

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol

Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Councillor Huw Thomas
Leader, Cardiff Council
Cardiff Council

cc: Councillor Jennifer Burke-Davies
Cabinet Member for Culture, Parks and Events
Dawn Bowden MS
Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip, Welsh Government
Jack Sargeant MS
Chair, Petitions Committee, Senedd

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Dyddiad | Date: 05 December 2022

Pwnc | Subject: Future of St David's Hall

Dear Councillor Thomas,

At our Committee's meeting on 30 November 2022 we considered correspondence relating to the future of St David's Hall and the possibility that the venue may be run in the future by an external company. This in addition to the two public petitions; one on Change.org and another on the Senedd's Petitions website, which together have been signed by over 20,000 at the time of writing. We have an interest in this important matter because of the central role which St David's Hall has always held as Wales' national operatic and symphonic concert hall. In addition to this, we are sure that you will appreciate the role our Committee has in scrutinising activity in cultural matters of national significance in Wales, and indeed the fact that the venue has previously received funding from the Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales. Given all of these factors, and your offer to meet Senedd Members to discuss the matter, we would like to ask you a number of questions relating to the proposal.

Existing Cardiff Council policy commitments

We noted that, in Cardiff Council's meeting on 27 October 2022, Councillor Burke-Davies committed "to secure a sustainable future for St David's Hall". We also noted the commitments made by your administration in its policy document, "Stronger, Fairer, Greener". The document states that you will "ensure St David's Hall retains its position as a world-class auditorium". The policy document also outlines commitments to prioritising public spaces and assets for community groups and under-represented groups. We welcome these commitments as they are consistent with our values as a Committee in ensuring equality of access to, and participation in culture for everyone living in Wales.



We would, however, welcome further clarity as to how you would intend to meet these commitments, were you to hand over the day-to-day running of the hall to a private sector provider.

We would also be grateful to know how you will ensure the hall's continued status as one of the world's best sounding concert halls. It has been noted that newer halls sometimes sacrifice sound quality for visual design and size. We are concerned that, should a private provider run the venue, they may seek to change the venue's layout – by means of an example, were the hall changed into a gig venue, a private provider could choose to remove the seating or the orchestra pit. We would be concerned that this could, in turn, impair the hall's acoustics, and indeed endanger its ability to continue to host international classical events, such as the International Concert Series and the BBC Cymru Wales Cardiff Singer of the World competition.

Financial information and performance of St David's Hall

In order to ascertain a more accurate picture of the financial challenges facing St David's Hall, we would be grateful if you could provide us with:

- A breakdown of the hall's income for the past three financial years (including grant income, including Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales);
- A breakdown of the hall's expenditure for the past three financial years;
- The estimated total cost of the maintenance backlog and a breakdown of the main costs;
- The number of performances held at the venue in each of the three previous financial years;
- The number of school visits and school concerts that have taken place in the past five years (including a breakdown of those from Cardiff and outside Cardiff);
- The number of occasions the venue has been used by community groups and underrepresented groups in the past five years (including a breakdown of those from Cardiff and outside Cardiff).

Forward plan and collaboration

We are also aware that the Council's Forward Plan includes an item in relation to a key decision relating to St. David's Hall. Specifically, this item details that Cardiff Council's Cabinet will "*consider the Outline Business Case for the future of St David's Hall and agree to proceed to the Full Business Case stage*" on 15 December 2022. We note that notice of a proposed key decision was first published on 11 November 2022, just over two weeks after the item was raised in Full Council.

As the Council had no doubt been developing its Outline Business Case for some time prior to 11 November 2022, and indeed 27 October 2022 when the matter was raised in Full Council, it is unclear why the decision was not published in the Council's forward plan earlier. We would be grateful if you could outline why this did not happen.

Although it has been reported that a company has made an offer to take over the running of St David's Hall to Cardiff Council, during First Ministers' Questions on 29 November 2022, the First Minister noted, following discussions with you, that Cardiff Council "*are doing the work with not just one company but with more than one company that has shown an interest in collaborating with the council on the future of St David's Hall.*"

As we are sure you can appreciate, the competing reports that have been noted in the media, by the First Minister and in correspondence received by us, has led to some confusion.

Therefore, we would be grateful if you could tell us:

- Over what period has the Council developed its Outline Business Case?

- What stakeholder engagement has taken place in developing the Outline Business Case? Specifically, what engagement has taken place with underrepresented groups (for instance those that have protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010)?
- Does the Council intend to publish its Outline Business Case, and if so when?
- To what timeframe is the Council working to identify a solution for the future of St. David's Hall, including when Cabinet is expected to consider the Full Business Case?
- How has the Council identified the organisations that have shown an interest in collaborating with the Council?

We would appreciate receiving the information requested in this letter **by Monday 12 December 2022**. We would also appreciate receiving a further update following the Cabinet meeting on 15 December 2022, including details of the proposed solution that will be taken forward to Full Business Case.

We welcome your statements on the importance of securing a sustainable future for St David's Hall as the national concert hall for Wales. We will all have a keen interest in ensuring the continued success of the venue, and we would welcome your response to the questions set out in our letter.

We look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS

Chair of the Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.