

Jane Hutt MS  
Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Social Justice,  
Trefnydd and Chief Whip  
Welsh Government

3 September 2024

## **Draft Priorities for Culture in Wales 2024 to 2030**

Dear Jane

I write to share the Committee's views on the Welsh Government's consultation on draft priorities for culture in Wales 2024 to 2030.

### **Committee's previous views on a Culture Strategy for Wales**

The Committee **wrote** to your predecessor in September 2021 welcoming the commitment to creating a new Culture Strategy for Wales. At the time, the Committee accepted that there were a number of interrelated factors that could affect its introduction, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the-then UK Government Spending Review. The Committee noted at the time that it would expect the strategy to include specific activity, funding allocations and timelines for achieving any goals that are set.

The Committee **asked** your predecessor to provide budget allocations and an outline of the different government programmes that would underpin the strategy. During **scrutiny on the Draft Budget for 2023-24**, we were informed that the Welsh Government had appointed an external company to undertake stakeholder engagement to inform the development of the strategy. This work was overseen by a steering group, as confirmed in a **written statement** in March 2023. That statement noted that:

*"Our focus remains on ensuring that the new Strategy is both pragmatic and ambitious, that it brings improved cohesion to how the sectors in scope work*

together, and to how culture is reflected across the work of the Welsh Government."

## **Draft Budget 2024-25**

In the meantime, it's been nearly three years since the Welsh Government committed to a new Culture Strategy to engage with the arts, culture and heritage sectors as part of its Programme for Government. During **Draft Budget scrutiny this year**, we asked the previous Deputy Minister what changes would be made to the strategy in light of budgetary challenges, and what about her expectations would have changed with regards to arms-length bodies ("ALBs") and the strategy. We **were told** then that the Welsh Government would:

*"...balance the need to provide strategic direction and to maintain the long-term vision and ambitions contained in the draft strategy with a pragmatic approach to actions in support of delivering these ambitions that might be taken forward in the short-term...[we] will review Remit Letters in light of the Budget Settlement."*

In February this year, we noted that budget reductions would affect the ability of ALBs to deliver what is required of them, and that the Welsh Government should initiate urgent discussions about their remit letters. We suggested that any such changes should be dovetailed with the publication of the Culture Strategy.

The Draft Budget for the current financial year outlined a budget reduction of 10.5 per cent (that is, compared with their indicative allocations for 2024-25) for those ALBs which would be key to the delivery of a Culture Strategy. In addition, it was confirmed that there would be a reduction of £1.233million funding allocated to the strategy.

We also noted our disappointment in our report in the Draft Budget when we were told that ministers "hoped" the strategy would be ready by the end of the year. We said at the time that:

*"This lack of ambition means it will take nearly three years to deliver something that we were initially told would take six months. Given the impact of the pandemic, high energy costs and inflation, and significant budget reductions, it would be beneficial for the sector for more strategic direction to be shown."*

## **Our view**

The publication of this consultation is long overdue. We welcome the outline of the priorities and the accompanying ambitions as they have been set out. Despite this, we are concerned about the lack of detail which accompanies these priorities. It is unclear to us how they will be delivered, or by whom, or indeed what objectives will be set. In addition to this, and given the funding reductions that have been experienced by the culture sector in this financial year (as well as the amount allocated to the Culture Strategy), we are not sure how this will be funded, let alone achieved. The poor progress

that's been seen in recent years when it comes to some Programme for Government commitments exacerbates our concerns. As one example, the "Museum of the North" project, which lacked clarity and detail, has been axed. There has also been slow progress with the National Contemporary Art Gallery project, which is now a shadow of what was initially proposed in the feasibility study. This recent history of non-delivery on projects within the culture sector is disappointing, and we need clear assurances as to what is planned as part of this strategy, and how it will be delivered.

There are, however, two specific points which we feel should be reflected, in addition to what's already been set out in the consultation. Firstly, the recent cuts to youth provision at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama have shone a light on the lack of higher levels of training available to pupils in this area. Given this, we would strongly recommend that any future strategy addresses the need for young people across Wales to be able to pursue excellence in music and drama.

Secondly, we would urge you to address and respond to the recommendations of our forthcoming report on culture and the new relationship with the European Union. The Committee received important, and concerning, evidence about the ways in which the UK's departure from the EU is affecting cross-border activities, and we would ask that our final recommendations also be treated as evidence for this consultation. We will share a copy of this report with you as soon as possible. Furthermore, a significant number of important and enduring relationships have been forged between Welsh and international cultural institutions over the years. We believe that our responsibilities for the scrutiny of the Welsh Government's International Strategy means we are best placed to assess the culture strategy from this perspective, and we think that the two should be interlinked.

To conclude, the culture sector has gone through a significant period of turmoil in recent years. It is still facing significant challenges as a result of recent shocks. The sector is crying out for the leadership it was hoped this strategy would provide. We would encourage the Welsh Government to share more detail about the strategy, including specific activity, funding allocations and timelines for achieving goals that are set. In doing so, we believe it would provide clarity to the sector who are dependent on the success of this strategy.

Yours sincerely



**Delyth Jewell MS**  
**Committee Chair**

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.