

Ken Skates AM
Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure
Welsh Government
Tŷ Hywel, Cardiff bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

20 July 2017

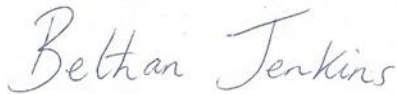
Dear Cabinet Secretary

Wales Millennium Centre Concerns

I have received the attached e-mail from a member of the public expressing concern about staffing arrangements at the Wales Millennium Centre and possible implications for public safety. The sender has asked that I not forward their name but I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of the views expressed.

Clearly, it would be very worrying if these concerns are true. I would, therefore, be grateful if you and your officials could look into this as a matter of urgency and let me have a full reply.

Yours sincerely



Bethan Jenkins AM
Chair



From: XXXXXX
Date: 13 July 2017 at 16:43:26 BST
To: "bethan.jenkins" <bethan.jenkins@assembly.wales>
Subject: WALES MILLENNIUM CENTRE CONCERNS
Reply-To: XXXXXX

Dear Bethan

As an ex BBC Wales Arts programme producer I, like you, am concerned about the future of the Arts in Wales and write to you, , with concerns that I have about our most noteworthy venue in our Capital City .

As Chair of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee you may well be aware that the Wales Millennium Centre now runs a volunteer scheme to man its operation. As such an iconic and venerable organization, I was concerned when I first discovered their intention. Subsequently it has been drawn to my attention that the staff are also extremely uneasy about this situation; not just because of the detrimental effect to their zero hours contracts but also to the vulnerable state it leaves the venue during busy performance times. Obviously I do not wish to disclose my sources but I have garnered some evidence of events that have arisen in recent weeks and shall proceed to quote them below.

As far as one of my sources is aware, since the volunteer system started they have never had the full quota of 16 ushers working on a performance. In fact there have been occasions when there have been as few as 4 ushers working – on one occasion only 2! This meant that managers and team leaders were placed on the doors, whilst still being expected to undertake their own responsibilities. Understandably, this can lead to doors being left unattended. There have also been occasions when managers have brought in partners/relations to help them out of this dire predicament. I am sure these people are all very able, but they haven't undertaken the proper training for the job and all that it entails and I'm sure there must be legal/insurance implications.

Another of my contacts told me they had to take a latecomer to the front upper circle only to find no usher on that door. This meant that there was no usher looking after half of the upper circle on a night with a full house. How can this be deemed safe?

I am also reliably informed that last week, 8 Motorpoint Arena Ushers were brought in to cover doors. This came as a surprise to WMC employees, as they have been told that it is illegal for "paid workers" to cover doors at the same time as 'volunteers' That lame excuse sounds like poppycock to me. As a point of note – the Motorpoint Arena Ushers are on a higher hourly rate than those working at the WMC.

Obviously this shambolic way of working, has led to people being seated incorrectly and subsequent altercations. On one occasion this continued throughout the first Act and with no VSA in attendance, the situation reached boiling point with a member of the audience calling the police.

I've also heard that there was a recent medical emergency. A woman ran to the concourse from the stalls, calling for help, as there was nobody on the door to assist. On this occasion the customer was fine but if this had been a more serious medical emergency, I shudder to think what could have been



the outcome of this delay. We should also note with this new staffing method, how on earth do they think they can lead people to safety in event of a fire.

At a time of rising terrorist threats, can it be right to leave this venue in such a precarious state. If the reason for this change in staffing is, as I fear purely driven by financial savings, then maybe the Grenfell Tower tragedy will prove a watchword for the mistakes made by mindless cost cutting. Safety should be paramount

I also feel I have to raise these questions – why should the WMC need to call on volunteers? How do they decide which jobs do not deserve financial recompense?

A VSA role may only be paid marginally above minimum wage, but that should not detract from its significance and importance. Obviously there are the safety aspects that I have covered earlier but VSA'S are also the real point of contact for the paying public, without whom the venue would cease to function.

In essence, the WMC is gambling with people's lives.

Yours sincerely

XXXXXX



Ken Skates AC/AM
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi a'r Seilwaith
Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref KS/02633/17

Bethan Jenkins AM
Chair
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay CF99 1NA

Stephen.george@assembly.wales

8 August 2017

Dear *Bethan,*

Thank you for your correspondence of 20 July, together with an email from a member of the public who has expressed concerns regarding staffing arrangements at the Wales Millennium Centre.

I would advise the person who has corresponded with you to raise the issue direct with the Wales Millennium Centre (WMC), using that organisation's complaints and/or grievance procedures. If he/she is dissatisfied with WMC's response he/she should then contact the Arts Council of Wales, the body which provides funding to the WMC and which is responsible for the effective operation of arts organisations in Wales.

However, given the safety issues raised in the letter, my officials have contacted the WMC and sought assurance from the Managing Director with regard to the safety of members of the public who visit the venue. He has provided that assurance, stating that public safety and security is critically important to the Centre's management and that security and evacuation procedures are the responsibility of paid and fully trained staff, who are always on duty in addition to the volunteer staff.

*Yours ever,
Ken*

Ken Skates AC/AM
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi a'r Seilwaith
Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.