

# Pre-Budget scrutiny 2026-27: Funding for culture

## Response from Museums Galleries Scotland

Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) is the National Development Body for Scotland's museum sector. We support museums and galleries through strategic investment, advice, workforce development and advocacy.

Scotland's museums and galleries are more than keepers of our national treasures, they are a force for public good, deeply embedded in our communities, and a powerful driver of cultural, social, and economic value.

They support 3,700 FTE jobs, volunteers contribute an estimated 54,100 volunteer days annually and they generate in excess of £900 million in total spend.

Our museums and galleries are amongst the most loved and trusted spaces and institutions in the country. But behind the scenes, the sector continues to grapple against a challenging landscape of rising costs and insufficient funding models.

The positives are real, but so too are the pressures. Without sustained investment and clear strategic support, the challenges facing the sector will never be far from the surface.



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## Question 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?**

The Scottish Government's commitment to increase overall culture funding is welcome and necessary. However, museums and galleries have not seen a proportionate share of that investment, despite their vital social, educational, and economic contributions across Scotland.

Taken together with the absence of multi-year funding for the museum sector, this creates a persistently challenging landscape. Short-term settlements and uncertainty around future budgets are preventing the sector from planning strategically, investing in long-term outcomes, or retaining skilled staff.

This is contributing to real and immediate risk leading to reduced capacity, shrinking reserves, and the loss of key roles in learning, curatorial care, and community engagement roles.

The recent launch of the [Museum Futures](#) Programme, with an initial £4 million of investment, is a significant and welcome step in the right direction.

Museum Futures is a pioneering new programme of funding and support which seeks to accelerate collaboration and innovation and embed organisational sustainability across the museum sector. It seeks to drive positive, strategic change, ensuring that museums continue to enrich our local communities for generations to come. By creating the right conditions for growth and resilience, Scotland's museums will be able to learn, adapt, and thrive.

Museum Futures has been developed in partnership with the Scottish Government, Museums Galleries Scotland, and The National Lottery Heritage Fund as a response to the long-running financial insecurity facing the sector after years of budget reductions and short-term funding cycles. It recognises that many museums have been operating under persistent resource constraints, limiting their ability to plan strategically, invest in their workforce, and adapt to changing community needs.

These challenges continue today and will take many years of sustained and growing investment to resolve. Early engagement by the sector has been encouraging and organisations have been swift to respond to the opportunity to access funding to grow their capacity, alongside expert advice,



coaching, peer-to-peer learning, and skills development opportunities. They are making informed decisions regarding immediate and longer-term priorities through our Organisational Health Checker. A month after programme launch, 15 organisational health checkers have been completed and submitted and a further 20 museums are working on one. More than 30 expressions of interest in the [Leadership Capacity Fund](#) have been received, we anticipate being able to fund between 10 and 11.

The strength of the sectors immediate response to Museum Futures demonstrates that it is meeting their needs. **It is essential that this investment is maintained and expanded into the 2026/27 budget and beyond in order for the programme to address the serious challenges the sector is experiencing.**

It is important to also note that the strategic progress that Museums Futures will deliver will remain severely constrained unless accompanied by:

- **A commitment to multi-year funding, enabling museums to plan, innovate, and retain skilled staff.**
- **Capital investment, to protect collections and make museum spaces safe, accessible, and environmentally sustainable;**
- **Support for outreach and engagement work, which is too often sacrificed due to immediate financial pressures.**

Scotland's museums and galleries deliver public value every day, enriching lives, supporting wellbeing, driving tourism, and safeguarding our shared heritage. But they are doing so under increasing strain. **Targeted, sustained, and fair investment is not only necessary, but it is the only effective way to protect our museums for future generations.**

In addition, **we ask for continued funding to fully implement the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums recommendation accepted by the Scottish Government in 2024.**

With the establishment, this year, of the Scottish Museum of Empire Slavery, Colonialism and Migration the work to create a permanent space to attest to Scotland's role in empire, to support BME peoples and communities in engaging with Scottish heritage and culture has started. Sustained, ring fenced investment is now required.

The Scottish Government investment in **MGS's Delivering Change Programme** developed in response to the ESSM recommendations **comes to an end in March 2026.** Delivering Change is supporting the sector to restructure as organisations based on anti-oppressive principles.



### **Funding will be essential to enable us to build on the groundwork already delivered.**

The wider heritage sector is also keen to see budgets match ambitions in respect to Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Following the UK's ratification of the 2003 UNESCO Convention in April 2023 progress on the recording, safeguarding, and promotion of Scotland's unique living heritage has been being carried forward by an informal national partnership including Historic Environment Scotland, Museums Galleries Scotland, Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland, and Creative Scotland. We recommend that the partnership is provided with a dedicated budget to embed ICH support across the wider sector and maintain Scotland's role as a leader in ICH across the UK. **A dedicated budget for ICH would allow the lessons learned from our new Protection Through Collection project to be extended, tightening relationships between ICH communities and their local cultural organisations.** Museums are perfectly placed to support ICH projects given their expertise in collection management, researching, documenting, interpreting and exhibiting.



### Questions 2 and 3

## WHAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE TOWARDS IMPLEMENTING ALTERNATIVE FUNDING MODELS TO SUPPORT THE CULTURE SECTOR?

### 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 welcome the Committee's continued focus on alternative funding models. The recent launch of the Museums Future programme, supported by £4 million from the Scottish Government, is a positive and strategic development. The programme will foster innovation, collaboration, and organisational sustainability across the sector. Crucially, it will enable museums to adapt and have the capacity to thrive, rather than simply survive.

However, **this progress must form part of a long-term strategy. To deliver its full potential, continued and expanded support for Museums Future is essential in the 2026/27 Budget and beyond.**

Despite the progress that Museums Futures represents, the current funding landscape leaves many museums unable to access the resources they need. Core, capital, and infrastructure funding remain largely absent across the majority of the sector. According to the Museums Association the estimated backlog in capital maintenance across Scottish museums is tens of millions of pounds, with some buildings facing closure due to health and safety concerns.

This year, **the Scottish Government awarded us £1.6 million for capital funding, a welcome and significant £1.4 million increase from the previous long-standing budget of £200,000.** This funding is being made available to the sector through the new Repair and Adaptation Fund split across two rounds. **However, the total value of the applications received in the first round alone has already exceeded available funds and we expect at least as many applications for the second round. We will not be able to meet the sector's needs with what we have.**

The scale of demand underlines the urgency of sustained capital investment. **We would encourage exploration of a new scheme similar to the Museum Estate and Development (MEND) fund in England which has disbursed over £133 million to date. A dedicated capital fund modelled on MEND would help address the mounting backlog in repairs and**



**infrastructure upgrades. It would protect collections from environmental damage and degradation, improve accessibility, safety, and sustainability, and reduce future costs through early intervention.**

Slow progress is being made on the development of alternative models of income such as the visitor levy. Museums are often anchor attractions for local tourism strategies yet get overlooked when funding is being distributed. **A fair share of revenues from visitor levies should be directly reinvested into museums to support local infrastructure, programming, and conservation.**

We recognise that our partners in Local Government are under enormous pressure to deliver statutory services in the face of sustained budget pressures. This often means that museums, which are not statutory, lose out.

The financial squeeze is long-standing, **local authority expenditure on museums and galleries in Scotland declined by 26% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2021/22**, illustrating the longer-term direction of travel.

Despite these pressures, local authority/ALEO run museums have continued to play an essential role in their communities, if this is to continue they require fair and sustained funding.

With limited options available this severe financial pressure is forcing Local Authority and ALEO run museums to consider the need to charge non-residents for entry as a means of generating additional income. This is not a decision that would be taken lightly, and its very consideration highlights the extent to which budgets are stretched.

Current legislation prohibits charging. For any change to be possible, new legislation would be required to repeal or amend the 1887 Act, giving local authorities or delegated bodies the power to introduce targeted charging policies if they choose to do so. Such a move would need careful consideration, sector-wide consultation, and safeguards to ensure continued access and equity, particularly for local communities.

In line with the wider cultural sector, **we strongly support the call for a “percentage for culture” model, with a minimum of 1% of the national budget allocated to culture, including museums.** This would signal a meaningful shift in how culture is valued and embedded across government priorities, taken together with increased support and capacity, would enable a shift towards a more sustainable future. Museums across Scotland are ready to adapt, collaborate, and innovate, but they need the right tools, infrastructure, and long-term support to make it happen.



#### Question 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?**

Some progress has been made towards mainstreaming culture, but it remains inconsistent and underfunded. Scotland's museums and galleries increasingly contribute to public policy outcomes far beyond the cultural/heritage sphere, including health and wellbeing, education, inclusion, and climate action. The cross-portfolio alignment needed to fully embed this contribution remains underdeveloped.

In the area of health and wellbeing, there is robust evidence of the preventative power of museum engagement. Our [Museums, Health and Wellbeing report](#) demonstrates that museum visits are linked to reduced depression, increased longevity, and a lower risk of dementia. Projects such as *Prescribe Culture*, *Art for Baby*, and *Dementia Socials* show how museum-based programmes can support physical, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing across all life stages.

**Notably, 80% of Scots believe there are health benefits to cultural engagement, and 53% said they would engage with heritage activities if referred by a health professional, more than for sport.** These outcomes not only improve lives, they reduce demand on public services and align strongly with the aims of the Scottish Government's *Population Health Framework*.

In education, too, museums deliver strong, measurable outcomes. In our [Museums and Education Impact Report](#), **88% of museums provide formal education sessions that directly support the Curriculum for Excellence. Over half offer early years learning opportunities, and many provide structured youth employment, life skills, and vocational pathways.** In this year alone we have supported 26 [Workforce for the Future](#) initiatives across 20 local authority areas.

Museums offer safe, stimulating spaces where learning is interdisciplinary, inclusive, and rooted in Scotland's cultural identity. However, these programmes are frequently at risk when budgets tighten, with learning staff and outreach often among the first roles to be lost, despite their long-term impact on attainment, confidence, and skills development.



**The 2026/27 Budget, can be a significant opportunity to properly demonstrate a commitment to preventative spending to mainstream culture and secure cross-portfolio benefits by creating a dedicated, cross-portfolio culture and health fund, aligned with the *Population Health Framework*. This would enable museums and galleries to deliver wellbeing initiatives in partnership with local health boards and third-sector partners.**

This approach could mark an important shift away from the limitations of short-term funding cycles, which disrupt planning, strain resources, and limit the ability of museums to build meaningful, long-term partnerships. **A move to multi-year funding would allow museums to engage more consistently with schools, health boards, and communities, leading to deeper impact. It would improve the efficiency of public investment by reducing duplication, administrative overheads and the need to repeatedly rebuild projects.**

Museums are uniquely placed to support the delivery of mainstreaming culture and embedding preventative spending as they are already rooted in communities across the country and have built up strong reserves of public trust and confidence.

Local museums, in particular, serve as accessible hubs for learning, memory, identity, and engagement. They reach people who may not engage with other public services and can act as first points of contact for community-based preventative interventions.

As such, they are well positioned to help deliver the Scottish Government's ambitions around tackling health inequalities, improving population health, supporting lifelong learning, and reducing loneliness and isolation.

**The 2026/27 Budget should invest in museums not only as cultural venues but as multipurpose community assets. By investing in museums through a preventative lens, Scotland can unlock the potential of these trusted spaces to deliver sustained improvements in wellbeing, education, inclusion, and environmental awareness. With the right support museums could become fully integrated partners in delivering a fairer, healthier, and more resilient Scotland.**



## Question 5

### **HOW IS THE CULTURE AND HERITAGE SECTOR ADDRESSING ITS OWN OPERATIONAL EMISSIONS IN LINE WITH THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S NET ZERO AMBITIONS?**

Museums across Scotland are taking meaningful steps to reduce their carbon footprints, despite the significant financial and structural challenges they face. From switching to LED lighting, reducing transport-related emissions through local sourcing in shops and cafés, to promoting active travel for visitors and staff, many museums are making small but impactful changes within their means.

Some organisations, such as the Scottish Crannog Centre, go further. They are embedding low-emission, circular principles into every aspect of their operation. The Crannog Centre sources almost everything from within a day's walk, enhances local biodiversity through traditional coppicing, and is actively working to improve access to the Centre via public transport and active travel. These approaches show how museums can lead by example when resourced and empowered to do so. However, progress across the sector is uneven due to common barriers. For example museums also report difficulty in measuring digital carbon footprints, as sector-wide tools and guidance remain limited. Change is slowed by planning permission delays that stall retrofit projects, and funding windows that expire before permissions are granted.

Financial pressures further restrict progress: while many museums want to move to more sustainable suppliers, install bike racks, or upgrade heating systems, they are constrained by upfront costs, lack of core funding, and competing priorities. Some have found that switching to green electricity tariffs is not rewarded under current location-based reporting rules, which discourages further investment in clean energy. These barriers must be acknowledged and addressed if the sector is to meaningfully contribute to net zero.

At MGS, we have made our own formal commitment to climate action. Our [Climate Commitment](#) sets out clear actions we are taking, including decarbonising our operations, embedding climate literacy, and supporting the wider sector to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. 2024/5 was the first year we had an official carbon budget. We set a conservative target of 25,000KgCO<sub>2</sub>e, allowing for the planned expansion of the team and requests for increased travel from the sector. Our final calculated carbon for the year totalled 15,338.85 KgCO<sub>2</sub>e, or 61.4% of our budget. This gives us the confidence to set more ambitious targets moving forward. We are aligning this with national frameworks and developing guidance to support climate transition at every level.



## Question 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 and heritage organisations have a vital role to play in raising public awareness, shaping attitudes, and holding space for informed debate on climate and environmental issues. They are trusted institutions, embedded in communities, and well placed to bridge global challenges with local relevance.**

Across Scotland, museums are already tackling the nature crisis, which receives far less public and media attention than it should. Innovative examples include Stromness Museum's snorkel safaris, Kinloch Museum's nature walks, and Ravenspoint Museum's bird of prey trail. Ellisland Farm recently hosted an entomology evening that led to the discovery of a rare moth, engaging local communities directly in biodiversity monitoring.

Museums are also using exhibitions to stimulate public dialogue and behaviour change. The Wardlaw Museum's "Rewrite the Future" exhibition actively invites visitors to make decisions about Scotland's future, linking personal choices with political action. Museums like Perth Museum and the Scottish Maritime Museum have become safe spaces for civic debate, balancing the need for climate action with lived local realities. This ability to inspire and inform, rooted in place and evidence, is essential for shaping public consent and scrutiny in response to the climate and nature emergencies.

**Museums can help translate policy into participation, if they are funded and empowered to do so.**



## Question 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 (CCP) offers a valuable opportunity to clarify the role of the culture sector in achieving national net zero goals. However, the CCP must take account of the staffing constraints, funding shortages, and governance complexity that hinder implementation on the ground.

#### **To contribute meaningfully, our sector needs:**

- Multi-year capital investment to support retrofitting, energy upgrades, and decarbonisation projects—particularly where planning delays or heritage protections slow progress.
- Support for the creation and integration of District Heating Networks and a decarbonised grid, which would enable museums to make more impactful energy choices.
- Reliable public and active travel networks, especially in rural areas, to reduce visitor and staff transport emissions and diversify who can access museums.
- Core funding for sustainability roles and dedicated project leads, which are critical to delivering climate-related projects but often unfunded or short-term.
- Adjustments to how carbon reporting is incentivised, especially in how green tariffs and renewable energy use are reflected in official reporting.
- Regional energy pricing or community-owned renewable funding models, which could help make renewable investments more publicly acceptable and beneficial to cultural institutions in areas where private investment is politically sensitive.

Five-year carbon budgets are extremely difficult to plan for without corresponding multi-year funding commitments. Staffing, programming, and infrastructure all require stable investment over time. A piecemeal approach limits ambition and reduces efficiency.



The sector is ready to do more, but it requires clarity, capacity, and investment to act at scale. Embedding culture into the CCP with accompanying resources would ensure that Scotland's museums and heritage organisations are full and active contributors to a just and sustainable transition.



## In conclusion

Scotland's museums and galleries are deeply rooted in their communities; recently described as the '[stewards of our national heritage](#)', they are also safe, trusted places where everyone is welcome and where we can connect with others, share our stories and find hope and healing.

**With the right policy environment and funding clarity, museums can be empowered to deliver positive change across government and society**, from boosting local economies to tackling health inequalities and inspiring climate action.

To do this they **must** have:

- Multi-year funding and the continuation of Museum Futures funding.
- A guaranteed and proportionate share in any culture funding uplift
- Increased and regular capital investment
- Recognition of their role, and an understanding of the benefits of aligning museum spending with wider Government outcomes on health, wellbeing, preventative spending etc

**Without this action, the risk is clear, a continued reduction in services and a diminished access to the cultural and societal benefits that museums provide.**

If enabled, Scotland's museums can be a cornerstone of a fairer, healthier, greener nation, helping to deliver not only cultural enrichment, but real public value. They are ready to play their full part in building a sustainable future. **With targeted investment and the right political will, museums and galleries can thrive and help Scotland to do the same.**

