

# **FRIENDS OF BEDFORDSHIRE YOUTH MUSIC**

## **MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING HELD AT WOOTTON UPPER SCHOOL TUESDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY AT 7.30PM**

### **Present**

**Panel:** Ian Smith (Chair): Robert Heley (Chair of FBYM): Michael Martin (representing FBYM): Michael Rose: Councillor David Sawyer (Bedford Borough Council): Councillor Peter Hollick (Central Bedfordshire Council): Ann Carson (Minutes Secretary)

The meeting was attended by 112 people: 53 FBYM members, 59 non members

### **1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

Ian Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting. He introduced himself as Chair and the members of the Panel.

Apologies were received from Freddy Johnson: Sylvia Johnson

### **2. Who are the FBYM - Robert Heley**

Bob introduced the Friends of Bedfordshire Youth Music and explained our aims and our roles in supporting the work of the Music Service. He explained how we raise money and also how we have lobbied successfully in the past in support of the excellent work of Bedfordshire Music.

### **3. The need for and successes of a Bedfordshire wide Music Service – Michael Rose**

Michael explained his commitment and contribution to Bedfordshire Music over the last 40 years and how his main concern was that the children of the county of Bedfordshire continue to have at least the same opportunities, if not better than the children of the past.

He referred to the Henley Report published yesterday and said that he was encouraged by the tenure of the report as it recommends keeping the level of funding that has been in place for the last 4 years for 1 more year and suggests that the Government should come up with a fairer system of music education provision country wide.

He posed the question that if the tenure of the Henley report suggests better value for money by combining rather than dividing (*Recommendation 15*), then creating separate services will surely incur extra cost? The implications will be enormous if the Borough contributes some funding to supplement the funding

from Central Government, but Central Beds rely only on the Central Government funding e.g. fewer teachers, higher fees, fewer opportunities. Michael concluded by asking both Councillors if they wish for the Music Service to continue and if so, what logic lies behind creating two services? One service will surely provide economies of scale. He spoke for all supporters of Bedfordshire Music when he said that he was sure we would all wish the high standards we are so proud of to continue.

#### **4. The Friends' Case – Michael Martin**

Michael explained the Friends' concerns with the consequences of the key decisions taken by Central Bedfordshire Council regarding funding and disaggregation in detail.

He summed up our case with the following points;

- The splitting of the Music Service does not make sense on any levels.
- The Friends do not wish to see a musical divide between areas under Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council control where one offers, for example, tuition on minority instruments and the other doesn't.
- We need to encourage CBC to reconsider its decision in view of the recommendations of the Henley Report, to retain a county wide Service and to act upon the recommendations of its Scrutiny Committee to *take steps to bring together at the earliest opportunity a small representative group of interested people to identify creative ways in which to achieve retention of Bedfordshire Music Service*. This may include for example Bedford Borough hosting the service as a county-wide service and a Trust running the courses?
- We need to lobby influential groups to ensure that our concerns are acted upon.
- We do not want to lose something that is very special and very much a part of Bedfordshire.

#### **4. The Position of Bedford Borough Council –Cllr David Sawyer**

Cllr Sawyer thanked the Friends for inviting him. He told us how the Borough has always supported the Music Service, viewing it as a very important part of extracurricular education. He is fully aware of the benefits of music education to young people.

He explained that the Henley Report gives a very clear direction to the Government, but that in terms of the Borough's vision, they will have to make significant reductions. Their aim is to keep music education in a steady state for 2011/2012 with fees remaining the same for this academic year, but that this is unlikely to remain sustainable for the rest of this period.

He felt that it is important to take time to see how to proceed and confirmed that they intend to work with the Music Service.

He read a statement from the Mayor who said that he will not allow Central's decision to damage the Borough's music provision and firmly believes in the principal of access for all. No child should have their access to music education limited by their parents' inability to afford fees.

Cllr Sawyer believes that parents should be required to pay according to their means-this will mean increasing the levels of fees which have previously been subsidised. He recognises the importance of providing quality ensemble opportunities as well as tuition.

The Borough's budget will be set this year, keeping the right priorities within challenging circumstances. They will look to aggregate with other authorities and do not rule out collaboration with anybody. As an authority, they are determined not to let the children suffer through things beyond their control and need to find different ways of working. They will look to FBYM and other bodies to give them ideas on how to work through this and invite anyone to share their ideas.

He concluded by saying that, although the Borough faces practical challenges, it subscribes to the principles of music education and will work hard to meet these challenges in order to preserve and provide it.

## **5. The Position of Central Bedfordshire Council – Cllr Peter Hollick**

Cllr Hollick began by offering the Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council, Patricia Turner's apologies. He voiced his awareness of the appreciation and love of music we all have in common, what an enriching subject music is, the enviable reputation of Bedfordshire Music and the wealth of young talent we possess.

He explained that the Henley Report demonstrates an on-going commitment to music education but that we don't know how funding will be distributed yet. He referred to the report's pledge to end the divide between authorities, maintaining that Central do not consider themselves to be disadvantaged as a whole. While they have no wish to destroy Bedfordshire Music's enviable history, Central have to be prepared to make harsh decisions and compare their commitment to music with their commitment to other services. If they do not receive enough from Central Government then they will have to think how to supplement their funding locally. This may involve looking at partnerships with other authorities and charities.

## **6. Questions from the Floor to the Panel**

- Helen Carter asked both councillors if they would be prepared to work together to streamline the Service and if it would be possible to keep the system as it is by talking to each other.

Cllr Hollick replied that he would be pleased if they could do that.

Cllr Sawyer replied that Borough would also like to work with Central and that Borough is prepared to subsidise the students in most need.

- Bridget Fordham asked what the educational rationale was for disaggregation. She stated the disadvantages this would mean for students with special needs and how every child should have access to music education.

Cllr Hollick recognised the values she was referring to but explained that the reality was that *when you haven't got enough money, you have to prioritise.*

- Helen Carter asked Cllr Hollick why, on a business level, it did not make sense for the two authorities to work together - in business things on a bigger scale work better.
- John Guthrie (Conservative Party Mayoral Candidate) felt that there were two distinct but interrelated issues to be addressed: firstly disaggregation, because each authority would not get the critical mass needed to provide quality ensembles and secondly different funding levels. He asked if it would be possible for FBYM to form a group to work with both authorities to form a Music Trust i.e. a new organisational model away from local authorities but acknowledged that this would need extra time granted to it if the two authorities were to be able to collaborate practically.

Both councillors agreed to take these comments back.

- Pat McKeown asked both councillors if they had initially set up a joint working party to prevent disaggregation and if not, would they go back to their councils and request the setting up of such a party.

Cllr Sawyer confirmed that no such party had been set up and Cllr Hollick agreed to take back the idea of a working party.

- Colin Phelps (Head Teacher in Central) asked if the debate is still open and is there a chance to maintain a shared service. He felt that it would be a tragedy if community projects like Sing Up went - his concern was not just with the elite groups.

- Greg Baker felt that the current situation was more to do with 'politics' and there must be a way to work together.

Both councillors agreed to explore how music education could be best provided.

- Helen Manley asked if they could guarantee that her disabled son would still be able to access his French horn lessons.
- John Shayler asked how two authorities could come to such different conclusions in similar financial circumstances.
- Peter Halliday felt that to disaggregate such a valuable part of the county's education system was an act of vandalism.

- Michael Rose said he was perplexed as to why Central had made their decision when the resolution at their Scrutiny Meeting had been to wait for the outcome of the Henley Report before making any decision. Cllr Hollick replied that the Scrutiny Meeting advises and the Executive Committee makes the decisions.

## **6. Proposal of Resolution**

Ian summed up the meeting with the following points:

- Both authorities value the Music Service but in different ways.
- The overwhelming feeling of the meeting is that to disaggregate is unwise.
- The strongest feeling seems to be that the two authorities should try to form a working group to reconsider disaggregating the Service.
- That this working group should also include people who believe passionately in the continuation of a countywide Music Service for Bedfordshire.

Ian proposed the following resolution to:

**“Form a diverse Group to work with both authorities to find a way of organising music education across Bedfordshire, and that the current Service be retained until the Group has reported.”**

Following the Members’ vote (45 In favour, 0 Against) the Resolution was carried unanimously.

## **7. Thanks from the Chair**

Ian thanked everyone for attending the meeting and introduced the string quartet of young musicians from across the County who then played beautifully to conclude the evening.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 9.45pm