

Healing Arts

↪ Scotland

Scottish Borders Roundtable

Wednesday 17th June 2026

Summary Report

Who?	We ran this event to bring together practitioners, healthcare professionals and local partners from different organisations who have an interest in ‘creative health’ in the Borders. There were five presentations from Steph MacKenzie and Clare Gillespie from NHS Borders, Jason Moyes from Live Borders, Juliana Amaral from Borders Community Action and Rod Anderson from Borders in Recovery. The roundtable event brought together 25 participants, including: The Chair and Directors of NHS Borders, GPs, Art, Music and Drama Therapists, Mental Health professionals, Senior Managers, Public Health and charity and voluntary sector representatives, including Borders Care Voice.
What?	There were presentations and discussion time around these topics: - Presentation of a new local research report highlighting good practice and evidence for how the arts and creativity can support the delivery of the NHS Borders Clinical Strategy; - Arts Therapies as a critical part of Arts and Health landscape, delivering effectively at each life stage of the Clinical Strategy within very limited resources; - The health and wellbeing benefits of cultural engagement across all art forms, plus a new ‘Comedy on Prescription’ pilot in Hawick; - Healing through creativity – local investment in creative health at a grassroots community level via the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund; - How Borders in Recovery is using creative pathways to wellbeing, connection and recovery through its BIRCHWOOD programme.
Where?	Everyone came together in person at the Chaplaincy Centre at Borders General Hospital
Why?	Our key objective for this event was to put a spotlight on local good practice, connect up across sectors and explore future opportunities for the arts and creativity to support the NHS Borders Clinical Strategy. We wanted to share with participants the evidence drawn from national and international research about how the arts can transform health and wellbeing – and what we can do locally together to make progress.
What next?	1. Create a steering group to move this work forward within NHS Borders 2. Creation of a network with a shared interest for creative health and the ‘Healing Arts’ in the Borders 3. Focus on key issues and prioritisation of initial projects, arising from discussion at this workshop and in line with NHS Borders Clinical Strategy

Highlights from discussions on the day

Across all life stages in the Clinical Strategy, the roundtable highlighted a consistent message:

Creative health should be embedded as a core, preventative, system-wide approach — delivered through partnerships, with clear pathways, equitable access, and a strong focus on mental health and wellbeing.

What the participants raised:



1. Prevention and Early Intervention

- Strong emphasis on acting earlier in the pathway, not waiting for crisis.
- Arts used as a preventative tool (e.g. perinatal mental health, school-based activity, social prescribing, dementia engagement, end-of-life preparation)



2. Integration and Partnership Working

- Repeated calls for cross-sector collaboration – NHS, Third Sector, Education
- Need for a shared directory, joint working and co-ordinated delivery models



3. Embedding Arts in Systems (Not Add-on Projects)

- Build arts into clinical pathways (e.g. perinatal, mental health)
- Include within organisational structures (permanent roles)
- Use emerging Clinical Strategy infrastructure (e.g. Health Hubs)
- Make a clear shift from pilots / activity-based delivery to embedded system change
- Ensure clarity about the continuum from community arts through health-focused arts engagement (e.g. arts on prescription) to clinical arts therapies



4. Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

In terms of mental health, arts therapies were highlighted at every life stage, including:

- Perinatal mental health
- Children and young people (neurodiversity, adolescent support)
- Adult mental health gaps
- Staff wellbeing and burnout
- End of life emotional support



5. Access, Equity and Locality-Based Provision

- Current provision is uneven
- There is a need for locality-based services / activities to be available across all areas



6. Workforce and Organisational Wellbeing

- Arts therapies proposed to support staff stress, burnout and workforce retention
- Inclusion of arts therapies within Occupational Health services



7. Infrastructure and Enablers

Delivery is constrained by operational and infrastructural gaps, not just vision. Practical system enablers were repeatedly raised:

- Directory of services
- Investment and commissioning models
- Music licence in NHS settings
- Facilities / spaces (e.g. creative health hubs)

Participant quotes

The scope for perinatal mental health improvement is HUGE
Work this into pathways / education

Cross Sector partnership models – invest and procure services and activities

Are there mechanisms or building blocks in the Clinical Strategy we could use to embed creative arts to support wellbeing? i.e. Health Hubs?

Reinstate the Music Licence across NHS Borders....
Can we have the Music Licence return?

Using arts activities – often music based – seems to be the best non-stigmatising ‘hook’ to bring Dementia Communities together

Arts therapies are some adolescent’s only form of support. Arts therapies across Mental Health – this is the biggest discrepancy

Photos below of the contributors on the day. Presenters clockwise from top left: Clare Gillespie (Arts Therapies Service Lead, NHS Borders), Jason Moyes (Arts Development Lead, Live Borders), Juliana Amaral (Chief Officer, Borders Community Action), Rod Anderson (Chief Officer, Borders in Recovery)



What's Next?

We are proposing a new **Healing Arts Steering Group** which will initially be co-chaired by Clare Gillespie (Arts Therapies Service Lead) and Steph MacKenzie (Health Improvement Specialist for Mental Health) which will meet for the first time in September 2026.

We're going to focus on:

- Embedding creative health into core NHS systems and pathways – starting with the issues of the Music Licence, staff wellbeing and emerging Clinical Strategy infrastructure (e.g. Health Hubs);
- Expanding equitable access to arts therapies, particularly for mental health;
- Building coordinated cross-sector infrastructure and partnerships – starting with a steering group and wider network.



If you would like to be part of this steering group, please get in touch!



Now you're part of the network we will share and disseminate information relevant to creative health and the Healing Arts and invite you to any future events!

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