



President – Dame Evelyn Glennie OBE

Patron – Chairman of Central Bedfordshire Council

Vice President – Frank Garrick

Patron – The Mayor of Bedford

20th January 2011

Future of Bedfordshire Music Service

Dear *Friend*

The *Friends of Bedfordshire Youth Music* was established in the early 1970s to support the Bedfordshire County Music Service, led first by Michael Rose and later by Ian Smith, and subsequently its replacement, *Bedfordshire Music* led by Richard Hart to provide a music service across Bedfordshire.

The Bedfordshire Music Service has a long established national reputation for excellence; the quality of the instrumental groups is superb. Most counties do not have orchestras or concert bands that are anywhere near as good as those here in Bedfordshire. This is thanks to the dedicated work of the committed music staff of Bedfordshire Music over many years.

You will recall that on 1st April 2009 Bedfordshire County Council ceased to exist when it was replaced by two unitary authorities, namely Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. It was agreed that Central Bedfordshire Council would host the Music Service for both local authorities. This arrangement enabled *Bedfordshire Music* to maintain the continuation of a county wide service; however on 7th December 2010 Central Bedfordshire Council made the decision to reorganise and disaggregate the Music Service. **Consequently, the current Bedfordshire Music will cease to exist in August 2011.**

We believe that:

- Central Bedfordshire Council plans to withdraw all of its financial support from *Bedfordshire Music* during 2011; we cannot understand this decision, especially at a time when there is a review of music education instigated by the Coalition Government which promotes engagement in instrumental/vocal learning opportunities.
- Bedford Borough Council plans to support music provision financially, but at this time we do not know to what extent.

There has not yet been an announcement about what will happen to Central Government money which has, hitherto, been earmarked for music education through the “*Standards Fund*” – but we do expect the Coalition Government to continue to provide financial support in some form or another.

It is planned that Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire will each develop their own separate music service provision arrangements from September 2011. We are extremely anxious about this development for many reasons, some of which are outlined in this letter.

Firstly, staff will be allocated to one or other authority; many of these teachers currently teach across the two authorities. This may mean many of the children will lose their current teacher if their teacher is allocated to the other authority.



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Secondly, there are children who attend schools in different authorities during their school careers – for example a Central Bedfordshire Middle School and a Bedford Borough Upper School (or vice versa). These children will have their music education disrupted – and what might happen if one Local Authority provides music teaching on the instrument the child learns but not the other. – It does not make sense.

Thirdly, there is the whole issue of economies of scale. There will be two Heads of Service for example. Similarly there will be two different sets of administrative staff and so on. It will also become increasingly difficult to provide tuition on minority instruments unless the same person is employed by both authorities; we believe that tuition on instruments such as the French horn, bassoon, and oboe to name just three minority instruments could be adversely affected.

Fourthly the county orchestras and bands are likely not to continue as the two separate local authorities will probably wish to develop their own groups. There is compelling evidence to support this view – this is exactly what happened when Luton became a unitary authority in the 1990s. Neither Bedford Borough nor Central Bedfordshire is large enough to support an ensemble structure that matches the current jewel in the crown.

We believe that a music service should provide both instrumental tuition and an opportunity to play with others at an appropriate standard. *Bedfordshire Music* is currently able to provide such opportunities as it draws upon young musicians from across the county.

A good music service needs a critical mass of music students at all levels.

Central Bedfordshire Council has itself identified some of the issues referred to in this letter associated with disaggregation as being potential consequences, including:

- The skill base of pupils for band and orchestral purposes could be reduced.
- The supply and availability of specialist teachers could be reduced if they concentrate in one or other unitary area.
- The split of assets (instruments and music library) could restrict the access to musical opportunities especially for the limited numbers of some instruments.
- There may be a limitation in skills to develop high quality centrally organised music groups such as band & orchestras.
- The range of consistent learning opportunities especially in specialist areas may not be widely available.

We do not believe that our members or many other supporters of music education in Bedfordshire will wish to see the end of *Bedfordshire Music* as a county wide music service. We do believe that everybody will be horrified by the prospect of the future disintegration of the superb Youth Music system.

The quality of music education offered to Bedfordshire's Young Musicians over the years is well known and the quality of *Bedfordshire Music* is also extremely highly regarded both nationally and internationally for its excellence.



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The purpose of this letter at this time is to request your help in lobbying for common sense to prevail.

First and foremost having read this letter we ask that you go to our website www.fbym.org.uk and sign the petition to retain *Bedfordshire Music* as a county wide music service and also the retention of county wide youth music ensembles.

Secondly, we ask that you download a copy of this letter which is on the FBYM website and send it to all of your friends and colleagues who will support this campaign so that they too sign the petition and forward the message to their contacts. We think everybody who lives in Bedfordshire should have the opportunity to express their support irrespective whether their children are currently in the system or whether they are former or potential future users of *Bedfordshire Music*.

Thirdly we would ask that you take the time to email or write to your own councillor in whichever authority you live to express your view. We can only make an impact if we are able to galvanise huge support across Bedfordshire. We know that councillors will not be swayed by circular or template letters. They will be swayed by individual letters or emails; these communications need not be long.

We would also ask those of you who use social networking sites to express your views there.

We will be holding a Friends Extraordinary General Meeting on Tuesday February 8th starting at 7:30 p.m. to discuss this matter further and to look for alternative solutions if necessary. **This meeting will take place in the Theatre Hall at Wootton Upper School, Hall End Road, Wootton, MK43 9HT.** Please try to keep the date free in the meantime so that you can come along and give your support.

Finally, if this letter has been forwarded to you and you are not already a member of the Friends, please consider joining – we produce a newsletter three times per year and offer financial support both to Bedfordshire's Young Musicians and to *Bedfordshire Music* itself. I am confident that the students and the staff that make *Bedfordshire Music* uniquely special have never needed your support more than at this time. There is information on how to become a *Friend of Bedfordshire Youth Music* on our website.

Yours sincerely

Robert Heley
Chairman
Friends of Bedfordshire Youth Music