

**SWYDDFA'R ARWEINYDD
OFFICE OF THE LEADER**

Fy Nghyf / My Ref: CM48774

Dyddiad / Date: 14 December 2022

Via email: SeneddCulture@senedd.wales

Delyth Jewell MS
Chair of the Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport and
International Relations Committee
Welsh Parliament

Annwyl/Dear Delyth,

Thank you for your letter and for the interest of the Committee in the future of St David's Hall.

In advance of a meeting of Cardiff Council's Cabinet on 15 December 2022, the Council has published a report ([Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 15th December, 2022, 2.00 pm : Cardiff Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)) containing all of the information that we are able to put into the public domain at this time covering the issues relating to the condition of the building, the offer from Academy Music Group (AMG) and the process we intend to utilise moving forward. A draft of this report was considered by the Council's Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee on 12 December 2022 and the Scrutiny Committee's assessment of the Cabinet's initial proposal will be published prior to the Cabinet meeting on 15 December 2022.

As you are aware, the decision on the future of St David's Hall is a matter for Cardiff Council to consider as the owner of the building and the sole funder and operator of the venue. I was puzzled therefore to read the assertions in your letter referencing Welsh Government and Arts Council of Wales (ACW) funding for the Hall. To my knowledge, Welsh Government has never provided revenue or capital funding for the Hall, whilst, with the exception of a small National Lottery Fund grant towards the work of the Arts Active Trust, no revenue support has been provided by ACW since 2014 when the venue's Revenue Funded Organisation status was withdrawn, and the Council currently pays to keep St David's Hall open.

It is important that public commentary on the proposals is informed by facts rather than conjecture. Consequently, the Council is also concerned about the thread that the Committee recently issued on social media, which again contains erroneous assertions about the process that is currently being undertaken. To my mind, such commentary could be seen to seriously jeopardise the objectivity and political neutrality of your committee.

It is wrong to state that the process is rushed and lacks transparency. The deterioration of the building has been flagged intermittently over the last decade by the Council to Welsh Government and ACW. The Council has also persistently drawn attention to the financial risk of the National Concert Hall of Wales being borne exclusively by the taxpayers of Cardiff. A consistent theme in these discussions is that the scale of investment required in St David's Hall could not be accommodated within ACW's affordability envelope. The Council has consistently highlighted in the public domain the need to address the asset maintenance backlog at St David's Hall; with the Cabinet authorising officers to explore alternative solutions in 2019 before the pandemic, and again in 2021.

GWEITHIO DROS GAERDYDD, GWEITHIO DROSOCH CHI

Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg, Saesneg neu'n ddwyieithog. Byddwn yn cyfathrebu â chi yn ôl eich dewis, dim ond i chi roi gwybod i ni pa un sydd well gennych. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

WORKING FOR CARDIFF, WORKING FOR YOU

The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh, English or bilingually. We will ensure that we communicate with you in the language of your choice, as long as you let us know which you prefer. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay.



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As has been stated publicly, a detailed competitive dialogue process – though attracting much interest from bidders – concluded unsuccessfully with no company prepared to take on the maintenance liability for the building. With regard to the First Minister's comments about multiple companies involved, I can only surmise it was a reference to this procurement process. Until AMG's proposal, no solution came anywhere near to remedying the poor state of the Hall.

Nor is it correct to assert that the Council has failed to engage with partners over AMG's proposal. In the context of strained public finances, the company's proposition gives far greater certainty to the Hall's primary users, including BBC NOW, WNO orchestra, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cardiff University, Cardiff Philharmonic, the Welsh Proms and the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition, and these organisations have been working closely and constructively with us and the company to ensure that their needs are accommodated within the new arrangements. The Council has also engaged constructively with the Cardiff Music Board about the proposals and will continue to do so as the proposal develops over coming months.

Suffice to say, the Council is confident that the Academy model will represent a significant enhancement of Cardiff's music offer, with contractual safeguards offered around the continuation of the classical programme, continued access for community organisations, and protection for the Hall's unique acoustics. We believe the new programme, providing a blend of rock, pop and classical concerts, will be welcomed by the wider public of South Wales and beyond. In this respect, it is worth underlining the extent to which AMG's proposal arises from the unique circumstances surrounding its long-term commitment to Cardiff and the £200million investment in the establishment of a new indoor arena at Atlantic Wharf.

The final decision will likely be taken by my Cabinet in March 2023 following a public consultation exercise on the Council's budget savings proposals and the issuing of a VEAT Notice that will enable the market to review the detailed proposal and challenge the proposed approach. I would recommend that this process needs to be concluded before the Committee rushes to draw conclusions about the proposals that are currently being considered by the Council.

In the interests of transparency and reassurance, I am prepared to offer a confidential briefing to you, as Chair of the Senedd's Culture Committee, on the proviso that the information disclosed is not shared more widely.

Yn gywir,
Yours sincerely,



CYNGHORYDD / COUNCILLOR HUW THOMAS
ARWEINYDD / LEADER
CYNGOR CAERDYDD / CARDIFF COUNCIL