

ECONOMY & CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 OCTOBER 2023

Present: Councillor Wong(Chairperson)
Councillors Berman, Henshaw, Jones, Shimmin and Thomson

38 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Cllrs Jenkins, Brown-Reckless and Lloyd Jones

39 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

40 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

41 : ST DAVID'S HALL UPDATE

Members were advised that they are scrutinising the report to Cabinet that sets out the results of the intrusive roof surveys and seeks approval for the Council to enter into a conditional agreement for lease and, once these conditions are satisfied, transfer St. Davids Hall via a business sale agreement and a full repairing and insuring 45-year property lease with AMG. The report also asks Cabinet to note the continued closure of St. David's Hall and the Council's proposed staff engagement strategy.

Members can explore these aspects and the implications for the Council, including whether there are any risks to the Council.

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Joel Williams, who was attending to participate in the scrutiny in his role as Chair of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee, which has oversight of property and HR.

In addition, the Chairperson welcomed Cllr Burke – Cabinet Member – Culture, Parks and Events; Kathryn Richards – Head of Culture, Venues, Tourism and Events; Scott Couzens – Bevan Brittan LLP; Chris Pembridge – Director, WSP – Structural Engineers; Neil Hanratty – Director of Economic Development; Chris Barnett – Operational Manager – Major Projects; Ruth Cayford – Operational Manager – Creative Industries & Culture; Donna Jones – Assistant Director – County Estates; Eirian Jones – Operational Manager – Strategic Estates; Richard Crook - Operational Manager (Interim) – Major Projects and Tracey Thomas – Chief Officer – HR, to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member was invited to make an opening statement after which Members were provided with a presentation from Officers.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members discussed how the proposals for St. David's Hall affect staffing. It was noted that TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) is unlikely to apply, and staff and unions are comfortable with this. Members were advised that temporary staff with two years or less service will be assisted in finding opportunities elsewhere in the Council, and long-term casual staff will be eligible for redeployment and voluntary severance. Redeployment guarantees cannot be given, but the Council will make every effort to maximise redeployment. Members noted that most full-time staff at St. David's Hall have expressed interest in voluntary severance.

The Committee noted the results of the intrusive surveys and discussed the proposed approach to close St. David's Hall for roof repairs and other refurbishment works, including the removal of RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) planks. Members were pleased to hear that a general contractor could undertake this work, despite the challenge of dealing with potential sudden collapses as RAAC planks are removed. The Committee also noted that several public sector projects have been cancelled across the UK, making contractors available for the work.

Members asked about the impact of RAAC plank removal on the acoustics of St. David's Hall. It was noted that the removal might have a positive effect, as the replacement roof could use materials that enhance acoustics. Any works will be subject to approval by a sound engineer, and the responsibility for costs of remedial works, if needed, would be with AMG.

The Committee supported the establishment of a working group consisting of representatives from AMG and Council officers, including planning officers, conservation officers, and economic development officers. Members noted that the group's purpose would be to determine whether planning permission or conservation permission is the lead issue for reopening St. David's Hall and to involve stakeholders in the process.

Members noted that Cabinet needs to remain satisfied that the proposals meet the best consideration duty. The previous KC advice, JLL valuation, and Bevan Britten advice were confirmed as applicable, and the risk regarding RAAC has solidified, affecting AMG's position while improving the Council's position. The only additional cost to the Council is the costs of voluntary severance where agreed.

The Committee discussed the costs of roof repairs and refurbishment, with AMG bearing these costs. Members noted that the delay in achieving savings from the proposed transfer of St. David's Hall is causing budget issues for the Council, and the Director of Economic Development is working with finance colleagues to address these issues.

Members asked about approaching the Welsh Government and the UK Government to seek financial support for dealing with RAAC at St. David's Hall. It was noted that a previous approach in December 2022 was unsuccessful, and the Director of Economic Development suggested that another approach is unlikely to succeed.

The Committee was pleased to learn that Arts Active services are protected and will continue to operate during the closure of St. David's Hall. Members were also pleased to hear that there is recognition of the need to protect the ecosystem supported by St. David's Hall, including audiences, orchestras, musicians,

relationships with promoters, and performers. A classical music stakeholder group is working on a Memorandum of Understanding to protect this ecosystem.

The Committee noted that survey work to identify RAAC across the Council estate would be completed at the end of October. Members noted that to date, no RAAC has been found in the Council's estate, including schools. Members were interested in the process for dealing with RAAC in non-Council buildings, and it was noted that the revised Health and Safety Executive guidance applies to all properties.

Some Members expressed regret that the Council is looking at handing over control of St. David's Hall to a private company and believed there should be a national funding solution, particularly since RAAC issues are a national problem driving financial challenges. These Members wished for their minority view to be noted.

RESOLVED – That the public be excluded from the meeting at this point during consideration of this item as the Committee discussed exempt information of the description contained in paragraphs 14 & 16 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The public may be excluded from the meeting by resolution of the Committee pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 during discussion of this item.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

42 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

43 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

21/11/23, 4.30pm

The meeting terminated at 7.20 pm

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