

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

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

Dafydd Rhys
Chief Executive
Arts Council of Wales
cc: 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 Dafydd

Following our Committee's consideration of correspondence from Creu Cymru at our meeting on 30 November 2022, we write with concern about the future of St David's Hall, and the possibility that, in the near future, it could be run 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. Our interest in this matter arises from the crucial place which St David's Hall has always held as Wales' national operatic and symphonic concert hall. As you will appreciate, we as a Committee have a role in scrutinising cultural matters which are of national significance in Wales. Given that the Arts Council of Wales has previously supported St David's Hall, we wanted to raise the matter with you directly.

As a concert hall, St David's Hall has international significance, hosting as it does the Cardiff Singer of the World competition. Its stage has launched the careers of opera stars of world renown, and its world-class acoustics attract orchestras, ballets and singers from across Europe and the wider world. But the significance of St David's Hall's is not only international: it is an asset beloved by people across Wales. Indeed, it is a space which offers opportunities both for Welsh audiences to experience world-class performances, and a space where our own, home-grown talent can nurture their skills. Put simply, it is a place where provides once-in-a-lifetime opportunities are available for young people, schools, choirs and community groups from across our nation to perform and share a stage with performers at the very height of their professions. There will be generations of people in Wales who will forever remember the feeling they've had when singing or performing at St David's Hall. It occupies a unique place in the cultural life of Wales, and we as a Committee are deeply concerned that this space could be lost.

We appreciate that Cardiff Council is the asset holder of St David's Hall. The hall, of course, predates devolution, and so the local authority was the only public body that could have assumed this responsibility at the time that the hall first opened its doors. Both Cardiff Council, and its predecessor South Glamorgan

Council, have undertaken an important role over the years in safeguarding the venue, but we know that the costs of operating such a space, especially in these austere times, will mean difficult decisions have to be taken by the council. We appreciate why Cardiff Council is exploring different operating models. We are also of the opinion that, were a national concert hall built today, it would be highly unlikely that it would be placed in the hands of a local authority (and we would note, by means of comparison, the fact that the Wales Millennium Centre is a standalone body).

We are, as a Committee, also gravely concerned that, should St David's Hall be run by a private provider without appropriate safeguards, it could be changed forever. By means of an example, and as Creu Cymru have drawn to our attention, the removal of all stalls seating and the flattening of the hall's floor to increase capacity in the auditorium to 2500 would dramatically change the acoustics of the venue. It could also jeopardise the hall's ability to host a full symphony orchestra. We are concerned about what the loss of this one-of-a-kind venue would mean for Wales and its cultural inheritance.

It is for these numerous reasons that we would like to ask you the following questions:

1. What discussions have you had with Cardiff Council regarding the future of St David's Hall?
2. Can you provide an update on the meeting that was scheduled to take place on 1 December 2022 between the Arts Council and Cardiff Council?
3. Have Cardiff Council asked you for any further support in ensuring St David's Hall will be run by a public or non-profit organisation?
4. Have you explored possible different models of funding for the future of St David's Hall with, or without, Cardiff Council?
5. Have you made any assessment of how much it would cost to support St David's Hall as a standalone organisation i.e. how much grant funding it would need? If yes, how much would it cost? If no, are you able to provide such an assessment?
6. What assessment has the Arts Council made of the provision of world class classical music facilities in Wales? If St David's Hall were not able to fulfil a function as the "National Concert Hall", what alternative provision would Wales have?
7. How will the Arts Council's investment review be considering the provision of world-class classical music?
8. What financial support has the Arts Council given to St David's Hall in the last five financial years, and is any support planned in this financial year?

We have also written to Cardiff Council asking for information relating to the financial performance of the hall, as well as details about the process it has undertaken in developing its outline business case.

Given the importance of this issue, we would appreciate receiving the information requested in this letter **by Monday 12 December 2022**.

Each of us, we are sure, will want to ensure the continued success of our national concert hall, and we would welcome your response to the questions set out in our letter.

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.