



# Culture and Leisure Services in Local Government

Report

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# Contents

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1.	Introduction	1
2.	Key Findings	2
3.	Summary and Implication	20
	Appendix A: Responding Councils	23

# 1. Introduction

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- 1.1 Scotland's public services are crucially important to the economic and social well being of the nation, but are under immense pressure. The need to reduce the UK budget deficit has brought substantial cuts in public funding across the UK, and local authorities are facing hard decisions about how to reduce spending while maintaining essential services.
- 1.2 At policy level, government has sought to protect spending in key areas such as health, while other areas of public service are seeking to make varying levels of budget savings. The position of culture and leisure services within this environment is undoubtedly challenging. There is little in the way of statutory protection for culture and leisure spending, and the level of strategic priority attached to these areas varies considerably across the local authority sector.
- 1.3 In our previous survey for VOCAL last year, we examined the levels of resources and priority for culture and leisure services and found a mixed picture. On the one hand, most Councils felt that both culture and sport were seen as important within their authority, even if there was evidence of some budget pressures, particularly in culture. However, many also felt that the uncertain future meant that the ways in which Councils deliver culture and sport would need to change.
- 1.4 That future, to a large extent, is now here, and rather than simply repeat last year's assessment, we have focussed this year on the ways in which Councils are seeking to manage budget cuts in culture and leisure services. In particular, the survey gathered information on:
  - the level of budget savings being sought;
  - areas of service provision being considered for reduction or removal (and why);
  - processes for considering options for savings;
  - possible impacts of the planned savings; and
  - alternative models of service delivery being considered.
- 1.5 The survey was hosted online and was promoted through VOCAL to all Councils in Scotland. In total, 17 Councils provided data, a response rate of just over 50%, considerably lower than that achieved in 2009. The list of Councils that responded is provided in Appendix 1.

- 1.6 The survey was supplemented by a number of one-to-one interviews with Councils and partner organisations including the Scottish Government, Creative Scotland, Sport Scotland and COSLA.
- 1.7 Initial findings were also reported at VOCAL's annual conference held in Perth in October 2010, and the survey was subsequently extended to encourage more responses.

## 2. Key Findings

### 2.1 Introduction

2.1 This Chapter presents the main findings of the research, structured into three main sections:

- budget savings;
- alternative models of service delivery; and
- key challenges.

### 2.2 Budget Savings

2.2 In total, 12 Councils provided data on planned savings for 2011/12. Nine Councils provided a financial value for these savings, amounting to just under £200m across all services. Seven Councils identified £7m of savings in culture and sport. The scale of savings amongst those Councils that provided figures show that savings in culture and sport are broadly similar, with sport averaging at just under £80,000 more than culture.

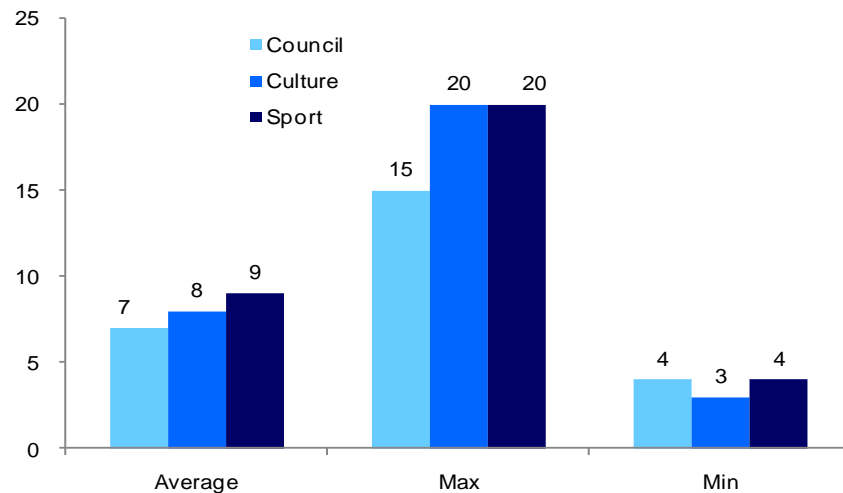
Table 1: Planned savings 2011/12

	Council		Culture		Sport	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
<b>Total</b>	-	£197,337,000	-	£3,372,000	-	£3,915,000
<b>Average</b>	7	£21,926,333	8	£481,714	9	£559,286
<b>Max</b>	15	£50,000,000	20	£1,200,000	20	£1,500,000
<b>Min</b>	4	£1,000,000	3	£62,000	4	£263,000
<b>Responses</b>	12	9	10	7	12	7

Source: EKOS online survey

2.3 Some Councils were unable to provide detailed financial information on budget savings, but did provide an indication of the likely percentage saving that they would be seeking to make in 2011/12. The average percentage savings expected in culture and sport are slightly greater than those for all Council services, particularly at the higher end (the maximum levels of % savings). As shown in **Figure 2.1**, over, some Councils are even predicting savings of as much as 20% in culture and sport, with the average levels being 8% for culture and 9% for sport.

Figure 2.1: Average expected budget savings (% saving)



Source: EKOS online survey

- 2.4 Looking forward to the three years post 2011/12, all those responding for culture anticipated further savings being made. In relation to sport, 88% expected further savings with one expecting to maintain spend at the reduced level.

Table 2.2: What scale of savings is your council planning to make in the three years' post 2011/12?

	Culture		Sport	
	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Further savings expected</b>	17	100%	15	88
<b>Maintain spend at reduced level</b>	-	-	1	6
<b>Don't know</b>	-	-	1	6

Source: EKOS online survey, culture n=17, sport n=17

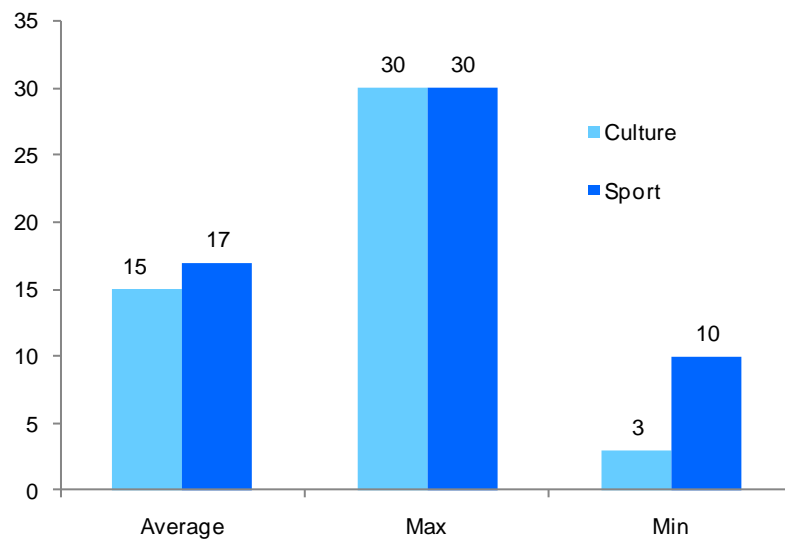
- 2.5 Although not all Councils provided data, the general picture is of even greater levels of savings expected in the three years following 2011/12, even up to a maximum level of 30%.

Table 2.3: Expected savings in following three years (%)

	Culture	Sport
<b>Average</b>	15	17
<b>Max</b>	30	30
<b>Min</b>	3	10
<b>Responses</b>	11	9

Source: EKOS online survey

Figure 2.2: Savings in following three years (%)



Source: EKOS online survey

2.6 When asked how the levels of expected savings in culture and sport compared with other services areas, almost half reported that savings in culture and sport were expected to be greater than other services. However, this is not consistent across the sector, with almost as many reporting that culture and sport would be seeking savings at a level broadly similar to other services.

Table 2.4: How do you think these savings compare with other service areas?

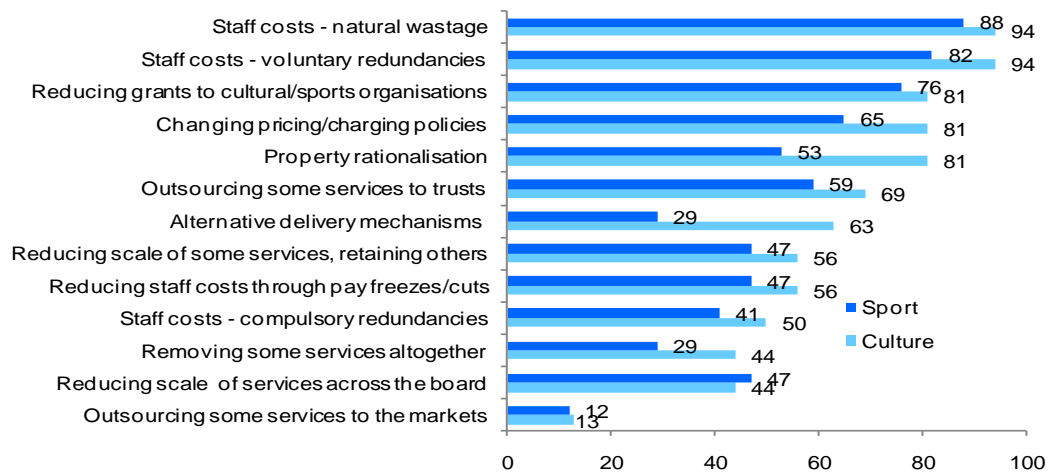
	Culture		Sport	
	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Greater than average saving</b>	8	47	8	50
<b>Lower than average saving</b>	1	6	0	0
<b>Similar to average saving</b>	7	41	7	44
<b>Don't know</b>	1	6	1	6

Source: EKOS online survey, culture n=17, sport n=16

- 2.7 As noted in the introduction, neither leisure nor cultural services have the kind of statutory protection of other services e.g. education and social care, and many respondents identified this as a reason for the high levels of expected savings. Importantly, this is true even in Councils where there is perceived to be strong strategic support for culture and sport.
- 2.8 It is also important to note that data collection took place prior to the announcement of the 2011/12 budget settlement in Scotland and, therefore, many Councils were still operating with a degree of uncertainty about the savings to be made. Although most were involved in detailed planning, some noted that even where culture and sport had strong support and the planning process had not yet identified substantial savings to be made, they could still be vulnerable when difficult decisions had to be made.
- 2.9 It is also important to note that many Councils have been make efficiency savings in culture and leisure services for many years. It was therefore felt that there was less scope to achieve significant savings without job losses and withdrawal of services.
- 2.9 There are essentially three broad strategies through which Councils can seek to achieve savings:
- efficiencies – through reducing staff and management costs;
  - reducing services either across the board (salami-slicing) or more selectively. This could include closing facilities, reducing opening hours or withdrawing specific programmes; and
  - externalising delivery in ways that reduce cost to the Council while ensuring continuity of service provision. Common models here include trusts, community asset transfer and outsourcing to external providers.
- 2.10 Many of those consulted felt that efficiencies alone would be unlikely to achieve the necessary levels of savings over the short to medium term, and that alternative approaches would need to be considered. This reflects both the scale of the challenge facing public funding, and the impact of successive efficiency measures in many Councils.
- 2.11 There was also a feeling from some of the consultees that arguments about the impacts of culture and sport, no matter how compelling, are unlikely to have much effect on budget decisions. Councils are simply facing very hard choices, and will need to protect frontline services, and those that provide support to the most vulnerable sections of society.

- 2.12 Looking in more detail at how Councils intend to achieve savings in culture and leisure services, the most frequently identified ways in which savings would be sought were in relation to staff costs (through natural wastage and voluntary redundancy), reducing third party grants, changes to pricing policies and rationalisation of the physical asset base. In relation to external models of service delivery, Trusts were the most frequently identified.
- 2.13 Compulsory staff redundancies and removal of services altogether are clearly considered last resort measures, and there appears to be less appetite for across the board cuts. This suggests a desire to take a more strategic approach to service delivery in the constrained financial environment.

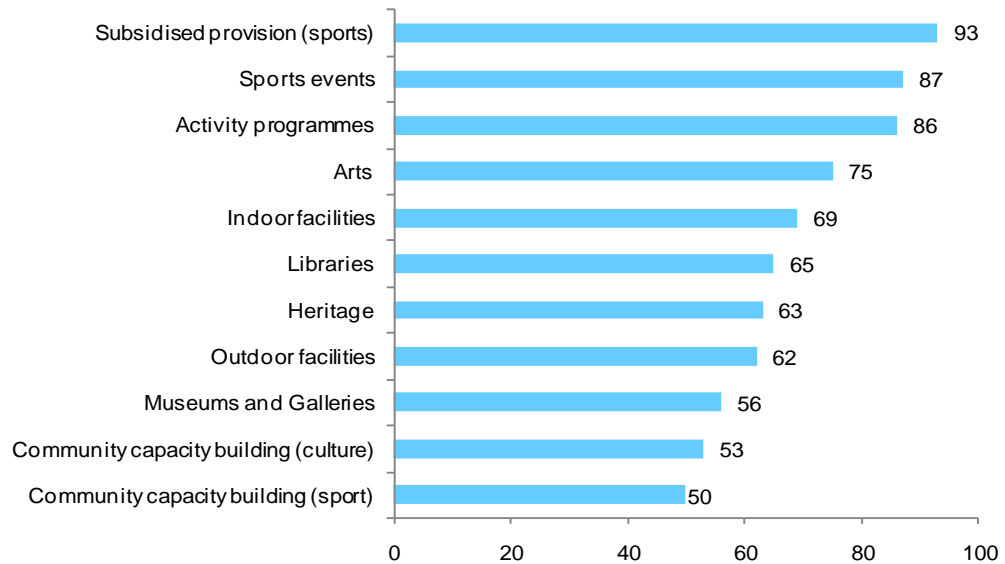
Figure 2.3: How are you planning to make savings in culture and sport? (%)



Source: EKOS online survey

- 2.14 When asked about the areas of service provision most likely to reduce in scale, subsidised provision in sport and arts were top of the list. Almost two thirds felt that provision in relation to libraries and heritage would reduce, and more than half identified museums and galleries. Although community capacity building activities were at the bottom of the list, most expected that these services would be delivered differently in future. Many also felt that the management of physical assets such as indoor and outdoor leisure facilities, libraries and museums and galleries would also be delivered differently.

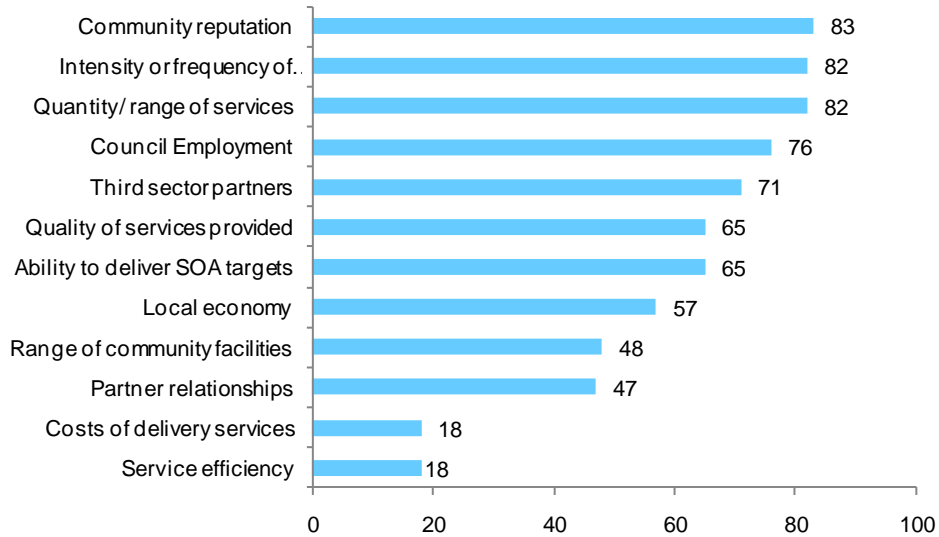
Figure 2.4: Services areas that would reduce in scale (% of respondents)



Source: EKOS online survey

- 2.15 The survey findings also indicate the nature and extent of the expected negative impacts of the planned savings. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 the impact of reducing or changing the delivery of culture and leisure services.
- 2.16 More than three quarters felt that the planned savings would have a negative or very negative impact on community reputation, the intensity and frequency of services, the quantity and range of services and on levels of Council employment. Almost two thirds identified negative or very negative impacts on the quality of service provision and the Council’s ability to deliver against Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) targets. The findings are shown in **Figure 2.5**, below.

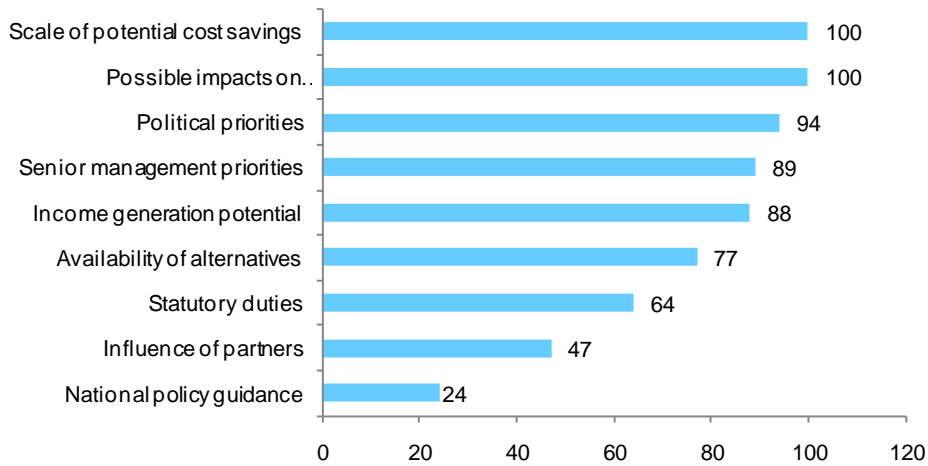
Figure 2.5: Impact of reducing/changing delivery negative/very negative (%)



Source: EKOS online survey

- 2.17 In order to gain a sense of the process for budget decisions, respondents were asked to identify the criteria that they felt were most important in this decision making process. All that provided a response identified the scale of potential cost savings and possible impact on communities as important/very important, and 94% also identified political priorities as a key criterion. Senior management priorities, income generation potential and the availability of alternatives were also considered more important than statutory duties, an interesting finding in light of the non-statutory position of much of culture and leisure services.

Figure 2.6: How important do you think the following criteria are in influencing decisions about how and where to achieve savings – % rating very important/important



Source: EKOS online survey

2.18 Encouragingly, most felt that their Council had sufficiently detailed information on which to base their decisions, and that the process was clear and transparent.

Table 2.5: Do you feel that your Council has sufficiently detailed information on which to base these decisions?

	Culture		Sport	
	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Yes</b>	11	65	12	71
<b>To some extent</b>	5	29	4	24
<b>No</b>	1	6	0	0
<b>Don't know</b>	0	0	1	6

Source: EKOS online survey, culture N=17, sport N=17

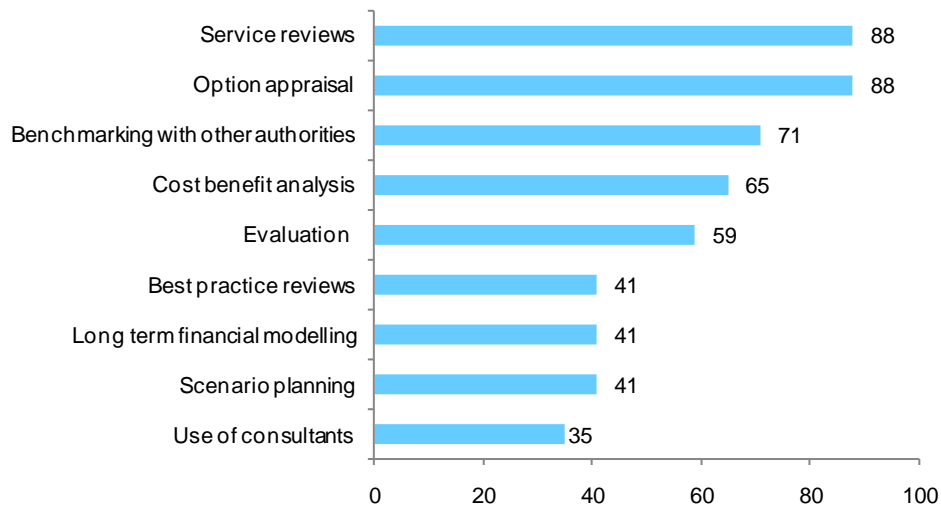
Table 2.6: Do you feel there is a clear and transparent process for making these decisions?

	Culture		Sport	
	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Yes</b>	14	82	15	88
<b>No</b>	1	6	0	0
<b>Don't know</b>	2	12	2	12

Source: EKOS online survey, culture N=17, sport N=17

2.19 Councils have used a variety of methods and techniques to inform decisions about budget savings, with service reviews and option appraisal work the most common. Relatively few have made use of external consultants or longer term planning techniques such as scenario planning. When asked what had proved particularly useful, the most frequently identified methods related to benchmarking with other authorities and sharing good practice.

Figure 2.7: Which of the following processes/techniques have you used (or do you plan to use) in helping to make these decisions? (%)



Source: EKOS online survey

2.20 There was strong support for a proactive approach to budget planning and decision making. The consultation feedback indicated some variability in the extent to which different Councils had been taking a proactive approach, with some preferring to wait until the budget settlement was known before undertaking detailed planning. In these cases, this was generally a corporate decision, rather than an approach specific to culture and leisure services.

2.21 Elsewhere, there was strong support for a more proactive approach that engaged politicians at an early stage in the planning for budget savings. In some cases, this had also been extended to wider consultation with the community, which was again viewed very positively. It was also felt important that Councils consider the longer term implications of the decisions being made now such that the need to achieve savings in the short term does not result in unsustainable models of service delivery.

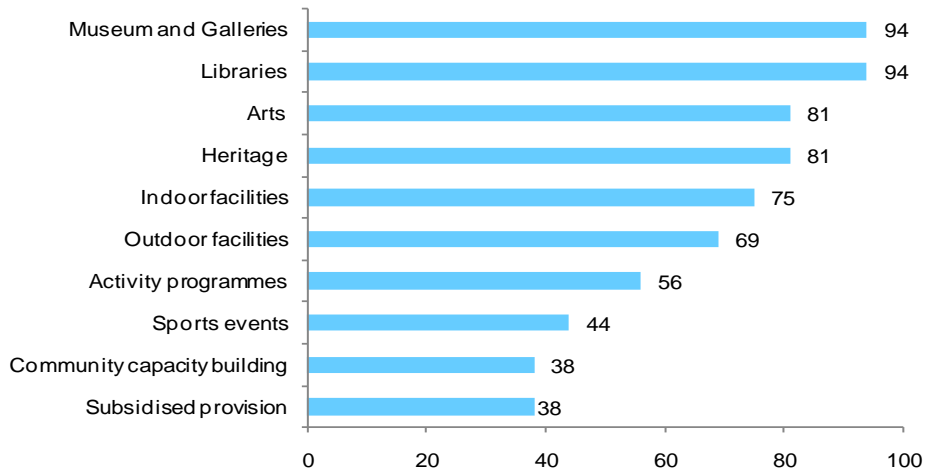
## Summary

- 2.22 The overall picture with regards to planned budget savings is undoubtedly challenging. While culture and leisure services are not in a particularly strong position, they do not yet appear to be disproportionately affected everywhere, although this may change when the hard decisions need to be made.
- 2.23 The overall scale of the savings required is such that efficiency measures alone will not meet targets, and there is a strong feeling that reductions in staff numbers and service provision are inevitable. There is, however, a clear will to achieve these changes in a way that minimises the need for compulsory redundancies, and protects services to the most vulnerable sections of society.
- 2.24 There is also an identified need to make decisions for the long term, ensuring that the pressure to achieve short term cost reductions does not become the sole objective. Early engagement with politicians and with communities were both seen as important ways of helping to ensure that the eventual savings agreed are widely understood as necessary and have broad support. However, less than half of the responding authorities reported making use of long term financial modelling or scenario planning, two techniques that can support effective long term planning.

## 2.3 Alternative Delivery Models

- 2.25 As noted above, there is growing interest in alternative models of service delivery. Most obviously, delivery through independent trusts is a model that has received widespread attention, both in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK. However, other models under consideration include outsourcing delivery to private or third sector providers, delivering through other Council departments and transfer of culture and leisure assets to community ownership/management.
- 2.26 The evidence from the survey is that delivery through Council-owned trusts is currently the most common alternative delivery model in culture and leisure, although trusts are far more prevalent in leisure than in cultural services. There was also evidence of some partnership with the independent sector, and of delivery through other Council departments in both culture and sport. However, outsourcing to the market and collaboration with other Councils seems to be far more limited, at least among those that responded to our survey.
- 2.27 Most Councils in the survey are now seriously considering alternative delivery models in one of more areas of service delivery. The most popular areas are museums and galleries, libraries, arts and heritage, as shown below.

Figure 2.8: Which of the following service areas is your Council now seriously considering or implementing alternative delivery models? (%)



Source: EKOS online survey

- 2.28 Looking in more detail at the kinds of models now under consideration, it is clear that trusts are the most popular, particularly in relation to libraries, museums and galleries, arts and indoor sports facilities. In areas like community capacity building and activity programmes, there is greater interest in delivery by third sector partners and even cross-Council collaboration, although the numbers here are small (see Table 2.7, over).
- 2.29 These findings were mirrored in some of the consultation feedback. In particular, there is widespread interest in trust models, driven in many cases by the appeal of short term rates savings. Although many also expressed interest in cross-Council collaboration, it was widely acknowledged that very little practical progress has been made in this area, and most recognised the considerable political barriers to this kind of approach.
- 2.30 The evidence from the survey also confirmed that while there is interest in various alternative delivery models, most of this is still at the discussion or option development stages, with few yet moving into implementation (at least at the time of data collection).

Table 2.7: Which of the following different models for delivering service areas are your Council now seriously considering and/or implementing?

	Delivery through Council owned Trusts		Delivery by private sector providers		Delivery by third sector providers		Shared services/ collaboration with other Councils		Delivery by other Council departments		Don't know		Other	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Libraries (N=14)</b>	9	64	-	-	3	21	4	29	1	7	1	7	2	14
<b>Museum and Galleries (N=14)</b>	10	71	1	7	4	29	3	21	-	-	1	7	2	14
<b>Arts (N=12)</b>	10	83	-	-	3	25	2	17	-	-	1	8	1	8
<b>Heritage (N=11)</b>	6	55	-	-	2	18	1	9	-	-	1	9	2	18
<b>Indoor facilities (N=9)</b>	6	67	1	11	3	33	1	11	-	-	-	-	1	11
<b>Outdoor facilities (N=8)</b>	4	50	-	-	2	25	2	25	2	25	-	-	1	13
<b>Sports events (N=6)</b>	1	20	-	-	2	40	1	20	-	-	-	-	2	40
<b>Subsidised provision (N=4)</b>	-	-	1	25	2	50	1	25	-	-	-	-	2	50
<b>Activity programmes (N=7)</b>	4	57	-	-	2	29	1	14	-	-	-	-	1	14
<b>Community capacity building (N=6)</b>	1	17	-	-	3	50	2	33	2	33	-	-	2	33
<b>Other (N=1)</b>	1	100	-	-	1	100	1	100	1	100	-	-	-	-

Source: EKOS online survey

- 2.31 The primary benefits of alternative delivery models were mainly considered to be in reducing operating costs, although stronger community links were also identified as a potential benefit of externalising subsidised provision, community capacity building and activity programmes. This is consistent with the greater focus on third sector delivery models in these areas.
- 2.32 However, there was also evidence of concerns with externalising services, including possible drop in service quality, internal political opposition (particularly in relation to trust models), staff-related issues such as possible disputes with trade unions and the loss of close links with other Council services.
- 2.33 The consultation and survey feedback also identified a number of issues to be considered with different models of externalising service delivery, discussed below.

### Trusts

- 2.34 Most felt that the trust model is fairly well established, both in Scotland and England, and that the case in favour of trusts is strong. However, a number of important issues were raised:
- trusts have the potential to deliver savings through non domestic rates and VAT, but also to raise income in ways not readily available to local authorities. However, many felt that scale is important, and to establish a whole series of small trusts would deliver only small scale and short term gains;
  - governance and constitution is crucial. Councils must manage their risks in handing over valuable assets to independent trusts, and the relationship between trusts and Councils must be properly established. Here views diverged, with some arguing strongly for Sole Member models to protect Council interests and ensure greater strategic alignment while others were in favour of greater independence. Local political circumstances will be a consideration, and most reported widespread political nervousness over trust models, due mainly to perceptions of loss of control; and
  - many felt there were risks in Councils rushing out to trust too quickly without full consideration of the issues relating to governance and accountability. Political support was also seen as crucial and some raised questions about the skills of local authority staff to manage trusts effectively – the skills being seen as quite different to those needed in managing local authority services.
- 2.35 The evidence does suggest that many Councils are now considering trust models where they do not already exist. The extent to which this is driven by short term savings rather than longer term strategic ambition is less clear. Experience from England also suggests that many small trusts are now struggling due to over reliance on Council income, poor management, lack of scale and poor quality facilities and

assets. It is therefore important that Councils in Scotland learn the lessons from experience elsewhere.

### Third Sector Delivery and Community Transfer Models

2.36 As shown in **Table 2.7**, there is some interest in externalising services by working with third sector delivery partners, particularly in areas in which the third sector may already have a significant role (e.g. museums and galleries, arts etc). However, two main issues were raised in the consultations that bear consideration:

- there may be issues with the capacity of third sector providers to manage services, and a potential role for local authorities in helping to build that capacity. This may take time and outsourcing to the third sector should not always be seen as a short term solution; and
- some questioned the potential to achieve real cost savings through this model, particularly if there are up-front costs in helping to build capacity.

2.37 Nevertheless, there is clearly some potential in working more effectively and more extensively with third sector organisations to help deliver some culture and leisure services.

2.38 Similar issues were raised with delivery models that involve the transfer of culture and leisure assets or activities into community ownership or management. In particular, there is little to be gained by transferring assets that are in poor condition to community groups that lack the capacity to manage them effectively. This will only create further liabilities for authorities, as well as potentially damaging service provision. As a result, this may again be a longer term solution with a requirement both for capacity building and work to ensure that any assets to be transferred are in sufficiently good condition.

### Cross-Council Collaboration

2.39 There was widespread agreement that Councils would need to consider more collaborative working models, including shared services. However, so far this has been discussed and proposed on a voluntary basis only and, at least in culture and leisure services, very little practical progress has been made.

2.40 Political nervousness was consistently identified as a significant barrier to these kinds of approaches, but there was general agreement that cross-Council working would rise up the agenda, and be increasingly driven by necessity.

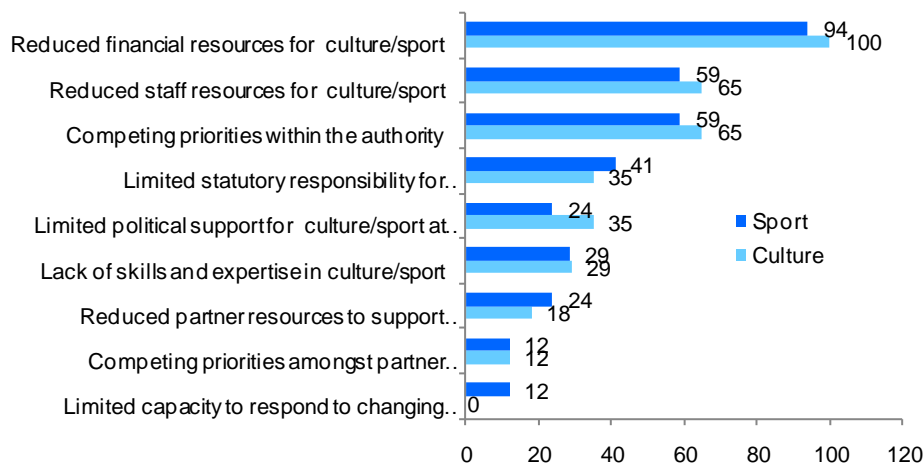
2.41 All models of externalising service delivery carry some risks both for Councils and for the external providers. For authorities, the risks relate mainly to ensuring ongoing quality of service provision while achieving the necessary cost savings. External providers on the other hand face clear business challenges in sustaining activity in an environment in which their clients (the local authorities) may continue to seek further cost savings, driving down revenue for the organisations.

2.42 There is no simple solution to the challenges ahead, and no universal model. Most authorities will need to consider a combination of all of the above, together with efficiency savings through measures such as staff reductions and rationalisation of the physical asset base. It is important to be clear that although there is no short term fix or panacea, there are real opportunities, particularly in supporting and enabling communities to do more for themselves and to take greater ownership of local services. Done properly, this can be a positive force for change.

## 2.4 Future Challenges and Issues

2.43 When asked to identify the top three challenges that authorities may face in delivering culture and sport in the future, budget reductions were, unsurprisingly, top of the list. This was also the case in our 2009 survey, but there is evidence of greater concern now over staff resources.

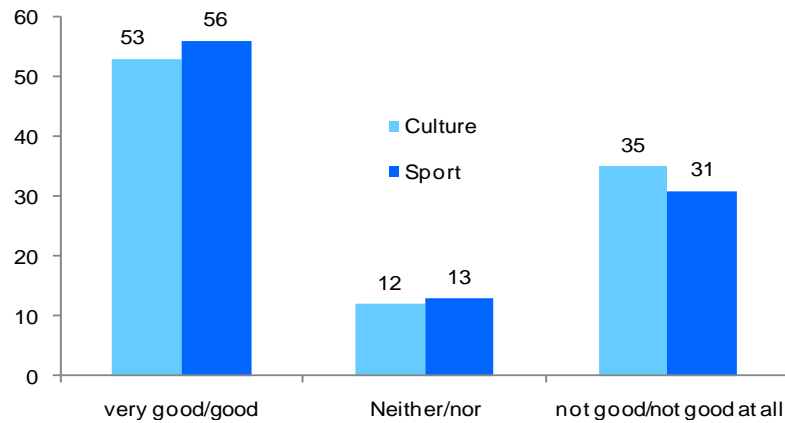
Figure 2.9: Top three challenges that you *may* face as an authority in delivering culture and sport in future in order of their relevance to your authority (%)



Source: EKOS online survey

2.44 More than half the respondents rated their ability to meet these challenges as good or very good, compared to 46% in 2009. However, 35% rated their ability to meet the challenges in culture as not good or not good at all and 31% in sport. This is higher than the 2009 figures (27%).

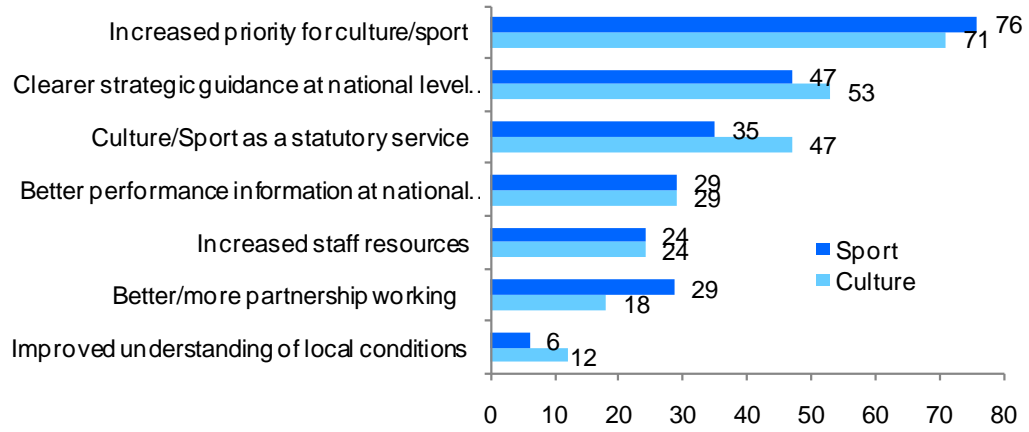
Figure 2.10: Overall, how would you rate your ability as an authority to meet these future challenges?



Source: EKOS online survey

- 2.45 Even among those that felt confident in meeting the challenges, there was recognition that staff numbers would reduce and some services would reduce or cease altogether. Others attributed their ability to meet the future challenges to effective planning, track record in establishing trusts and clear priorities across the Council.
- 2.46 In terms of what would help, some suggested better sharing of best practice across the sector, along with effective advocacy at political and public levels. There was also some support for better collaboration between authorities.
- 2.47 Respondents were then asked to consider the relative importance of a number of issues that could help them meet key challenges in the future. In relation to both culture and sport, the three issues ranked highest in terms of their potential to help Councils meet future challenges were increased priority for these services, clearer strategic guidance at national level and statutory responsibilities. This contrasts slightly with the 2009 survey in which increased funding was highly rated, and clearer strategic guidance less prominent.

Figure 2.11: % rating challenges as 1-3 in relative importance in helping authority meet these challenges (where 1 is most important)



Source: EKOS online survey

## 3. Summary and Implications

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- 3.1 The 2010 survey took place at a particularly challenging time for Scotland's local authorities. Although the scale of the likely reduction in public sector funding was not known, and spending priorities had not been agreed, the general mood was one of concern and uncertainty.
- 3.2 At the time of the survey, not all authorities had completed detailed financial planning for 2011/12, and even those that had still expected things to change once the budget settlements were agreed. These issues, combined with the fact that the response rate was lower than the 2009 survey, should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.
- 3.3 These issues notwithstanding, a number of broad conclusions can be identified:
- Councils face an undeniably challenging future. Although culture and leisure services do not appear to be particularly well placed relative to other services, they are also not (yet) disproportionately affected everywhere;
  - however, the scale of the savings to be achieved are such that standard efficiency measures are unlikely to meet targets and other approaches will be required. The evidence suggests that staff reductions, service reduction and even discontinuation and rationalisation of property assets will all feature to a greater or lesser extent in most Councils over the next few years;
  - the ability of Councils to manage this process effectively will inevitably be variable. Those that take a proactive approach, plan early and thoroughly and engage politicians and communities will be most likely to succeed; and
  - there is considerable interest in alternative models of service delivery, with trusts at the very top of the list. However, in most cases, this work is still in the early stages. Other models for external delivery of culture and leisure services are further behind (than trusts) but are starting to emerge.
- 3.4 In all of this, it is crucial that authorities look to the longer term. The decisions made now will affect the delivery of services over the next 10 to 15 years, and there are real risks in taking too short term an approach.
- 3.5 In this respect, it is fundamentally important that Councils identify clearly their primary objectives and establish the outcomes that they are seeking to achieve. The SOAs have been the primary vehicle for this, and our 2009 study found that culture and sport's position within SOAs was variable, although improving. There is more work to do here. Both culture and sport can make an effective (and often cost-effective) contribution to health, learning, well being and community cohesion. In particular, culture and leisure activities have a role in early prevention of social issues and, as

such, can reduce the need for services at a later stage – the role of physical activity in health prevention is an obvious example.

- 3.6 This argues for a more strategic approach to service design and delivery, and for strong strategic links from culture and leisure services into relevant areas such as health, education and social care. This kind of strategic commissioning model offers considerable promise, but depends both on the strength of these strategic links and the quality of the evidence for the contribution that culture and leisure can make.
- 3.7 Externalising services is also an opportunity, and below we offer some initial thoughts about some of the issues raised in the survey, and in the wider literature around these approaches:
- in seeking to externalise services, it is important to consider a range of options rather than rushing to do what others have done. At the moment, much of the talk is of trusts, but other options are available. Including partnership with the third sector, strategic commissioning of services and cross-Council collaboration (although these are not mutually exclusive);
  - recessions always offer opportunities, and for Councils this may be a good time to review the asset base and decommission those assets that are no longer fit for purpose or are in a state of disrepair. In any case this is important if considering external delivery models;
  - trusts are an obvious opportunity to save money, at least in the short term, but there are important issues to consider:
    - political support is crucial and governance and constitutional issues are also key – Councillors on the boards of independent trusts can face issues with conflict of interest, and Councils may wish to ensure greater strategic alignment through Sole Member Trust models
    - the management task and organisational culture for a trust is different to that of a local authority and it is important both to ensure appropriate management capability and to keep staff on board during a time of significant change
    - scale is important – small trusts/partnerships lack the economies of scale that larger organisations offer, reducing the potential for savings and future income generation
    - financial and legal risks must be considered in detail at an early stage in the process;
  - third sector delivery and community transfer are also appealing options but the capacity building role is critical. This may be a longer term strategy, but without the necessary support, the risk is that assets and services may suffer in this approach, at least if the capacity to manage them is not well enough established; and

- cross-Council collaboration is becoming increasingly obvious, and there are precedents for this in areas such as Environmental Health and Trading Standards. Combining services with other Councils can reduce procurement, management and back office costs while maintaining service quality. This is not only an opportunity for authorities themselves - external delivery organisations such as Trusts may also be less territorially bound, and could also seek collaboration across authority areas. Of course, political issues will arise, but with commitment these should not be insurmountable barriers.
- 3.8 Finally, it is worth considering the role that VOCAL might play in all of this. There is a clear and ongoing need for a forum to share information and best practice and to allow Councils to learn from wider experience. To an extent, VOCAL already fulfils this function, but it should continue to do so. Indeed, VOCAL should be a hub for innovation in culture and leisure services, articulating and testing new models of delivery.
- 3.9 There may also be a more specific role to commission early stage and specialist input on external delivery models (for example the legal and HR issues around setting up trusts). The risk is that different authorities continue to commission discrete work on the very same issues. Of course, each authority will reach a stage at which specific advice will be needed, but there is a shared requirement at the more basic levels which could be co-ordinated centrally.
- 3.10 Finally, there is also an important role in maintaining an effective channel of communication at strategic level with national government and key national agencies such as Creative Scotland, Sport Scotland and Museums and Galleries Scotland. This includes continuing to advocate for culture and leisure's importance and wider role in delivering a whole range of outcomes. VOCAL is uniquely well placed to do this.

## Appendix 1: Participating Councils

A total of 17 responses were received from a sample of 32 local authorities although there were two submissions from Fife Council. This represents a success rate of 50%.

The following local authorities responded to the survey:

- Argyll and Bute;
- Aberdeen City;
- Aberdeenshire;
- City of Edinburgh;
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
- Dundee City;
- East Ayrshire;
- East Lothian;
- East Renfrewshire;
- Fife (2);
- Orkney Islands;
- Perth and Kinross;
- Renfrewshire;
- Scottish Borders
- Stirling; and
- West Lothian.