social prescribing and support for the local culture and leisure sector). In other words, continuing to focus funding in areas where things have already gone wrong in people's lives, rather than providing funding to stop them going wrong in the first place. Ten years on from the Christie Commission, we are not seeing the necessary changes in the focus of resource spending. It is also important to note that funding to address this must be sustainable and not at the expense of core Local Government funding.

Outcomes-focussed approach

41. COSLA's desire, since Single Outcome Agreements were first introduced in 2008 and reaffirmed by signing the National Performance Framework (NPF) in 2018, has been to focus on outcomes, not inputs and outputs, and we have long called for there to be less directed funding. There is little evidence of any commitment to this in the RSR. The RSR does not afford us flexibility, less directed spend or a reduced reporting burden. It points to more of the same, delaying many decisions until budget setting in December.
42. As highlighted by SPICe⁹, "there does not appear to be any analysis of the impact of the spending plans in the RSR on the delivery of the different national outcomes and the outcomes in totality, or of how the data in the NPF has informed these spending plans."
43. It is helpful that the NPF now includes culture as one of our national outcomes. The health and wellbeing contribution of cultural participation could be further recognised and enabled through the NPF. This is particularly important with regard to mental health recovery, closing the education attainment gap, local placemaking, and individual and community resilience. Consideration should also be given to the potential role of cultural and creative industries in enabling significant changes in thinking towards economic growth given the climate emergency and the need to shift from consumption-led towards wellbeing-led models via innovation.

Q.5. The Committee's view is that it is essential that, wherever practical, multi-year funding for the cultural organisations the Scottish Government supports is passed on to the groups and individuals being funded who should, where appropriate, also receive a multi-year settlement – what progress has been made in moving towards multi-year funding, what are the main barriers and how do we overcome them.

44. COSLA has long called for multi-year funding. Multi-year settlements are required to maximise the positive impact of public spending. Resourcing on an annual basis is not a best value approach. Single-year budgets prevent effective planning for systemic challenges such as tackling inequalities which cannot be resolved in a single year. Multi-year investment funding is required to unlock a strategic response that meets the aims of the relevant strategies and outcomes. Resourcing on an annual basis inhibits effective service design, has negative impacts on recruiting and retaining people with the necessary skills, and hinders strategic procurement activity

⁹ [SPICe briefing: Resource Spending Review and Pre-Budget Scrutiny](#)

which leads to stop-start service delivery. It can mean that interventions are limited to what can be provided within that financial year rather than interventions which will deliver the best outcomes. This was recognised by the Accounts Commission in their Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022:

"The ongoing absence of a multi-year financial settlement creates uncertainty for councils at a time when effective and robust financial management is crucial.

"The Scottish Government continues to fund councils on an annual basis. This makes it challenging for councils to plan and budget effectively for the medium and longer term, and work with partners to develop long-term plans to deliver better outcomes and address inequalities."

45. The lack of multi-year budgets has a knock-on impact on the effectiveness of the whole public sector to plan and implement systematic changes aimed at tackling inequalities and improving outcomes across Scotland over the longer term. The financial and service planning of Local Government and culture organisations is severely compromised without multi-year funding commitments.
46. Councils have only had single year budgets in recent years and so have generally only been able to offer single year budgets to the partners they fund. These partner organisations also therefore suffer from the same challenges of service design and recruiting and retaining staff. This uncertainty has an impact on the organisation and on the wellbeing of the workforce. Where Councils do offer three-year funding packages to the third sector, this comes at significant financial risk to their finances.
47. Whilst the RSR is welcome, it gives very little detail. Local Government will still be subject to annual budget setting processes and a degree of uncertainty on future budgets.
48. Whilst the Scottish Government has reviewed its 5-year capital spending review and published its intentions in relation to capital, the outlook for Local Government is not positive. As highlighted above in this response, Councils are reporting large increases in capital costs so this will mean less capital projects. The potential impact of the Capital Accounting Review will exacerbate this.

Q.6. The Committee has previously stated that the collaborative learning from managing the response to COVID should be harnessed and built upon; for example, in exploring how innovative ways of working such as the shift to digital platforms can enhance the accessibility of cultural activities while at the same time improving health and wellbeing – what progress has been made in embedding the collaborative learning from managing the response to COVID, what are the main barriers and how do we overcome them.

49. The strengths and vulnerabilities highlighted by the pandemic do need to be understood in order to inform appropriate change and the sector requires ongoing support to adapt and innovate in partnership with other sectors, institutions and local, regional, national and international structures.

50. There are lots of good examples of collaborative learning from managing the response to COVID-19. For example, a significant increase in online programming of social and cultural activities was driven by the pandemic. Many services were able to adapt by creating online services, including virtual museums and galleries. Libraries also developed 'click and collect' arrangements for lending and the use of virtual libraries has also grown. This has also enabled greater access for some who previously may have been unable to due to disability, poverty and geography.
51. It is likely that a hybrid model of digital and physical would be an innovative and beneficial way forward and investment in digital infrastructure and skills should be a priority following the experience of the pandemic. It is important to highlight that there must be a hybrid approach and not a purely digital offering. Online services and programming increases attendance but it is physical attendance that has the biggest impact from a mental health and isolation perspective.
52. **Embedding a hybrid model is dependent on Local Government capacity to invest in services and systems.** As highlighted throughout this response, a flat cash settlement for Local Government, with increasingly directed funding and protections in education and health and social care, continue to mean that other areas like culture and leisure services are subject to cuts with no ability to invest in services and systems.
53. There needs to be investment for Local Government and the wider culture and leisure sector in supporting embedding of digital and hybrid approaches (including in research and development of quality digital platforms), as well as supporting Councils to provide the necessary infrastructure, particularly in remote and rural areas, and to remove barriers to ensure all audiences can access.
54. Another barrier to embedding collaborative learning is the workforce challenges that the sector faces. As highlighted above, the sector was significantly impacted by pandemic and many of the freelance staff that the sector depended on have left. The sector is facing huge recruitment and retention challenges. This impacts on staff capacity to implement any learning.