CARDIFF SERVICE RISES TO THE CHALLENGE



Anita Holford *reports on the state of play for music services in Wales, and how one music service has faced local authority cuts head on*

Being a music teacher isn't easy at the moment, but if you're working in Wales, the situation is grim. In many areas, work for peripatetic teachers and others working in schools has reduced or dried up altogether. As a result, primary teachers are receiving little or no support with music, and secondary teachers are facing a sharp decline in the number of young people who've had the opportunity to learn an instrument during primary school.

The local authority cuts of the last few years have simply sped up a process that's been ongoing since the Welsh Government stopped funding music services directly ten years ago, passing the allocation on to local authorities and removing ring-fencing.

With massive deficits in most local authorities, music services have either closed (Powys), or had to lay off staff, vastly reduce support or increase charges to schools and parents (for example Gwent, Pembrokeshire and Flintshire). In Conwy, core funding of £257,000 in 2010/11 is likely to be reduced to £59,850 by 2017/18; in Gwent, two of the four local authorities that supported the service withdrew their funding (all except a hardship bursary fund and a small amount for music centres). Most are anticipating further cuts, and some are facing closure. The latest casualty is Rhondda Cynon Taf, with the local authority announcing last month it is to close the service by the end of the academic year.

Despite a high-profile campaign in 2006 from music educators and musicians including Bryn Terfel and Super Furry Animals, and a music education review by the Welsh Government in 2010, there's been little or no progress.

In some areas, new organisations are forming to plug gaps and find different sources of funding. One of these, The Glam, was launched recently with a fundraising concert by ex-members of the former Glamorgan and Mid-Glamorgan Youth Orchestras and Choirs, aged between 30 and 74. It is now continuing to raise money for youth music projects.

In Cardiff, one half of the music service – Music Development Cardiff (MDC) – looked set to become another casualty. Last March, the council announced it was to delegate 100 per cent of the music service's funding to 67 primary schools in the most economically disadvantaged areas in the city. There was to be no ring fencing, so schools could choose to spend the money how they wished. As this was the sole source of funding for MDC, it was a potentially terminal blow.

Until that time, the service had been one of the more fortunate in Wales. The Council had continued to honour the level of funding (£172,800) that the Welsh Government had previously provided to each music service. This funded all of MDC's work – largely whole class activity in schools, targeting young people with the least opportunity.

The rest of the music service – mainly one-to-one or small group instrumental teaching in schools, and orchestras/ensembles out of school – was funded largely through fees from parents topped up with a small amount of the central funding. When the cuts hit, this part of the service was forced to become completely self-funding – which has resulted in the familiar story of services being accessible only to those whose parents can afford them.

In the meantime, Emma Coulthard, head of MDC, and her team were faced with losing their jobs and their services to schools, or rising to the challenge. She says: 'We had to just get out there and really understand what »