

Our Ref/Ein Cyf: WP/CLI
Your Ref/Eich Cyf:
Date/Dyddiad: 15 April 2016
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Mr William Powell AM

Chair – Petitions Committee
Chamber & Committee Service
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear Bill,

Re: Petition P-04-637 – To Protect the Future of Youth Music in Wales

Many thanks for your letter dated 21st March 2016 concerning the future of Youth Music Services in Wales and for your Committee's interest in the work of the Music Services Task & Finish Group, which was commissioned by the Education Minister in January 2015.

As you will be aware, the WLGA was represented on the Music Services Task & Finish Group and participated fully in the inquiry and the work of the group. In addition, the WLGA has since worked closely with all its partners in local government, especially the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) and Arts Council for Wales (ACW), in taking the work and recommendations forward.

The WLGA is a politically led organisation that represents the interest of the 22 local authorities in Wales. In relation to this particular piece of work, political lead was provided by Cllr Ali Thomas, Leader of Neath Port Talbot CBC and the WLGA's Education Spokesperson for Lifelong Learning, and Cllr Hedley McCarthy, the then Leader of Blaenau Gwent CBC and WLGA Spokesperson for Culture, Sport & Major Events. Both Spokespeople felt that this review was timely and topical as all local authority services, discretionary and statutory, are under pressure as a result of the current financial climate.

Despite the challenges of austerity in recent years, local government in Wales has emphasised that education is a number one priority and has focused on raising standards and improving outcomes for learners in Wales.

The 22 authorities have embraced fully the Welsh Government's strategic aims of improving literacy, numeracy and digital competency and breaking the link between poverty and attainment. As such, local authorities have increased funding delegation rates to schools -

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exceeding the 85% target - and met the First Minister's funding commitment throughout the lifetime of the last National Assembly.

As a consequence, it is a matter of pride for local government that performance in education is continuing to improve, that learning outcomes are improving and that currently there are no local authority education services in special measures or any Estyn category.

These achievements have been met against a context of very challenging financial circumstances and significant cuts in local authority revenue funding.

This has resulted in a withdrawal from the provision of some services and a greater focus on statutory and core services. Councils have also had to consider alternative models of service delivery, ranging from collaborative working arrangements (like the Gwent Music Service) to external partnership provision (such as Gwasanaeth Ysgolion William Mathias). For this reason, the WLGA welcomed the focus of the Music Services review and the opportunity to participate in the work through the Task & Finish Group.

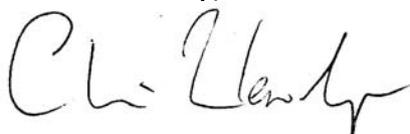
The WLGA's Spokespeople are fully committed to the provision of music services and recognise entirely their contribution to raising standards within education, enabling individual learners to fulfil their potential and contributing to the wider enrichment of school and community life.

Following the publication of the Task & Finish Group's report and subsequent Welsh Government response from the Minister for Education & Skills, Huw Lewis AM, the WLGA has been working closely with officials within Welsh Government and the Arts Council for Wales to take forward this work along with consider how each recommendations can be positively implemented in light of public sector budget challenges.

These issues have also been discussed at the regular bilateral meetings between the Education Minister and the WLGA's Spokesperson, Cllr Ali Thomas, in addition to discussion at civil service and officer level.

This work is still on-going, and will no doubt be discussed at future bilateral meetings between the WLGA and the new Ministers after the National Assembly elections on 5th May.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Chris Llewelyn

Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information
Cyfarwyddwr Dysgu Gydol Oes, Hamdden a Chyfathrebu



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