

IFRCS20 Roland Evans, Assistant Head of Economy and Community, Cyngor Gwynedd

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg, Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol | Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Effaith Gostyngiadau Cyllid ar Ddiwylliant a Chwaraeon | Impact of Funding Reductions for Culture and Sport

Ymateb gan: Roland Evans, Pennaeth Cynorthwyol Economi a Chymuned, Cyngor Gwynedd | Evidance from: Roland Evans, Assistant Head of Economy and Community, Cyngor Gwynedd

1. What impacts has reduced funding had on your organisation and sector so far?

A reduction in budgets is considered to have affected areas of leisure by :

- Reducing the authority's ability to invest in leisure and wellbeing provisions and facilities. In practice, this includes :
 - A reduction in the value of the Healthy Living delivery agreement due to significant inflationary costs
 - The ability to invest in facility maintenance to an acceptable standard
 - Real-terms reductions to budgets from Welsh Government - which come through Sport Wales, Actif North Wales and Health. E.g. Actif Young People, Free Swimming, the 60+ programme, NERS and Play Grants which fund holiday projects for children and young people.
 - Financial challenges and uncertainties make it difficult to plan ahead into the medium term. That leaves high staff turnover and loss of expertise and a reduction in capacity. E.g. it is very difficult to recruit Bilingual Professional Practice Officers to the NERS Team. Annual funding offers only and coming very late in the previous financial year. Staff turnover always reduces the level of service for vulnerable residents, as a period of re-training new staff is required.
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- A lack of medium-term funding arrangements is also a challenge on top of reductions. That leaves high staff turnover and loss of expertise and a reduction in capacity. E.g. it is very difficult to recruit Bilingual Professional Practice Officers to the NERS Team. Annual funding offers only and coming very late in the previous financial year. Staff turnover always reduces the level of service for vulnerable residents, as a period of re-training new staff is required.

Culture:

- We have had to cut Archives opening hours.
- We have lost professional staff across our cultural services in archives, museums and libraries and have made redundancies or not filled jobs to make savings.
- We have restructured library services and closed some locations.
- Our Library Service for schools will be coming to an end.
- Our Library Lorry service has ended.
- We have cut the total grant fund for supporting the arts in the county.
- We have closed Neuadd Buddug in Bala.
- We have closed the Quaker Heritage Centre in Dolgellau.
- We have sought to review business plans for improving the efficiency of Storiel Museum and Gallery, Lloyd George Museum and Neuadd Dwyfor arts centre in Pwllheli.
- Our budgets for hosting activities and marketing and communications have been reduced which is affecting our ability to attract audiences and visitors in certain locations.

2. What measures have you taken in light of it, such as changing what you do and how you do it?

Leisure:

- Have had to increase user fees
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- Have had to reduce staffing levels and therefore the quality and scope of the service
- Decision not to market the NERS scheme due to lack of staffing capacity to cope with the "real" demand.
- Have introduced energy efficiency measures
- Have had to manage pay levels which mean that they do not compare favourably with work in other sectors, which leads to high turnover and high costs of recruitment and re-training.

Culture:

- We have increased entrance fees at Lloyd George Museum and at Neuadd Dwyfor.
- We have increased fees generally across cultural services.
- We have reduced staffing numbers which puts pressure on service delivery in times of illness or staff leave.
- We have reviewed business plans with the aim of being more commercial.
- We have ceased recruitment to support staff posts such as Museum Education Officer or Museum Engagement Officer due to lack of budget.
- We have discontinued some key activities e.g. reading competitions, arts events etc.
- We are having to reduce the amount of engagement activities.

3. To what extent will these impacts be irreversible (e.g. venues closing, or specialist skills being lost rather than a temporary restriction in activities)?

Leisure:

- Long-term impact of inflation in fees.
 - Long-term impact in staff turnover and loss of expertise.
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- Long-term impact on the condition of facilities and equipment, due to the inability to invest adequately in the maintenance and replacement of equipment and facilities,

Culture:

We have closed venues as set out in question 1 – library sites, Neuadd Buddug in Bala and the Quaker Centre.

The loss of support staff is affecting visitor numbers and engagement across the county.

4. What interventions would you like to see from the Welsh Government, beyond increased funding?

Leisure

- Collaborate to establish an additional Referral to Practice Programme for non-chronic conditions. Several local authorities have piloted work that suggests such interventions can be financially self-sustaining if health sector input is secured in terms of referrals. It can be a very valuable preventive intervention and reduce demand on the health sector while making leisure facilities more self-sustainable.
- Re-visit the Curriculum for Wales to place a clearer emphasis on ensuring that all children learn to swim as a necessary life skill. The national transport framework should also be looked at to take into account school travel costs (particularly in rural areas)
- Commit to medium term funding arrangements for all grants in this area e.g. a minimum of 3 years to provide job security for the workforce / reduce turnover / loss of experience and resource waste. And a reasonable process within the terms and conditions of the NERS scheme to review user fees – as a contribution towards delivery costs.
- Revise the Free Swimming Grant to set clearer expectations that correspond better to the level of investment available and follow clear priorities. E.g. being able to use it to target children and young people who are unable to swim

Culture:

- Having fiscal interventions over a longer period would facilitate service delivery.
- Ensuring a better correlation with health and social preventive services and using a component of their budgets could create better provision and outcomes in the long term.
- Facilitating better relationships between the Department for Culture, Arts Council, bodies such as Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library of Wales and the Royal Commission with Local Authorities and the wider sector.

5. To what extent do the impacts you describe fall differently on people with protected characteristics and people of a lower socioeconomic status?

Leisure:

The pressure is heavier on several groups:

- Low-income households suffer as fees rise to meet the financial gap. Children from a low income household are completely dependent on school swimming in order to learn to swim and if their school does not prioritise that, then the risk of them not being able to swim increases significantly. These families in rural areas also suffer from reduced service in other areas e.g. lack of public transport to be able to reach leisure facilities.
- Older and vulnerable adults are affected by a lack of capacity within the NERS scheme. This group often do not have the skills or confidence to practise independently so access to the scheme means they have a real opportunity to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and in many cases be able to live independently for longer.
- Residents in rural areas are affected due to the higher cost of providing facilities and the lack of private sector presence as an alternative. Some facilities in South Gwynedd have a catchment of around 5,000 people, which is not commercially sustainable. This leads to reduced opening hours, lower staffing levels and limited programmes.

Culture:

- Increasing fees is going to have an impact on everyone but especially those from low income households.
- Access to some services has been curtailed for everyone, but library closures and the curtailment of archive opening hours specifically are likely to affect user groups with protected characteristics and rural areas.
- Reducing arts grants is going to affect the ability of some providers to work with certain groups with protected characteristics and rural areas.
- Not recruiting to certain positions e.g. Museum Education Officer and Museum Engagement Officer will have an effect on groups with protected characteristics and low-income families – and many in rural areas.

6. Do you have any other points you wish to raise within the scope of this inquiry?

The Government has recently published the draft Priorities for Culture 2024 to 2030 document. While we welcome the priorities and aspirations; there is concern about the ability of Government, Local Authorities and the culture sector to be able to deliver on these priorities without ensuring adequate budgets and effective collaboration.

At a time of further cuts and savings - it will be difficult to maintain the status quo let alone achieve any further aspirations and priorities however commendable they are.
