

Scottish Leaders Forum Collaborative Leadership Across Systems

Thank you to all of you who were able to join the Scottish Leaders Forum on the 24th June at the Grassmarket Community Project to join a conversation to share the emerging learning from the '**reform clusters**' and to learn together about the critical role collaboration plays in reform, particularly the importance of building and sustaining strong, purposeful, collaborative practice.

From Autumn 2023, a number of Scotland's Public Bodies and Local Government leaders, supported by professional facilitators, have been working in 'reform clusters', as part of the work to make progress on public service reform around: environment, culture, and digital licensing.

With thanks to our Co-Chair [Louise Macdonald](#) for chairing and hosting on the day, we were able to hear from representatives of the Environment and Culture clusters: Nicole Paterson (SEPA), Marie Hernandez (NatureScot), Amina Shah (National Libraries) and the Scottish Government's Permanent Secretary, John Paul Marks.

The clusters work is in its early stages, so this SLF conversation offered an opportunity for panel members to share their ambitions for the work they're undertaking with other public authorities, share the ongoing learning and reflect on what it takes, as a public service leader, to work in this way.

We heard about how important it was for the clusters to have that independent facilitation, someone neutral who can ask the really challenging questions, who keeps the momentum going by 'holding that space' and who can push for whether there is room for more innovation in the system.

It was a packed afternoon, but here's a flavour of some of the conversation:

- The quality of collaborative leadership is central to success in any system – we need to let go of brands and egos and focus on our shared purpose as well as recognising where silo'd working prevents us from thinking genuinely transformatively. Trust is critical;
- This work as an opportunity to do differently and better – it's exciting as well as daunting;
- This way of working is hard, it's not an easy journey; we need to use collaboration for support and lean on others, be prepared to ask for advice;
- Our day-to-day attention is drawn to immediate challenges and short term problems; we must create space to lay the foundations for longer term work;
- There are, potentially, a number of different starting points for clusters to explore e.g. efficiencies, projects, long term aims, but wherever you start, you end up with similar points to consider;
- Reflections on what strategic leadership looks like for a cluster and what the implications are for governance arrangements.