

Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Tai, Adfywio a Threftadaeth
Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Your ref: P-03-317
Our ref: HL/06080/11

William Powell AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
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21 December 2011

Dean William

Thank you for your letter of 29 November regarding the evidence given to the Petitions Committee by the *Hijinx Funding for the Arts* petitioners on 1 November 2011.

You state the committee agreed to write to me to enquire how the priorities set out in future Remit Letters to the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) will be decided and whether Members of the Petitions Committee could have an input into that letter.

I am taking this opportunity to also respond to your letter of 29 November 2011 sent to Jane Hutt AM, Minister for Finance and Leader of the House, seeking her views on the equality issues raised by the *Hijinx Funding for the Arts* petitioners.

As you are aware, Welsh Government funding of the arts in Wales is channelled through ACW, which operates at arms-length from Government. As Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage, it would not be appropriate for me to intervene in individual funding decisions taken by ACW, or to comment in detail on ACW's decision to reduce *Hijinx Theatre's* funding.

The Minister with responsibility for the arts issues ACW with an annual Remit Letter as part of our sponsorship arrangements. The Remit Letter sets out, at a strategic level, the priorities and targets upon which ACW should focus in the year ahead.

The Welsh Government, through ACW, aims to develop a vibrant, sustainable and high-quality arts sector accessible to all individuals and communities in Wales. The Welsh Government's Programme for Government document emphasises commitments that require ACW to continue improving access and reducing the barriers to participation and

appreciation of the arts, and to undertake a developmental and support role for arts organisations in Wales.

The priorities set out in future Remit Letters to ACW will be linked to the Welsh Government's strategic agenda for the arts in Wales as set out in the Programme for Government. The strategic priorities and targets will be set by me, as Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage in consultation with ACW. There will therefore be particular emphasis on improving accessibility for Children and Young People and those groups that have traditionally found it difficult to break down the barriers preventing participation, for example disabled people, BME communities, and people living in rural areas.

Although some National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) Committees scrutinise existing Welsh Government policies, it would not be appropriate for the NAfW Petitions or Communities, Equality and Local Government Committees comprised of cross-party AMs to have direct input into a WGSB Remit Letter issued by the Welsh Government.

Regarding the equality issues raised by the *Hijinx Funding for the Arts* petitioners, ACW is committed to promoting equality of access to arts events and to promoting equality of opportunity within the arts. ACW's Disability Equality Scheme ensures that it complies with its duties towards disabled people under the Equality Act 2010. Furthermore, in my Remit Letter I encourage ACW to assess the implications of its financial decisions on equality issues.

Last year the Communities and Culture Committee published its report into 'the Accessibility of Arts and Cultural Activities in Wales'. One of the key recommendations was to emphasize the need to improve access to the arts for disabled people. This recommendation was accepted by the Welsh Government at the time and I can confirm that this remains a priority for the current administration. I have recently written to the Chair of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee, updating her on the progress made against this and the other recommendations contained within the report.

As regards the specific issue of Hijinx Theatre's funding, I can only reiterate what I have said before. Hijinx remains a revenue funded client of ACW. ACW is focusing funding on Hijinx Theatre's work with people with learning difficulties, which is a high priority element of the company's activity.

I would urge Hijinx to continue to work closely with ACW with a view to maximising the opportunities for securing Lottery project funding, to supplement its annual revenue funding.

Regards



Huw Lewis AC / AM

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