

Question for Salisbury Area Board - 14 May 2015

I would like to state that I am acting tonight as an individual. I was a Trustee at the Arts Centre but have resigned so that it would be clear that anything I say at this meeting are my views and mine alone. I am so angry; if anyone has an issue with anything I say, then the responsibility to address it rests between them and me.

Let's not get confused, there are 2 related but separate decisions.

First The decision to reduce the arts budget. **(This is policy.)**

I don't want to see any reduction in arts funding; but accept the decision as it was agreed by the Cabinet on 10th February, supported by the full council on 24th February.

Second The decision on where that cut should fall - on the Arts Centre alone. **(This is not policy - it is implementation.)**

It is this second totally unfair decision that makes me angry.

The Council has twice told the Arts Centre that it is "unable" to renew its partnership agreement; it is not "unable" - it just decided not to. By that decision, the Council has delivered a vote of no confidence in the Arts Centre.

I cannot see that there has been any consultation.

- The Arts Council was not consulted even though all organisations are NPO's and Wiltshire has a representative on the South West Area Council.
- The hard to reach groups who benefit from the outreach work that is now under threat have not been consulted.
- The Council observers on the boards of the respective organisations were not all consulted - if any.
- Ordinary councillors have not been consulted even though the approved budget report explicitly assures them:

"assessments will be done on the delivery plans for the respective budget decisions at the stage when plans for implementation are drawn up. These will be made available to all Councillors during the decision making process."

Some reasons for the decision have been put forward.

Like the Playhouse and The Festival, the Arts Centre **does** have national and international standing. It is an NPO, it receives visitors from overseas, it programmes international performances and films - and all 3 are listed in the Lonely Planet Guide to England (the same body that selected Salisbury as one of 10 cities in the World to visit this year).

The Council looked at the possible economic impact of their decision and state that organisations are capable of managing a 10% reduction in income. Even then, they decide to hit the Arts Centre with a cut of over 10% contrary to that research.

The Council agreements make it clear they cannot confirm funding until the budget is approved. But they then tell us that as The Playhouse and The Festival have made forward commitments, cuts to them would be unmanageable. The Council insults the Arts Centre by implying that they do not do forward planning - and what justification can there possibly be to punish one organisation if others do not comply with their agreements.

The Council's equality assessment admits that the cut will reduce the capacity of the Arts Centre to deliver programmes to engage with protected (i.e. vulnerable) groups. It

believes that work with these groups can be met by other providers - including The City Hall, Library and Young Gallery. Really? The Council shows no understanding of the difficult work needed to establish and maintain relationships with disadvantaged and hard to reach groups in their communities.

There is no rationale for the decision to place the full burden of the cut on the Arts Centre.

- The Council appears totally ignorant of the Arts Centre's work.
- There has been no consultation with stakeholders.
- No reason for the decision offered so far can stand up to scrutiny.

I claim that the decision carries no authority! There has been a very clear breakdown between policy and implementation. As a consequence:

- **either:** information was withheld from the Council on 24th February
- **and/or:** staff have not followed the process agreed at that meeting.

The cut is a vote of no confidence in the Arts Centre, is highly disrespectful to its staff, discriminates against disadvantaged groups and is contemptuous of the Arts Council, all stakeholders and ordinary Wiltshire councillors.

I plead with all the people in Salisbury to make your councillors aware of your views. I ask that all councillors now stand up, represent those views and decide what action they will take to address this unjust and undemocratic decision.

I have 2 questions.

My **first** is for the Democratic Services in Wiltshire Council. I can only table this today and ask that a response be given at the next meeting.

“How does Wiltshire (having sacked the Chief Executive) ensure that within the Cabinet model there is always a clear and unambiguous separation of policy from implementation, and how do the people of Salisbury hold the Cabinet to account?”

My **second** for Councillor Wheeler:

“When was the decision made that the Arts Centre should take the full cut in the arts budget, who were consulted (a complete list please - organisations, Cabinet members, staff and individuals), what objective and comparative data for all grant recipients in Wiltshire was used to inform that decision, and where in the archives of Wiltshire Council is all the information recorded so that it can be reviewed by the public?”

Peter Williams - 14 May 2015

Copy to:

- Salisbury Area Board
- Salisbury Journal