

Statement on The Arts

I am speaking as the Council Champion for Culture, and from my experience as previous cabinet member for sustainable development.

The refresh of the Economic Strategy is welcomed, and has been in the pipeline for sometime. Welcomed also is the recognition and incorporation of the Arts and Culture into the strategy. The arts and culture sectors contribute substantially to our economy and play a vital part in making Bath & NES a leading Cultural destination.

A Paper entitled Arts Strategy was provisionally put forward to Cabinet in the Autumn, but subsequently withdrawn. It outlined amongst other things a commissioning basis for arts projects and training, and other initiatives, and was perhaps more about process than any strategy. The cultural sector was told there would be an interim period to await the development of the economic Strategy. The Cabinet Member vocalised publicly that the Previous Paper "was not worth the paper it was written on, and even stronger words to that effect.

However the actions in that paper are continuing to be implemented, without the endorsement of Cabinet, and it would seem without the support of the Cabinet Member given his public statements.

To be rolling out the Arts Commissions without the proper basis and understanding of a Strategy has caused a great deal of difficulty for the cultural sector locally, and there is a lack of clear direction and strategy. Indeed the process of these commissions has added administrative costs, and is complicated. The process has not been conducive to fostering good relationships between local Arts Organisations and the LA. Additionally large commissions have been awarded away from local Organisations to outside area operators, which runs in the face of our preferred local procurement policy.

In the face of the growing dismay and uncertainty felt in our excellent local arts sectors, this Administration must work with

renewed focus and energy to facilitate and strengthen our Cultural Sector. Whilst it is not my intention to question professional judgement in the recent allocation of Arts Commissions, Cabinet should note that the effects have been to weaken key local organisations, to place a strain on relationship with the LA and importantly to have a negative impact on partnerships with key funders - Arts Council England for one.

Experience elsewhere shows that when arts organisations work together and have a positive relationship with their local authority, everyone benefits - it's possible to raise more money, to attract big grants, to do ambitious in depth projects that have high profile and involve thousands of local people, and the sector becomes more healthy overall which has long-term impact. Short term contracts let for 3 years to companies from outside B&NES may achieve the service goals in the commissions, but they won't form long term relationships with local communities or create jobs in the local area.

The current commissioning process should be put on hold, whilst this Administration commits to working with Partners to create a thoughtful, well researched overall cultural strategy, working with the cultural sector and strategic partners (universities, ACE, other agencies to form a framework for the arts development strategy, and to develop a funding/commissioning regime that will help to support the delivery of this new strategy.