



**Creative  
Lives**

**Creativity Matters for Democracy;  
*Empowering communities  
through creativity.***



## **About Us**

[Creative Lives](#) is a registered charity, established in 1991. We champion community and volunteer-led creative activity, and work to improve opportunities for everyone to be creative. In particular, we celebrate and promote people expressing themselves creatively with others, recognising the benefits this can bring.

We work with communities, organisations, and creative individuals as a voice for positive change; to improve and expand the landscape in which creative participation can take place. We aim to address inequalities in access to creative participation, promote inclusivity, connect people and communities, and seek to increase awareness of the links between creativity and wellbeing.

Earlier this year we brought together a cross-section of Scotland's creative communities to help them express their views on the Scottish Government's Local Governance Review - Democracy Matters.

We believe that this review offers creative groups around the country an opportunity to demonstrate the value of everyday creativity in helping build more sustainable communities.

### **Scotland's creative communities of place and interest**

As demonstrated through the Scottish Government's [20 Minute Neighbourhood's proposals](#) we are, as a society, living increasingly local lives. The Government's commitment to thinking differently about the places we live must also include a commitment to the creative social institutions and fabric that makes up our cultural commons.

This review, together with the outcomes of the [Culture Strategy for Scotland](#) presents a key opportunity for creative groups to play a role in promoting community cohesion and resilience through better local decision-making.

Scotland has more than 10,000 volunteer-run creative groups bringing vibrancy, imagination, fun and connection to every community nationwide. From choirs and amateur drama groups to sewing circles, poetry slams, and ukulele bands. The individuals involved in these groups selflessly give up

their time and energy to deliver a range of creative activities with wider benefit to local places.

This everyday creativity is flourishing in almost every locality. The local governance review is an opportunity to unlock the potential of a sector that embodies the principles of community-driven change and empowerment, which if enabled could go on to become the new pivot for community and cultural life in Scotland.

## **Creativity matters**

Community has never been more important. Since the pandemic local people have come together to support and reanimate their neighbourhoods.

Local creative groups naturally create a range of benefits - both for their individual participants (confidence, skills, well-being, improved mental health, self-expression, social connections, etc) and for their communities (cohesion, civic action, pride and identity, economic impact, and creative solutions to local problems).

Such groups have also proven themselves to be good at helping to alleviate the effects of a wide range of societal problems, including isolation and loneliness, poor health, divisions in communities and disempowerment.

The Scottish Government and COSLA have already agreed to adopt the [Place Principle](#) to help overcome organisational and sectoral boundaries, to encourage better collaboration and community involvement. Through their efforts, creative groups are working to make places more healthy, connected, distinctive, sustainable, and adaptable.

Everyday creativity has the unique ability to break down barriers and bring diverse groups of people together, bridging gaps between different communities, and fostering mutual understanding and respect.

The Culture Strategy for Scotland and its Action Plan sets out a series of steps to strengthen, transform, and empower through culture. We believe that this can be delivered alongside greater recognition for locally based and volunteer and community-led creative groups in the decision-making process.

By involving these groups they will help create local places where people thrive, and celebrate their collective identity.

We would encourage the government to give due consideration to the ways that local creative groups could be involved across local decision-making, from giving creative groups a voice in existing local decision-making bodies such as community planning partnerships or by encouraging the establishment of new creative networks/partnerships between local authorities and local creative groups.

One key example where this is already happening is in Inverclyde through the Inverclyde Alliance Community Planning Partnership's, [Inverclyde Culture Collective](#).

The Collective was established with 4 key objectives all focused on making Inverclyde a better place to live. The group has supported the expansion of arts infrastructure in Inverclyde, boosted creative participation, and supported 791 engagement sessions involving 56 community partners.

Arts-led conversations on the theme of local governance have sparked great thought and debate across our sector with organisations such as [The Stove Network](#) exploring how greater involvement and partnership with arts organisations can create fertile ground for local communities to get involved with keeping democracy visible by using empty shops etc. as “alternative town halls”. They have highlighted how cultural activity can help keep democratic processes accessible and relevant for communities.

We would also encourage consideration of the approaches to cultural/creative participation in local civic life that are demonstrated in the Scottish Government-funded [Creative Communities project](#). This project highlights how involving creative groups can help create stronger communities by tackling isolation and building community connections, improving well-being, most commonly mental health. Reducing anti-social behaviour through diversion activity, for young people or adults.

Getting involved in a common cause, in which your voice is valued and heard, helps to foster a sense of hope and is the kind of civic participation that forms the bedrock of a healthy democracy.

For the benefit of a healthy democracy, we would look forward to a future Scotland where local decision-making reflects the invaluable contribution of its creative communities.