



South Powys Youth Music

charity number 1121625

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Bethan Sayed AM

National Assembly for Wales

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Dear Ms Sayed

Re "Hitting The Right Note" and South Powys Youth Music

I was delighted recently to read your WAG report "Hitting The Right Note" and wholeheartedly applaud the aims expressed in it to establish a national strategy directed at supporting youth music making in Wales. It is my fault that somehow the evidence gathering process passed me by as I would very much have liked to have had some input in order to explain the situation in Powys. Your report – excellent as it is – seems to be predicated on the understanding that every local authority area in Wales has a music service. Sadly this simply is not the case. Powys does not have a music service at all and has not had one since the mid 1990s. Nor has Powys since then had, as far as I can tell, any coordinated provision of musical instrumental teaching. What has existed since then has been on an ad hoc basis and has survived, as far as I understand it, very much because of the dogged determination of a few individuals rather than as a result of any support from Powys CC. Having read your report I am anxious that you and your committee may be wholly unaware of quite how bad things are in Powys in terms of support for music provision and for how long this has been so.

I have the privilege of being chair of South Powys Youth Music (SPYM). It was founded in the mid 1990s by Alan Davies (previously a Powys Music Service peripatetic cello teacher) in an effort to fill some of the yawning gap in musical provision left by the disbanding of the Powys Music Service. SPYM is an independently run charity. It is categorically not, and has never

pretended to be, a music service – it simply does not have the financial resources to be one. The core of SPYM's work revolves around weekly after school sessions in Brecon on Wednesdays. These sessions cater for children and young people between the ages of 6 – 18. Average attendance each week is somewhere between 80 – 100. In an effort to be as accessible to as many people as possible in our very rural area SPYM fully funds bus transport from the Crickhowell and Builth Wells areas. SPYM runs various groups for various ages – choir, percussion group, wind band, Stringtastic (for less experienced string players) and South Powys Youth Orchestra (SPYO). The musical director is Tim Cronin. He is originally from Neath and came through the West Glamorgan Music Service. He went on to read music at Oxford before having a career as a violinist and violist with leading London period instrument orchestras before he relocated to Brecon about 15 years ago. Tim is assisted by professional musician tutors who in turn are supported by a group of adult volunteers who are experienced musicians. SPYM also has a stock of instruments available for hire. SPYM puts on regular concerts. In addition to this there has in past years been outreach work in collaboration with Sinfonia Cymru, BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. SPYM has also in the past - when funds have allowed - provided instrumental roadshows in primary schools to try to introduce as many young people as possible to live music making and to playing instruments. In addition to this SPYM runs "Shake Rattle and Roll" – interactive music sessions for pre school children at various locations.

The aim of SPYM is to provide high quality group music making opportunities for the children and young people in our area. As far as I am aware there is no other body providing similar opportunities in the area. Whilst we aim for high standards we are open to young musicians of all abilities – we are not just interested in musical talent but equally in musical interest. SPYM also has longstanding and fruitful links with the Royal Welsh Academy of Music and Drama who often help with the provision of lower brass players to assist SPYO in concerts and with the renowned Brecon Baroque Festival whose musical director – the eminent international baroque violinist Rachel Podger – is the partner of Tim Cronin, SPYM's musical director. Further and in addition to SPYM's work, Tim Cronin and Rachel Podger run the Mozart Music Fund – a fund which assists those in need with the costs of instrumental tuition.

The issue of local authority support for SPYM has for some time been a bone of contention between me and Powys CC. I have been chair of SPYM for around 10 years now. In that time the highest level of financial support in any single financial year from Powys CC for SPYM – the only provider of the musical services it offers in the area, and in the complete absence of any

Powys CC expenditure on a music service (very simply there isn't one) – was £20,000. That was the level of funding in 2011 – 2012 and 2012 – 2013, two of the three years (2012 -2014) when SPYM very successfully joined forces with their North Powys counterparts to hold a residential Powys Youth Orchestra Course. Since then the level of Powys CC support for SPYM has steadily decreased. In the year 2013 -2014 the support was cut to £15,000. In 2014 – 2105 it was further cut to £10,000 – this being a discretionary award. In May 2015 Powys set up the Powys Youth Music Development Scheme as a vehicle for funding. The maximum amount that could be applied for was £7,500. SPYM was awarded that amount, this being the entirety of Powys CC support for 2015 - 2016. When invited to apply to the fund for support in 2016 – 2017 we were told that the maximum grant would be £5,000. After some fairly brisk emails from me and Tim Cronin, Powys backtracked and raised the maximum to £7,500 which again was the entirety of the support from Powys CC for SPYM that year. Unfortunately the limit was lowered the next year (brisk emails that time had no effect...) to £5,000, this being the entirety of Powys CC support in 2017 -2018. Over the years I have also been to various meetings with Powys CC officials and councillors to fight SPYM's financial corner. Those trips to Llandrindod Wells achieved precisely nothing.

Before I come to the most recent developments you will I hope be dismayed by the paucity of financial support offered by Powys CC to SPYM – as I say, the only such provider of such youth music services (for want of a better word) in our area. In very general terms SPYM's core activities (the Wednesday sessions in Brecon) cost around £35,000 to run per year. About 6 or so years ago when SPYM was able to do rather more – for instance the Powys Youth Orchestra residential course, a "satellite" outreach group in Presteigne, Junior Orchestral workshops etc – we realised that funding in the future was likely to drop. We not only sought further and alternative sources of funding but, I think wisely, took a cautious approach in order to preserve some financial reserves. We also recognised that it was likely that we would have to reduce SPYM's activities in order to secure its longer term future. This has indeed happened with SPYM now focussing only on its "core" Wednesday sessions. But even with this reduction of our activities, with careful financial management and with ongoing active fundraising efforts SPYM's financial reserves have dwindled. At a Committee meeting earlier this week there was a recognition of the possibility of SPYM, on current trends, simply running out of money within 2 years.

Yesterday, the day after that committee meeting, I received from Powys CC the news that as a result of our latest application to the Powys Youth Music Development Scheme SPYM has been awarded £5,000 for 2018 – 2019. That email, however, concluded with this paragraph;

Please be advised that the **Powys Youth Music Development Scheme** is likely to cease at the end of this year and therefore no further funding will be available from Powys County Council from April 2019. We apologise for the disappointment this may cause.

This news is the latest awful development in the sorry tale of Powys CC and its approach to the financial support of youth music provision. Quite where this will leave SPYM we have yet to work out. We have survived so far and are determined to do our best to survive in the years to come but at the very least it will be difficult. It would be the greatest of ironies if bodies such as ours were to wither before the recommendations in your report are put into force.

There is one final point. Within 45 minutes of receiving the email from Powys CC telling me of SPYM's award of £5,000 for 2018 – 2019 and also of the likely complete cessation of funding from April 2019, I received a further email from the same person. That email was a reminder to SPYM of the looming deadline for applications for auditions for the NYAW ensembles. Quite where people think young musicians will magically appear from in the future when funding to youth music organisations in Powys is likely to cease completely is something that completely baffles me. I found it extraordinary – and extraordinarily and very unfortunately ironic - to have received those two emails in quick succession.

I hope that this letter helps you understand the most unfortunate situation in this area. I will also be writing on the subject to Kirsty Williams AM (whom I know and who is also a former SPYM parent), to Chris Davies MP and also to various Powys County Councillors whom I hope may be sympathetic to our cause. I have also enclosed the programmes from two of SPYM most recent concerts which may give you an idea of the sort of work that we do. If you would like any further information please do not hesitate to contact me. Likewise if (and I realise you must be extremely busy) you would be interested to come along on to Brecon on a term time Wednesday afternoon to see what SPYM does, please do not hesitate to contact me. We would be very pleased to welcome you. Equally if you would like to meet

me in person to discuss this matter further I would be delighted to come to wherever would be most convenient for you.

With very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

NICK GEDGE

CHAIR OF SOUTH POWYS YOUTH MUSIC