

Scotland hit by £90m cut in cultural services since 2011, claims Labour

Lewis McKenzie

About £90m has been cut from Scotland's cultural services budgets since 2011, affecting libraries, museums, galleries and sports facilities, Labour has claimed.

The party said its analysis of net revenue expenditure between 2011-12 and 2016-17 identified a reduction in real-

terms spending, leading it to warn that cuts were entrenching inequality.

Figures indicated a £22m reduction in spending for libraries, with more than £5m cut from museums and galleries.

The study also found there was almost £20m removed from budgets for sports facilities and more

than £30m from community parks and open spaces.

Labour claims the figures are evidence the Scottish government has helped to implement austerity measures taken by the UK government.

Claire Baker, the party's culture, tourism and external affairs spokeswoman, said: "The SNP government's

decision to pass on Tory austerity to our communities has resulted in multimillion-pound cuts to cultural services across Scotland.

"Libraries aren't just a free source of reading, they are often at the centre of people's daily lives. They are a place for everyone to learn, to study, to talk and exchange ideas, and can

always provide a safe and welcoming environment for vulnerable people in our communities".

She said the cuts entrenched inequality and damaged the quality of life of thousands, and that a future Scottish Labour government would fund councils properly and ensure arts and culture were more accessible.

The Scottish government sought to dismiss the attack. A spokesman said: "Libraries empower communities, help tackle inequality, reduce isolation and boost the local economy. Since 2014, the Scottish government has provided funding of more than £4.7m which has supported the development and delivery of

Scotland's first national public library strategy and continues to support innovative ways for people to use public libraries.

"We are also maintaining our support for non-national libraries through continued support for the Scottish Library and Information Council, and we are maintaining our investment

of £450,000 in the public library improvement fund to support innovative ways for people to use public libraries."

He said the government continued to ensure that local government partners received a fair funding settlement despite further cuts to the Scottish budget from the UK government.

Wild foraging walks are pick of the bunch for visitors

Move to train more tutors to meet demand as food treks sell out to tourists keen to learn ancient skills

Julia Horton

As the pithy wisdom goes, all mushrooms are edible but some are edible only once.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the potentially deadly risk of picking the wrong fungi, a foraging frenzy has gripped Scotland, with thousands of people paying to learn how to raid nature's larder safely.

Expert foragers are so swamped with bookings that courses around the country have been selling out as customers seek to restore invaluable centuries-old skills and knowledge, long lost for most in the 21st century.

A programme to train more tutors is due to launch next year to help meet demand from people such as stressed professionals keen to get back to nature and those on hen parties.

Meanwhile chefs, international bar workers and would-be home brewers are interested in making tipples and treats from the hedgerow cabinet.

Mark Williams, an established tutor at Galloway Wild Foods in the southwest of Scotland, has become a pioneer for responsible foraging, having started out 30 years ago.

"I take thousands of people out on guided walks each year – there is so much interest," he said.

"I used to travel all over Scotland, but more and more people are now coming to me in Galloway, which has the coast,



Rosehips are a popular choice on foraging trips

hills and tons of forest to forage in for seaweed, fungi and so many plants.

"All these fancy chefs and contestants doing well on TV shows like MasterChef are into foraging, but people also really want to reconnect with where they are from and the land and flavours of time and place."

Locals and bar staff from around the world and are enticed by Williams's wild booze courses, which teach how to make drinks such as gin and mead.

Williams is a founding member of the Association of Foragers, an organisation promoting a "sustainable, safe and mindful" approach. He has credited the association with driving up demand from people who are grateful for reliable information about reaping the benefits without harming themselves or the environment.

Monica Wilde, a herbalist and member of the association, who is based in West Lothian, said: "This year I taught from the start of February to the end of October, and every course was fully booked."

The health benefits were clear, she said, adding that stressed and busy workers such as lawyers would arrive blind to the natural world, learn to relax on a foraging course, and leave it with the ability to spot the free food, drink and medicine around them.

The growing resurgence of foraging has now spread to cities. Amy Rankine leads foraging walks in Edinburgh along the Water of Leith, which offers a "surprisingly good" range of natural produce, she said.

Newcomer Rankine is a drinks consultant and forager whose Livingston-based business, Hipsters and Hobos, specialises in gathering ingredients such as Japanese knotweed to make beer.

"This year I ramped it up quite considerably and I've sold out all of my courses from the beginning of the summer," she said. This was after doubling the classes from two a month to four.

"I wanted to keep it more urban because you don't have to go into the wilds to find something that is easily identifiable, and which people walk past every day without realising what they could do with it."



The trips include foraging for ingredients for gin and mead, as well as mushrooms and other fungi

Waste firm in body parts row ceases trading

Lucinda Cameron

A disposal company facing a probe over a pile-up of health service waste has ceased operations, announcing yesterday that its remaining employees would lose their jobs.

Healthcare Environmental Services (HES) became embroiled in a clinical-waste stockpiling controversy earlier this year with the NHS, during which it denied claims that human body parts were among items caught up in a backlog at its sites.

Staff at its depot in Shotts, North Lanarkshire, were handed redundancy notices on Thursday and the company said yesterday that its remaining employees had also been notified they were out of work.

HES is thought to employ 150 people in Shotts and 350 elsewhere across the UK. It had contracts with the NHS in England and Scotland in the past.

In November, HES said it planned to sue the NHS organisations that had terminated their contracts.

It insisted that a shortage of incinerators led to the backlog problem and it has always maintained that the waste was being stored safely and securely.

The company said it believed Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment applied and staff should have the opportunity to transfer to other waste operators that had taken over its contracts.

HES managing director Garry Pettigrew said: "We have tried so hard over the last few months to keep going, but we've now reached the position where this is no longer tenable. Regrettably, we have informed staff that we are ceasing operations."

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has said it was continuing to "robustly" regulate and monitor the HES base in Shotts and its other Scottish site in Dundee.

The agency said on Friday it had started an investigation to establish whether criminal offences had been committed.

“People want to reconnect with where they are from and the land and flavours of time and place

Glasgow still toxic despite low emission zone, say campaigners

Lewis McKenzie

Environmental campaigners have called for tougher action to curb pollution ahead of Scotland's first low-emission zone (LEZ) becoming operational in Glasgow tomorrow.

The first phase of the LEZ will set emission standards which must be met by 20% of buses that pass through the city centre. It means bus services must comply with European emissions standards. Phase two, applying to all vehicles entering the zone, is to be implemented in December 2022.

The scheme will be enforced through the use of automatic number plate-recognition cameras.

But campaigners say the plan to phase out the dirtiest buses in the city centre over a five-year period will bring almost no change in the first year. They have criticised the decision not to impose restrictions on all other vehicles until 2022.

Friends of the Earth Scotland air pollution campaigner Gavin Thomson said: "The toxic, illegal levels of air pollution in Glasgow causes hundreds of

premature deaths and life-limiting conditions.

"Unfortunately, the weak terms of this low-emission zone – only applying to one in five buses – won't achieve any significant change for air quality. This 'no-ambition zone' means fumes from transport in the centre of Glasgow will carry on poisoning people's lungs for many more years."

He added: "About 18% of buses in Glasgow already met the emission standards before the zone was decided, so there will be very little change in the fleet."

Councils in Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen have discussed following Glasgow in bringing in LEZs.

Thomson said councils must be bold in their approach to tackling pollution. "Private bus operators in Glasgow are getting a free ride, while everyone else is suffering the effects of illegal levels of air pollution," he said.

"Three hundred premature deaths are caused by air pollution in Glasgow every year. We need bolder action by the council, and bus companies need to prioritise people over profits. We need our other city councils



across Scotland to be bolder than Glasgow.

"With Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen all planning their low-emission zones for 2020, there is an opportunity for cities to set a path to clean air, compel bus companies to clean up their fleet and remove the worst polluting vehicles from city centres."

A Glasgow city council spokeswoman said the strategy would deliver a "manageable, yet robust" approach to pollution.

"Glasgow is committed to cleaning up the air and is

leading the way by introducing Scotland's first low emission zone at the end of the year," she said.

"Glasgow's LEZ is modelled as being capable of making significant reductions in levels of air pollution in the city centre. This pragmatic and phased approach will ensure a manageable, yet robust timetable for implementation that looks at the city's overall needs to ensure it won't have a detrimental impact on people's lives, businesses and the vitality of the city centre."

A bus makes its way through the busy streets of Glasgow

Greens voice concern over safer cycling routes

John Boothman

Ministers have been accused of ignoring demands for safer cycling routes as they look set to fail to meet a government target of ensuring that 10% of all journeys are made by bicycle within the next year.

The most recent Scottish Household Survey indicates that only 3% of adults usually cycle to work, and fewer than 1% of children cycle to school, well short of the Scottish government's 2020 target.

The Greens voiced concern that, while increasing active travel such as walking and cycling was a key pledge within the government's physical activity delivery plan, ministers spent only about 6% of their £1.2bn transport budget supporting walking and cycling. Most funds went to motorways and trunk roads.

Green transport spokesman John Finnie MSP said: "More and more adults and children realise that

going by bike is cheap, healthy and quick. Sadly, the government is leaving Scotland in the slow lane, choosing instead to prioritise more motorways, trunk roads and airline travel.

"Last year Green MSPs negotiated with the Scottish government to double the funding available, but ministers must go further and faster. Investing in walking



Cycling is 'cheap and quick'

and cycling can help tackle everything from type 2 diabetes to the air pollution that causes heart disease."

The government agency Transport Scotland defended its record. A spokesman said: "The shared vision within the cycling action plan for Scotland was intended to be bold, aspirational and challenging, in order to galvanise action across local authorities and society."

"We have doubled our budget to £80m from 2018 to step up support to councils to build safe, segregated infrastructure, and there are some signs of progress."

"In 2017, for commutes of five miles or under, 4% of people cycled to work; this figure is at its highest level."

Transport Scotland has announced a commissioner who will highlight the priority that the government gives to active travel, and will become an advocate for walking and cycling.