

shaping culture's future

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Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson  
Leader  
Portsmouth City Council  
Civic Office  
Portsmouth PO1 2AD

Dear Gerald,

We are all too aware of the pressures on budgets this year as a result of the severe economic downturn. However, we are particularly concerned about any reduction in the level of funding, which may be applied to council services that impacts on culture in the next budget.

Whilst we recognise that priorities such as health, education and social services are pre-eminent, we would ask elected members to consider the enormous health, economic and social benefits of a vibrant culture, with citizens having rewarding and life-affirming cultural experiences. Indeed, cultural services in its broadest sense enhance the effectiveness of these other services.

City Councillors have signed up to the PS I LOVE YOU bid and thus have stated: "*The contribution of culture is central to our development, supporting healthy and prosperous cities, regenerating city and town centres, and attracting new businesses*". Thus cuts to culture contradict this statement.

The PUSH Quality of Places panel states as its vision: "*To put culture at the heart of South Hampshire, which will be recognised as a national and international beacon for, and capital of, all forms of cultural activity, to the benefit of residents, visitors and the local economy.*" Furthermore, "*MORI research suggests that around 20% of residents feel excluded from cultural activities due to cost, travel difficulties and a lack of awareness as to what is happening locally*".<sup>1</sup>

We ask you to focus on the reality of the relentless cuts made to Cultural Services over the last five years, including a 33% cut of the Arts Service budget alone. Despite these difficult circumstances, members of council and council officers have fought to maintain an acceptable level of service to the community. Further cuts would have a devastating effect, leading to closures, reductions in core services and threatening the delivery of the values stated in PS I LOVE YOU.

We are concerned that we are facing a reduction in library provision, reduced access to sporting facilities, and degradation in museum provision, which could lead to museum closures with the potential loss of Museum Association's Accreditation. For example, reducing library hours reduces access to IT and research which thus prevents job seekers from accessing knowledge and information to increase their employability, let alone making them independent learners. For many people, a library is the only place where one can focus uninterrupted on learning outside of formal education. Inadequate numbers of workstations in libraries and other facilities was cited as a key

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<sup>1</sup> Source: PS I LOVE YOU 2013 BID

factor by the Economic Wellbeing Partnership Board in the summer 09 in holding back the prospects of individual job seekers.

Reducing the Council's support to events and promotions, threatens the viability of live music at the Bandstand or opera in the park (popular with thousands of residents, many of whom lack the financial resources to engage with other cultural events). Next year, we may see community centres closing or not being adequately resourced impacting negatively on community cohesion, which is one of the 10 Priorities in the Vision for Portsmouth.

The termination of the Outdoor Education Service will have disastrous effects on people's informal learning and on their health.

The PS I Love You Bid, ratified unanimously by Portsmouth City Councillors states: *"historically, we have been punching beneath our weight in terms of cultural participation – particularly among hard to reach audiences in our pockets of social and economic deprivation. A significant proportion of our populations – and potentially a huge national and international audience - are not engaging with our cultural activity"*. Reducing cultural spending runs counter to this, especially when such populations look to the council, not to private or third sector organisations, to provide the overarching civic leadership and facilitating role exercised through the elected representatives of the city. Reducing cultural spending sends the signal to that the City is not committed to PS I LOVE YOU, and could undermine the success of the bid.

Again, PUSH, in analysing the benefits of culture cited another city, Liverpool, where the city was *"highly successful in using culture to regenerate the area, and the benefits are well know to PUSH<sup>2</sup>"*

As you all too aware, the council is bound by the indicators within the Local Area Agreement. How are more people expected to think of Portsmouth as a cultural city, and how will visitor numbers increase when you continue to cut culture budgets? Culture has a positive impact on the education and aspirations of the City's young people.

The impact of culture in stimulating individual and group creativity is the lifeblood of innovation, which in turn is key to the PUSH and Portsmouth vision and strategy to create growth and jobs. Reducing cultural service spending will undermine the sub-region's strategy to compete with other areas of UK, Europe and beyond.

The City is currently developing its Regeneration Strategy, within which, culture, as one of the eight priorities in the Vision for Portsmouth, will play a lead role. Areas such as the seafront (including flood defences), Tipner, The Hard and Somerstown are programmed for dramatic improvement, yet the element which provides the richness and vibrancy within any regeneration or any community, i.e. culture, will be sidelined if significant cuts are implemented. Such physical developments will be devoid of any cultural and design excellence and thus do little to improve community well-being beyond performing the standard functions of any structure.

We implore you not to look to Cultural Services as a soft target, but instead to recognise the huge benefit which all of these services, directly and indirectly, brings to the communities of Portsmouth. Indeed, at a time of economic crisis, cultural spending needs to be preserved or even increased, as it gives a population hope, and the cultural experiences of people, especially, the very young, have a massive impact of their self-esteem, self-belief and overall well being. The city must aspire to developing new and innovative ways of ensuring increased access to culture to those on low incomes, young people, minority ethnic groups, and addressing the needs

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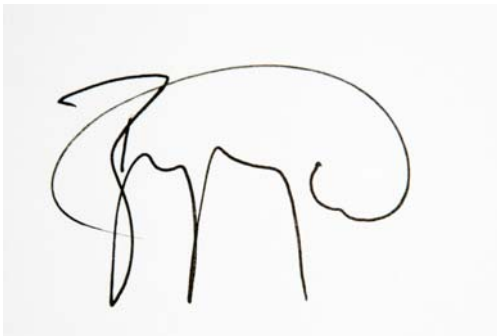
<sup>2</sup> Urban South Hampshire For UK City Of Culture- Stakeholder Briefing - Liverpool 08 – Lessons Learned 10 Sept 2009

of those facing difficulties of access due to physical and learning disabilities, this will not be achieved by continual year on year cuts to Cultural Services.

In the way the budget is constructed, it is quite startling that there is no mention of the Vision for Portsmouth, the LSP Flagship Issues or the current LAA throughout any of the budget documentation. This means that there is no coherent framework against which to construct statements of impact on the community and city as a whole. Thus all the impacts lack a strategic coherent focus.

The City should be showing a visible commitment to culture to increase the chances of a realising the vision in UK City of Culture programme (irrespective of whether the bid is successful).

Yours sincerely



Bryony Whitmarsh  
Chair

Copy to:  
Chair, Portsmouth Local Strategic Partnership Main Board  
Chair, Cultural Partnership