

Reduction in arts funding - update

The decision not to renew the partnership agreement with Salisbury Arts Centre in 2015/16 was made after careful consideration of the number of organisations that the council allocates arts grant funding to and the impact that any reduction in this funding would have.

As a part of the council's annual budget setting a review of the council's grant funding for arts organisations was undertaken in January (2015). The key outcomes of this review are below. These outcomes informed the decision made at cabinet on 10 February and full council on 24 February.

Review of process for decision making – arts grants reduction - summary

At the time of the review (January 2015) Wiltshire Council had four partnership agreements with cultural sector organisations in Salisbury; the Arts Centre; the Festival; the Playhouse and the Salisbury Museum.

The council also provides Salisbury City Hall and the Library service as well as managing the two trusts which support the work of the Young Gallery.

The review focused on the three arts organisations in receipt of annual grant awards from the council and considered the impact that a reduction in funding would have, and in particular the impact on members of the community within the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010.

The outcome of the review highlighted that Salisbury Arts Centre was the organisation most able to manage a reduction in funding and that the impact on the community would be mitigated as a result of the continued support of the other two arts organisations along with the services offered by City Hall, the Library and Young Gallery.

The review concluded that the Arts Centre would not close as a result of a reduction in funding and that with the support from Wiltshire Council the organisation could maintain its priority areas of work. The review recommended that the council's arts service work with the Arts Centre to manage the end of the contract and to provide support to identify other sources of grant income, potential new partnerships and new and innovative ways of working.

Two key considerations were the timing of the decision and the nature of the work undertaken by all the arts organisations.

The council's funding agreement clearly states the time line for confirming the annual funding position for organisations. Confirmation of funding is only available after the budget has been approved by council at its meetings in February.

On this basis, it was evaluated that the impact of a decision in February to reduce funding to the Salisbury Festival (which commences in May) would be unmanageable by that organisation. Equally, the lengthy production cycles of the Salisbury Playhouse means that that organisation has committed expenditure and entered into contractual agreements throughout the subsequent year making assimilating such a reduction extremely difficult.

The Arts Centre, however, is a receiving venue which enables the organisation to either reduce the cost of its programme or shield itself from loss through altering the makeup of the live performance programme and the associated outreach and learning projects.

The review considered the degree to which the three arts organisations in Salisbury offer duplication of activity, as well as the staffing and operational structure which each organisation supports. It identified that each organisation has developed relationships with different target audiences, though there is overlap with all three organisations offering youth programmes that focus on personal and social development, life skills and career progression. Equally, civilian / military integration programmes and support for deprived communities were common to all three organisations. Wiltshire Council's funding agreements do not require any of the organisations to provide specific programmes of support for people although there is a stipulation that the recipients of funding will adhere to the council's Equalities policy to reduce discrimination and support tolerance.

The size of the establishment that each organisation supports was also looked at. The comparison shows that the Salisbury Arts Centre employs almost twice the number of staff of both the Wiltshire Music Centre and the Pound Arts Centre. These two organisations deliver extensive programmes within their communities with far fewer staff and have developed operating models which use either project funded staff or allow for community groups to organise elements of their programme thus reducing the requirement for the host organisation to maintain such a large staffing structure.

The council recognises that the three Salisbury arts organisations operate collaboratively and welcomes the work underway to deliver efficiencies.

I can confirm that within the 2015/16 grant awards to both the Playhouse and the Festival the council has asked both organisations to consider ways to reduce their council funding allocation to enable an agreement with the Arts Centre in 2016/17. The intention is to support the Arts Centre to retain its National Portfolio status with Arts Council England and to support the Arts Centre to find a sustainable operating model. I can also confirm that Wiltshire Council is working with the Arts Council at the regional level to discuss the council's long term vision for the arts within Salisbury.

The council's decision not to renew the partnership agreement with the Salisbury Arts Centre was compliant with the Equalities Act 2010 as due consideration was given to the process by which the agreement was allowed to come to a natural end and the evidence upon which the decision not to renew the agreement was made. An initial screening assessment was undertaken in February which identified that there would not be undue impact upon any of the protected characteristics as sufficient alternative provision was available within the city and advice and support would be available to support the Arts Centre to maintain its programmes which work with individuals within the protected characteristics. As such a full equality impact assessment was not required, however, a full assessment has been undertaken to ensure that all the actions which could be taken to support the community have been identified.

The council owns the freehold to the premises occupied by the Arts Centre and is responsible for the external maintenance and repairs. **The Arts Centre leases the building (St Edmunds Church) for a peppercorn rent from Wiltshire Council. The council has made no change to this arrangement.**

Any further queries or concerns on this matter should be referred to Councillor Stuart Wheeler, Cabinet Member for Heritage & Arts. Email: stuart.wheeler@wiltshire.gov.uk