

Public Questions
Cabinet, 5th February 2020

1) Mr Mark Smart, Chair, Reach Arts has asked the Cabinet:

Reach Inclusive Arts (RIA) is a charity that works with adults with disabilities. RIA direct their charitable efforts towards those in the community whose needs are greatest. At this time, with increasing pressure on resources for adult social care, the greatest challenge in the lifetime of a disabled person comes when they move into adulthood. RIA have used the funding provided by Swindon Borough Council (SBC) to unlock 7.5 times as much money from other sources. SBC are proposing to cut RIA funding completely. Without it, RIA may be forced to close altogether as match funding cannot be unlocked without that grant from SBC and the endorsement that it provides. How do SBC intend to replace the loss in essential adult social care that Reach currently provides and save money?

The Cabinet Member for the Town Centre has responded:

Thank you for your question.

Cabinet takes these issues seriously, and the Council budget is based on the professional advice, and recommendation, of Swindon Borough Council Officers. Over 80% of day to day money is now dedicated to Adult Social Care and Children Services, and the Councils statutory commitments must be met. Unfortunately, this means that discretionary areas like grants are affected. The grants cannot continue in their current form otherwise this challenge will exist in every future year.

Reach Arts does excellent work, and with the Councils grant raised £101,000 last year in other grant opportunities. There remain many ways the Council can continue to work with, and assist, Reach Arts, such as supporting heavily discounted rent from HQ theatres through their Council contract at the Wyvern. Change is difficult but it is necessary.

No decision has been made yet, and an amendment will shortly be proposed at the Cabinet meeting.

My colleagues, and I, are supportive of an extra £10,000 being provided to Adult Social Care and Children Services, so that the Council can continue working with Reach Arts but the relationship will need to change. For example, instead of a grant, the Council should look to commission Reach Arts for agreed outcomes that directly support Council objectives.

2) Mr Jacob Tyrell, Trustee, Prime Theatre, has asked the Cabinet

I'm Jacob Tyrell, a Trustee of Prime Theatre and one of the many Deaf young people and Looked After Children who access Prime's services for free. The Council's essential core support triggers further funds that Prime uses to extend the valuable work of your own Education Department. This includes raising aspiration and achievement, tackling mental health and creating the inclusive community that this Cabinet seeks to build. What do Cabinet have to say to the young people like me who are disillusioned at this potential destruction of a major reason we have to celebrate or stay in Swindon? Please don't let it be your watch that silences the creative heartbeat of our town.

The Cabinet Member for the Town Centre has responded:

Thank you for your question.

Cabinet takes these issues seriously, and the Council budget is based on the professional advice, and recommendation, of Swindon Borough Council Officers. Over 80% of day to day money is now dedicated to Adult Social Care and Children Services, and the Council's statutory commitments must be met. Unfortunately, this means that discretionary areas like grants are affected. The grants cannot continue in their current form otherwise this challenge will exist in every future year.

The work of Mark Powell and his team at Prime theatre has a wide positive impact on the local community, particularly their activities for Looked after children, the Deaf and those with Special Educational Needs. Mark and I have spoken several times over the last 12 months on this topic, and Prime is fully aware of the pressures that the Council faces.

There remain many ways the Council can continue work with, and assist, Prime, such as supporting heavily discounted rent from HQ Theatres through their contract at the Wyvern. Change is difficult but it is necessary.

No decision has been made yet, and an amendment will be proposed at the Cabinet meeting for an extra £25,000 to be made available to Adult Social Care and Children Services. I thank my colleagues for their support because this will help the move to a commissioning model that Prime supports, instead of receiving a direct grant. I hope this will be welcomed by everyone.

- 3) Ms Shahina Johnson MBE, CEO & Artistic Director, Create Studios, has asked the Cabinet

Creative Industries are growing at twice the rate of any other economic sector at present, and lack of diversity is as an issue the sector seeks to address. Create Studios is leading the way, not only growing new diverse creative digital talent for Swindon but is drawing substantial national resource for its skills development, education and community cohesion programmes, and is a key partner in Swindon's new Institute of Technology.

£30,700 that SBC invests in Create Studios unlocks a further £270,000 of grant and project income which benefits young people and communities within its not-for-profit social enterprise model. As one of three Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation in Swindon, Create Studios is recognised nationally for its practice as being "outstanding".

The proposed cuts would not only impact Create's core costs which other income does not support, it additionally jeopardises potential funding of several millions from Arts Council England, linked to Cultural Quarter and pre-work via Creative People and Places funding.

How does Cabinet resolve potential loss of Create Studios core funding, and linked draw down resource for Swindon with the opportunity to be part of Creative Industries national economic growth and regeneration, and how can the new Cultural Quarter developments flourish if funding to the cultural organisations are cut?

The Cabinet Member for the Town Centre has responded:

Thank you for your question.

Thank you also for the emails outlining the benefits and work of Create Studios, and how the Council's grant represents 10% of the Studio's income last year after a further £270,000 was raised last year. This position has been reiterated in your question.

Cabinet takes these issues seriously, and the Council budget is based on the professional advice, and recommendation, of Swindon Borough Council Officers. Over 80% of day to day money is now dedicated to Adult Social Care and Children Services, and the Council's statutory commitments must be met. Unfortunately, this means that discretionary areas like grants are affected. The grants cannot continue in their current form otherwise this challenge will exist in every future year.

No decision has been made yet, and we continue to talk with Officers, the Arts Council and Create Studios about what possible support can be provided in the years ahead. There remain many ways the Council can continue work with, and assist, Create Studio's, such as supporting heavily discounted rent from HQ theatres through their Council contract at the Wyvern. There are also opportunities where Create has previously been keen to relocate to the Carriageworks at J Store and may be available in a few months, or other options in the Cultural Quarter as we

move forward. Change is difficult but it is necessary.

My colleagues, and I are supportive of the Council continuing to work with Create Studios on areas like digital training, which you highlighted yesterday as an example. However, this would be through a contract, not a grant, and therefore isn't a decision for Cabinet tonight or Full Council later this month.

Mrs Karen Davison-Renouf has asked the Cabinet:

4) I welcome the decisive action by the Council in finally terminating the relationship with Swindon Corn Exchange Ltd. For too long, there has been no progress by the developer. It is well known that in 2018 the Council stepped in to secure the building, and do some remedial work. Please could the Cabinet Member for Heritage confirm how much was spent by the Council on this action, is Swindon Corn Exchange Ltd liable for any of this cost and if so, how much has been paid and outstanding?

The Cabinet Member for the Town Centre has responded:

Thank you for your comments about the Corn Exchange development agreement. I believe terminating the agreement is the right decision, and the owner now needs to step up by finding a new team of architects and developers. The developer was told more 12 months ago that this was the last extension and patience was running out. Another extension will simply tie the hands of the Council, and the owner with no progress made.

I can confirm that the Council spent has £30,000 on the site, and Swindon Corn Exchange Ltd is liable for the full amount. Despite repeated requests, no money has been paid back in the last 12 months. This adds to a picture of a developer who cannot deliver on a multi-million scheme on a hugely important heritage building in Old Town.