

Cyngor Tref ABERYSTWYTH Town Council

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Maer Aberystwyth Mayor: Y Cyng. / Cllr. Kerry Ferguson

Delyth Jewell MS
Chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh language, Sport & International Relations
Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
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Aberystwyth Town Council
11 Stryd Y Popty
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4 March 2024

Dear Chair,

We are writing on behalf of the residents of Aberystwyth, where the National Library of Wales resides. We write asking you to utilise all possible levers to increase the arts and culture budget related to the National Library of Wales and Amgueddfa Cymru.

Aberystwyth Town has a population of 14,648 (Census 2021), is rich in history and culture and is home to one of Wales' most prestigious Universities. The Welsh Language is a crucial element of everyday life and is celebrated through poems, songs and displays of pride throughout the town. As a Town Council, we advocate for our community and continue to ensure that local services are protected. We do our utmost to drive investment, support local businesses and maintain our parks, grounds and Community areas for everyone to enjoy. This includes our National Library, which stands proudly over our great town.

We recognise that the Welsh Government is in an undesirable fiscal position, thanks to the actions of 14 years of Westminster austerity; however, the proposed budget for both the National Library of Wales and Amgueddfa Cymru is unacceptable.

The PCS and Prospect trade unions, representing members in both locations, warn of the loss of jobs due to this budget settlement. We will reference the National Library of Wales in particular as it relates to Aberystwyth. The potential loss of jobs and capacity is deeply concerning to us. This impacts the individual employees and the wider community, the local economy, the future of Welsh culture, the institutions themselves, and our future generations.

The loss of jobs in the National Library of Wales will impact our community in many ways. Loss of salaries will impact our local economy and businesses; loss of skills and capacity will discourage literary and research tourism, and possibly student numbers at Aberystwyth University; loss of staff and capacity will negatively impact the Welsh Language; a reduction of capacity will have a direct negative impact on our heritage and culture.

Capacity losses at the National Library of Wales will also impact the institutions in question. Key skills and expertise will be lost, which may take decades to rebuild. Cutbacks on current

operations will impact the capacity for projects and proposals that Aberystwyth Town Council have been proud to support, such as the ongoing awareness raising and digitisation of the Welsh Women's Peace Petition, recently debated at the Senedd.

Loss of jobs and funding at the National Library of Wales will also have secondary and tertiary effects on the nation as a whole:

As a Council, we share concern that these job losses and loss of skills and capacity at Wales' primary cultural and historical institutions are not in line with some of the stated aims of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, namely "A Wales of Vibrant Culture & Thriving Welsh Language", "A Wales of Cohesive Communities", "A Prosperous Wales", and "A Resilient Wales".

Outreach and Education programmes, vital to future generations' understanding of Wales, may also be under threat.

Capacity losses will mean fewer visitors to Aberystwyth and Wales, but likely also less of the groundbreaking research and projects that Aberystwyth University and the National Library of Wales have built a reputation around.

Aberystwyth Town Council is currently leading a bid to make Aberystwyth a UNESCO "City of Literature", which, if granted, would be the first in Wales. Cuts to the National Library of Wales will negatively impact this bid.

Aberystwyth Town Council has been proud to support the planning applications and investments the National Library of Wales has made to make themselves Net Zero. The National Library of Wales has shown itself as a leader in this area, and the reduction of funding is not an incentive to break further ground on the ever-important need to ensure our institutions are climate resilient.

Aberystwyth Town Council asks, on behalf of our residents and institutions, our local economy and our Welsh culture, that you review the proposed funding reductions, and that the Welsh Government and Senedd work proactively with both the institutions and trade unions concerned to ensure that Wales is not made culturally poorer by the actions of our Governments in Cardiff and Westminster.

During a time when so many services are under threat, a reduction in funding for our culture and heritage goes against every fibre of what we believe is the aim of the Programme for Government in Wales and the Cooperation Agreement to develop a culture strategy. Both documents relate to improving cultural assets and securing future investment. Only a few areas remain free for the public to use; taking away funding for an institution that gives so much to enrich the lives of the people of Wales and help give voice to our culture, history, and language may also alter that arrangement. This decision may again place a barrier for our most deprived communities to enjoy the richness of what is on offer at our National Library. Our culture should not be behind a paywall; currently, our National Museum is proud to ensure that isn't the case.

We welcome the opportunity for the Committee to address the Town Council to hear our concerns for our residents and citizens of Aberystwyth, and to share the wider impacts that cuts this deep will have on our culture and our town.

Sincerely,

Aberystwyth Town Council