

Museums and public service reform: investing in the capacity to deliver better outcomes

Public Service Reform: Pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28 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.



Introduction

Most see our sector as being part of a wider set of cultural service, places that preserve collections, provide opportunities to learn and offer enjoyable experiences, but Scotland's museums have much more to offer. **A visit to a museum is not simply a cultural experience; it is a lesson in how inclusive growth, social impact, and civic pride can be achieved, alongside valuable examples in positive public sector reform.**

Across Scotland, museums are working with local authorities, schools, universities, health and social care partners, community organisations and other public services to address local priorities. They provide trusted spaces in communities, support learning and wellbeing, contribute to local economies, strengthen civic participation and help people develop a sense of place and belonging.

Many museums remain strongly aligned with the principles established by the Christie Commission. Designing services around people and remaining relevant to communities by working together with a focus on prevention and reducing inequality.

The Scottish Government's Public Service Reform Strategy builds on that approach. It recognises that complex challenges cannot be addressed by organisations working in silos and identifies the need for greater collaboration, integration, prevention, local decision-making and the removal of duplication and unnecessary complexity.

Museums offer a practical example of why this broader understanding of reform matters. We recognise the financial pressures facing Scotland's public services, but we also know that efficiency cannot be considered in isolation from effectiveness.

A reduction in expenditure is not necessarily a saving if it results in greater demand elsewhere in the system, reduces the ability of services to intervene early, or undermines the infrastructure through which positive outcomes are achieved.

Christie recognised this distinction, which is particularly important for the services delivered by museums and galleries. Their contribution frequently cuts across conventional portfolio boundaries and budgets, delivering a range of projects beyond their core work that contribute to:

- educational attainment and lifelong learning
- health and wellbeing
- reducing social isolation
- supporting children and young people
- local economic development and tourism



- community wealth building
- place-making and regeneration
- climate action and resilience
- strengthening local identity, belonging and civic participation.

The value of this activity is not always captured within the budget lines of the organisation delivering it. That is why it should be easier for organisation like museums to access support to work across boundaries.

Government cannot expect or ask organisations to collaborate more, without removing administrative barriers which too often make collaboration difficult to fund, manage and sustain.

Museum Futures: an example of reform in practice

The [Museum Futures programme](#) provides a particularly positive example of how this approach can work within the cultural sector.

Museum Futures is a £4 million Scottish Government investment delivered by Museums Galleries Scotland in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Its purpose to drive positive, strategic change, ensuring that museums and galleries can continue to enrich our local communities for generations to come.

The programme is important in the context of public service reform because it does not simply provide funding to maintain existing activity. It is designed to help museums become stronger, more effective and more sustainable, while testing new approaches, building leadership capacity, encouraging innovation and developing collaboration across the sector.

The Year 1 evaluation explains that the programme reached 104 of approximately 297 potentially eligible organisations. 100 completed an Organisational Health Check, 58 received grants, and 110 museums accessed wraparound support through 21 activities.

More importantly, the programme is beginning to change the conditions in which museums operate.

The evaluation found that 51 of 53 supported museums agreed that the Organisational Health Check helped identify priorities, 50 of 53 found the follow-up conversation with MGS valuable, and 41 of 53 agreed that it had led to actions they would not otherwise have taken.



The OHC is a vital diagnostic tool, giving us a new level of evidence and data to make strategic choices. It is also significant in supporting organisations to understand their challenges/problems, identify opportunities and act on them.

The programme is creating space for innovation. The evaluation found that 41 of 70 survey respondents had tried a new approach in the previous 12 months and a further 23 were planning to do so. Examples included new income-generating activities, venue hire, festivals, shop redevelopment and feasibility work to bring parts of museum sites back into use.

Crucially, the programme's innovation-focused strands is helping to convert this appetite into action. Among supported museums, 45% of those engaged with the Innovation Fund, Unlocking Potential Fund or Pathfinder reported testing or planning a new approach, compared with 18% of those not engaged with these strands.

This is precisely the type of activity that a reform agenda should seek to encourage: testing, learning, adapting and scaling what works rather than assuming that the existing model of service delivery is the only possible one.

Testing new models of delivery

In Year 1, three Pathfinder awards were made. Two funded scoping work for collaborative projects, while the third funded a shared staffing model across a cluster of museums.

These are small-scale examples, but they illustrate an important principle for public service reform: some efficiencies and improvements will come not from asking existing organisations to do more with less, but from changing the way organisations work together.

Shared staffing, shared infrastructure, collaborative procurement, joint services and collective approaches can all potentially reduce duplication while maintaining or improving the quality of provision. This is directly relevant to the Scottish Government's simplification and shared services workstreams.

The lesson from Museum Futures is that change requires investment before it generates benefits. Organisations need the capacity to explore an idea, assess its viability, test it and learn from it. They also need permission to experiment where the outcome is uncertain.

That is why an *Invest to Save* approach is important. The objective should not simply be to identify immediate savings, but to support changes which can generate better outcomes and sustainable efficiencies over time.



Moving museums beyond survival mode

The case for continued investment in Museum Futures is also connected to a wider question about the sustainability of public services.

The Year 1 evaluation found that 88% of survey respondents identified funding and financial sustainability as one of their three biggest current challenges.

This financial pressure matters because organisations operating permanently in survival mode have limited capacity to reform.

The evaluation found that 63% of respondents disagreed that their senior leadership had enough time and capacity for strategic work beyond day-to-day operations. The Leadership Capacity Fund provides an important illustration of what can happen when that constraint is addressed: recipients were significantly more likely to report that leadership time had been freed up for strategic work.

This suggests an important principle for public service reform:

Transformation cannot happen without capacity to think beyond immediate operational pressures.

Investment in organisational resilience should therefore not be regarded as separate from reform. Museum Futures is beginning to demonstrate this. The evaluation describes museums as showing clearer priorities, renewed planning activity and more confident leadership, while noting that deeper changes in operational capability and financial durability will take longer to emerge.

This is why Museum Futures is seen by the Scottish Government as a potential model for the longer-term funding of cultural services, and why it now needs to be mainstreamed with a multi-year budget that secures the progress made to date and that ensures further benefits will be delivered.

Museum Futures is demonstrating through its first year the potential to break the recurring cycle in which organisations move from crisis to short-term stabilisation and back to crisis again, by building the organisational capacity, leadership, collaboration and innovation required for longer-term sustainability.



Funding for museums

In 2025, Scotland's total culture expenditure was £532.7 million, equivalent to just 0.75% of total public expenditure of £71.3 billion. When measured against a public sector saving challenge of £0.5 billion a year, seeking blanket reductions from culture would only damage an already fragile sector. While Scottish Government-controlled culture spending has increased significantly in recent years, Museums have not seen our fair share of this funding.

The introduction of Museum Futures funding at £4 million while welcomed is modest compared to the 54% increase in funding for Creative Scotland in 2026/27 alongside a three-year multiyear funding commitment.

As we have set out in previous Pre Budget Scrutiny responses **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.**

So a key question when looking at any reform of public sector funding should be to ask what greater value could be generated by properly funding Scotland's network of more than 450 museums and galleries, reaching communities across the country encompassing national institutions, local authority services, independent trusts and small volunteer-led organisations. This extraordinary nationwide network of trusted civic spaces, collections, expertise, buildings and volunteers can contribute to national priorities through local action if properly enabled and supported as both custodians of Scotland's past, and active participants in shaping its future.

Museum Futures provides a practical vehicle for Government to unlock this potential. By investing in organisational capacity, innovation, collaboration and new ways of working. The programmes Innovation Fund is explicitly designed to allow museums to develop, trial and implement new approaches, while wraparound support and Pathfinder pilots are creating opportunities to test collaborative models and share learning across the sector.

We encourage the committee to further explore Museum Futures as a model for public service reform, where museums can become more sustainable and more effective partners in delivering public value.



With the right investment and policy support, more than 450 museums and galleries can be empowered to contribute to a more preventative, connected, resilient and place-based public service system, helping communities to thrive and contributing to a brighter future for Scotland.

Prevention and the wider public value of museums

The preventative pillar of public service reform also provides an opportunity to rethink how cultural services are understood.

Christie argued that prevention should be central to reform because reactive services are often required to address problems after they have become more costly and difficult to resolve. It specifically highlighted the importance of partnership working, community participation and investment in approaches that reduce demand over the longer term.

Museums can contribute to this preventative agenda because they provide accessible, trusted and community-based spaces through which people can participate, learn, connect and access activity that supports wider wellbeing.

Our soon to be published sector survey tells us that **63% of museums are actively engaging with the health and wellbeing agenda** through deliberately targeted programmes. Of the museums that actively engage with the health and wellbeing agenda through deliberately targeted programmes, **more than two-thirds have worked with the following groups** within the last two years:

- **Older people (92%** of these museums have worked with this group/this activity)
- **Family activities (91%** of these museums have worked with this group/this activity)
- **Youth engagement (89%** of these museums have worked with this group/this activity)
- **People living in socio-economically deprived areas (80%** of these museums have worked with this group/this activity)
- **Pre-age 5 activities (71%** of these museums have worked with this group/this activity)
- **People experiencing loneliness and isolation (68%** of these museums have worked with this group/this activity)
- **Disabled people (68%** of these museums have worked with this group/this activity)

In terms of **active engagement with education and learning** providers:

- **83%** of museums have actively engaged with **primary schools** within the last year
- **82%** of museums have actively engaged with **secondary schools** within the last year
- **70%** of museums have actively engaged with **universities** within the last year
- **60%** of museums have actively engaged with **colleges** within the last year
- **51%** of museums have actively engaged with **early learning and childcare** within the last year



The challenge is for other services across government to recognise and use these assets as part of their wider approaches to prevention.

Summary

Public service reform is an opportunity to rethink how Government spends the public's money and how public services can work better together.

Museum Futures shows what this can look like in practice, moving museums beyond survival, enabling innovation and collaboration, and building the capacity to deliver greater public value. It demonstrates that **museums are not a cost to be reduced. They are national infrastructure to be better used.**

