

Public Questions - APPENDIX A

Public questions at Full Council on Wednesday 27 March 2024:

1. “Question for Chippenham Town Council for and behalf of Kandú Arts Community Projects CIC. To the Chairperson Chippenham Town Council. We, the undersigned are volunteers, mentors, beneficiaries and associates for and of Kandú Arts both delivering and receiving services and projects, and residents of Chippenham. Kandú Arts has been delivering high quality, accredited and necessary services to vulnerable members of Chippenham community of all ages for over 25 years.

At a meeting of the Town Council community donations sub-committee meeting on 16 June 2023, an application for funding for continuation of an oversubscribed and much needed young peoples After School Group, to be delivered by the highly experienced team at Kandú Arts, was refused consideration on the grounds of sub clause 5.3 in the council donations policy criteria being breached. The live stream of this meeting was viewed by many members of the public, associates of and volunteers with Kandú Arts. This clause, inserted in recent amendments to the criteria/donations policy states that should any organisation or any member of an applying organisation criticise or say anything that could be deemed defamatory of the town council, that the application will not be considered.

Councillors Budgell and Allen cited that Ed Deedigan director of Kandú Arts for Sustainable Development had breached this clause in a podcast in which he said “would it not be better if the Town Council did not have a chief executive and spent the funding on community initiatives such as the folk festival”. This statement is not defamatory. The suggestion that the town council did not need a chief executive was made to Mr Deedigan by a member of the community donations sub committee present at this very meeting! Chippenham is one of very few Town Councils to employ a chief executive, most opting for the far cheaper Town Clerk option.

We are told, having contacted Legal advisors, The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, the Department for Levelling up and chairs and members of other Town Councils that this clause is neither permissible or enforceable, as an opinion is not defamatory nor should influence the delivery of local services. Furthermore, as a wider issue it could in theory prevent any associate of any organisation who offer an opinion on Town Council spending from securing funding.

We have written and asked the Chair of the Sub-committee Cllr Murry to answer several questions, we have asked Cllr Cousins to answer several

questions and have been told by other members of the council that these individual councillors have been told not to respond to questions either about the conduct of councillors Budgell and Allen in the meeting and of the non-consideration of the clause and to the request for a review of this meeting and Kandu Arts Application.

We are very concerned that there have been no attempts by the Town Council to ensure that democratic process has been followed but crucially that young marginalised and vulnerable young people within Chippenham's community have been denied crucial services. Can the Town Council publicly respond to these concerns, demonstrate accountability to the Chippenham community, demonstrate that absolutely no personal prejudice has been employed in their decisions and give a public timeline by which councillors will respond to wider enquiries regarding this matter.”

2. “I have been a resident in Chippenham for decades. I am a volunteer at the valuable, busy and thriving resource that is Kandu Arts “social hub of positivity” in Emery Gate”, which offers an accessible warm place, guidance, services, workshops and so much more for very vulnerable people in our community. (it has no funding from the council!

I watched the meeting of the Community donations sub committee in June 2023 and was shocked to see that 2 councillors drew attention to a point in the donations criteria which says that organisations applying for funding to support people in Chippenham won't be permitted to have their application considered if anyone connected to the organisation criticises the Town Council in the 12 months before the application. In this meeting the two councillors talked about matters and personal feelings towards Ed Deedigan the director of Kandu Arts for sustainable Development and also nobody in the committee seemed aware of the clause in the criteria and also nobody in the meeting looked at the podcast where Mr Deedigan just says that the council should spend the money that it spends on a chief executive on community events like the folk festival.

I and many others are very concerned that the meeting was not paused and this issue considered fully. That nobody has responded to letters and questions to the committee and councillors from Kandu Arts. That the committee seemed to have to vote on not looking at Kandu's application without the appropriate information. That the meeting chair permitted 2 councillors to express personal matters in a public meeting. Most concerning however is that the Town Council Donations sub- committee has put a clause in its criteria intended to prevent anyone in Chippenham from questioning Town Council spending or conduct - are we to assume for example that if anyone from the angling association, or Age UK (I am a pensioner myself) were to suggest Town Council funding be better used in a different way that they too will have applications for their vital work thrown out too?

Please can the Town Council Respond to these points and give a timeline of how they will be accountable to vulnerable young people and the community in Chippenham for their lack of transparency and communication.”

3. “To the Distinguished Members of the Chippenham Town Council,
Introduction - As a fervent advocate for the sustenance and empowerment of Chippenham’s community fabric, I pen this letter with a sense of urgency and a call for introspection regarding the Council’s recent decision affecting Kandu Arts Community Projects CIC. This venerable entity, with its rich legacy of over 25 years, has been a beacon of hope and transformation for the vulnerable among us. The crux of my concern mirrors the shared apprehensions regarding procedural transparency and policy interpretations that seemingly encumber rather than empower.

Critical Reflection on Funding Decision - The crux of the disconcertment stems from the exclusion of Kandu Arts from funding eligibility, hinged on the premise of council criticism by association, particularly spotlighting remarks by Mr. Ed Deedigan. This procedural outcome not only stifles the vibrancy of civic dialogue but inadvertently signals a retreat from the democratic ethos of accountability and constructive critique.

The Dual Facets of Concern:

Procedural Transparency: The application’s rejection underlines a profound need for clarity in the Council’s funding policies. The rationale, rooted in clause 5.3, seems to conflate constructive critique with disqualification criteria, thereby setting a precarious precedent for community engagement and feedback mechanisms.

Policy Interpretation and Application: The operationalization of said clause raises existential queries about the balance between governance oversight and the nurturance of a free, open dialogue ecosystem. This balance is pivotal for fostering a resilient community infrastructure capable of adaptive, responsive governance.

Proposals for Forward Movement:

Reassessment of Application: A proposition is laid forth for an unbiased reevaluation of Kandu Arts’ application, with an emphasis on the intrinsic community value and the potential societal impact devoid of ancillary considerations.

Policy Revision: An earnest plea is made for the Council to undertake a thorough review of its funding policy framework. This review should aim at ensuring that policies are not only facilitative of, but also conducive to, promoting a rich tapestry of public discourse, thereby enhancing governance transparency and democratic engagement.

Public Discourse and Accountability: A structured, transparent dialogue mechanism is advocated for, allowing for the articulation of policy reviews,

decisions, and the rationale behind them. Such a framework would not only augment trust but also reinforce the Council's commitment to acting as stewards of the public interest.

Conclusion - The essence of community strength lies in its unity, diversity of thought, and the collective will to uplift each segment of society, especially the vulnerable. It is with a spirit of constructive partnership and shared responsibility that I urge the Council to consider these propositions, not as criticisms, but as invitations to collectively enhance our community's structural and social edifice.”

4. “To Chippenham Town Council, I am writing to express my concern over the rejection of Kandu Arts Community Projects CIC’s funding application, an organization instrumental in supporting our community's vulnerable populations for over 25 years. This decision, based on the application's critique of council spending, particularly comments made by Ed Deedigan, strikes at the heart of democratic values and free speech.

The use of a policy clause to disqualify applications due to criticism of the council not only jeopardizes essential services but also stifles the constructive dialogue necessary for community progress. Such actions raise concerns about the council's commitment to transparency and fairness.

I urge the council to reevaluate Kandu Arts' application with an emphasis on its merits and the positive impact it has on our community. Furthermore, I recommend a review of the funding policy to ensure it promotes, rather than restricts, open and constructive criticism. This situation calls for immediate action to demonstrate the council's dedication to fostering an environment where community organizations can thrive without fear of unjust penalties.”

5. “Dear Esteemed Members of the Chippenham Town Council, In the tapestry that forms the heart of Chippenham, each thread represents a voice, a story, and a life that contributes to the vibrant hue of our community. It is within this context that I find myself compelled to write to you, not just as a resident but as someone who believes deeply in the power of unity, support, and mutual respect. Among these threads, one has woven particularly profound impacts over the past twenty-five years - Kandu Arts Community Projects CIC. Their dedication to nurturing the vulnerable and fostering a sense of belonging has painted strokes of hope across many lives, mine included. Imagine my dismay, then, when I learned of the recent decision to deny Kandu Arts' application for funding. The rationale, as I understand it, pivots on a clause regarding public criticism of the council. Such a stance, while perhaps rooted in a desire to maintain decorum, inadvertently casts a shadow on the very principles of democracy and open dialogue that should illuminate our path forward as a community.

The specific instance cited, involving comments made by a member of Kandu Arts, does not, in my reflection, merit the negation of years of invaluable service to our community. To equate critique with contempt is to overlook the opportunity for growth and understanding. Indeed, it is through the crucible of conversation that we refine our goals and strengthen our bonds. The decision to disqualify Kandu Arts based on this clause not only diminishes the council's relationship with community partners but also sends a chilling signal to all those who wish to engage in constructive discourse.

In light of this, I find myself pondering the path forward. How can we, as a collective of diverse yet interconnected lives, navigate the complexities of governance while upholding the values of transparency, equity, and inclusivity? The answer, I believe, lies not in the silencing of dissenting voices but in embracing them as catalysts for positive change. It is through the kaleidoscope of our community's voices that we find our strength and identity.

Therefore, I urge you, with the utmost respect and hope, to reconsider the funding application of Kandu Arts on its merits, independent of any external commentary. Moreover, I advocate for a reflective review of the policies that led us to this juncture, with an eye towards fostering a culture that not only tolerates but welcomes constructive criticism as a cornerstone of democratic engagement.

As we stand at this crossroads, let us choose the path that reaffirms our commitment to the wellbeing of all Chippenham's residents. Let us remember that at the heart of governance is the duty to serve and uplift, to listen and to lead with compassion. In doing so, we reaffirm our dedication not just to the ideals of community service but to the very essence of what it means to be a community. With sincere respect and anticipation for a future built on the foundations of understanding and mutual respect.”

6. “To the Esteemed Members of Chippenham Town Council, I am writing to express profound concerns regarding recent observations and experiences related to the application process for community funding, specifically in the context of Kandu Arts Community Projects CIC, a cornerstone organization dedicated to serving the vulnerable segments of our community in Chippenham.

It has come to my attention, and that of many others, during the community donations sub-committee meeting on June 16, 2023, that a critical application from Kandu Arts was dismissed outright, not on the merit of its potential impact but ostensibly due to a contentious clause within the council's funding policy. This clause precludes consideration of any

application from organizations where any member has publicly criticized or allegedly defamed the council in the year preceding the application.

Notably, during this session, discussions surfaced around remarks made by Mr. Ed Deedigan, director of Kandu Arts, regarding the council's expenditure priorities. These comments, while perhaps challenging in nature, are far from defamatory and echo sentiments I have heard within the community. The dismissal of Kandu Arts' application, predicated on these grounds, raises substantial concerns about transparency, fairness, and the potential silencing of constructive critique within our community governance.

Furthermore, it was alarming to witness the personalization of this procedural matter within the committee's discussions, diverging from the objective evaluation of funding applications based on community benefit. The apparent lack of familiarity with the cited funding policy clause among committee members, coupled with the absence of any pause to reflect or address the raised concerns, underscores a troubling disregard for due process and open dialogue.

The implications of such a policy, and its application, extend far beyond the immediate case of Kandu Arts. It hints at a broader, more systemic issue of governance transparency and the vital principle of allowing community voices to be heard, even (and especially) when they offer critique. The prospect that any community group could be excluded from council support for expressing viewpoints on public spending or council conduct is deeply concerning and antithetical to the principles of democratic governance and community engagement.

Therefore, I urgently request the council to:

1. Reconsider the application from Kandu Arts in light of its substantial potential benefits for our town's youth and broader community, without prejudice or undue consideration of unrelated commentary.
2. Review and publicly clarify the application and evaluation process for community funding to ensure it is transparent, equitable, and free from constraints on legitimate public discourse.
3. Provide a detailed timeline and framework for addressing these concerns and demonstrating accountability to the people of Chippenham, particularly those most in need of the services organizations like Kandu Arts provide.

The strength of our community lies in our ability to engage in open, constructive dialogue and to support those who dedicate themselves to uplifting the most vulnerable among us. I look forward to your response and to seeing how the council will take proactive steps to uphold these values.”

7. “To the Governance Board of Chippenham Town Council, Amidst the dynamic discourse surrounding community development initiatives, a pivotal moment has emerged, necessitating a collective reflection on the frameworks governing our community’s financial support mechanisms. At the heart of this dialogue is the recent examination of the funding application process, specifically regarding Kandu Arts Community Projects CIC, an institution that, for over two decades, has been a cornerstone of support and empowerment for our community’s vulnerable demographics.

Recent proceedings have illuminated a critical need to revisit the council’s funding eligibility criteria, particularly the clause disqualifying applications from organizations that have engaged in public criticism of the council. This policy stance has inadvertently positioned the council at the nexus of a debate on governance principles, particularly concerning free speech and constructive criticism’s role in a vibrant democratic society.

I would like to propose the following strategic recommendations to be discussed:

Policy Reevaluation: Immediate action to reassess the funding application of Kandu Arts Community Projects CIC, focusing on the organization’s intrinsic value and potential community impact. This reassessment should serve as a case study for broader policy revision, ensuring that future funding evaluations prioritize community benefit over procedural technicalities.

Framework for Constructive Engagement: Development of a new engagement framework that encourages open dialogue between the council and community organizations. This framework should facilitate a constructive exchange of ideas, fostering an environment where feedback is not only welcomed but also seen as a critical component of community development.

Transparency and Accountability: Implementation of measures to enhance transparency in the council’s decision-making processes. This could include public forums, enhanced communication channels, and detailed reporting on funding decisions, ensuring that the council’s actions are both visible and understandable to the community it serves.

The vitality of Chippenham’s community is significantly enriched by the contributions of organizations like Kandu Arts Community Projects CIC. It is imperative that our governance frameworks reflect a commitment to nurturing this vitality, embracing diverse perspectives, and fostering an inclusive, supportive community environment. In navigating the complexities of community support and engagement, let us prioritize policies and practices that uphold these values, ensuring that Chippenham remains a beacon of community solidarity and innovation.”

8. “To the Esteemed Members of Chippenham Town Council, I am reaching to express my concern over the recent decision concerning Kandu Arts Community Projects CIC's application for funding. For more than a quarter-century, Kandu Arts has been instrumental in providing essential support to the vulnerable members of our community, making its contribution invaluable.

The rejection of their application, based on the interpretation of a clause regarding criticism of the council, has prompted me to question the fairness and openness of the council's funding policies. The incident in question, involving comments made by Ed Deedigan, does not, in my view, warrant the exclusion of Kandu Arts from funding opportunities. The clause used to justify this decision seems to curtail free expression and constructive feedback, which are fundamental to a thriving and democratic community.

This situation concerns not just Kandu Arts but signals a broader issue of governance and transparency within our council's operations. It is essential that the council reconsiders its stance and looks at Kandu Arts' application based on its merits and the substantial benefits it offers our community. Moreover, there is a pressing need for the council to review its policies to ensure they encourage, rather than inhibit, open dialogue and constructive criticism.

Our community's strength lies in its ability to engage in open discussions and to support initiatives that uplift the vulnerable. I trust that the council will take immediate steps to address these concerns, demonstrating its commitment to transparency, fairness, and the well-being of all Chippenham residents. Looking forward to your response and action on this matter.”

9. “Dear Members of the Chippenham Town Council, I hope this letter finds you well and committed to the principles of fair governance and support for all community segments. I write as a concerned citizen and advocate for community-based initiatives that have long been the lifeline for many in our midst, especially the efforts of Kandu Arts Community Projects CIC.

For over two and a half decades, Kandu Arts has not just served but transformed lives within Chippenham, providing a sanctuary and a springboard for the vulnerable to leap towards brighter futures. The recent decision to deny their application for funding on grounds of perceived criticism is both disheartening and, frankly, a deviation from the values of openness and mutual respect that should hallmark our community's discourse.

This stance on criticism, particularly citing the commentary from Mr. Ed Deedigan, not only stifles vital feedback but potentially jeopardizes the very fabric of our democratic engagement. Critical voices should not be grounds for exclusion but rather seen as opportunities for reflection and growth. By adhering to a clause that effectively mutes such voices, we risk alienating indispensable community services and the broader ethos of constructive dialogue.

In light of this, I respectfully request a reevaluation of Kandu Arts' funding application, with an emphasis on its intrinsic value to our community rather than extraneous factors. Additionally, I advocate for a broader reassessment of the funding policy to ensure it nurtures a culture of open discourse, allowing community organizations to express concerns without fear of retribution.

Moreover, I suggest the council outline a clear, public strategy for enhancing transparency and accountability in its decision-making processes. It's crucial that such strategies foster an environment where community groups feel supported to share insights and suggestions without apprehension.

In closing, let us not forget that the strength of Chippenham lies in its collective spirit and in embracing diverse viewpoints for the betterment of all residents. I eagerly await your considered response and am hopeful for a resolution that reflects our shared commitment to fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and supportive community.”

10. “To the Chair and Members of Chippenham Town Council, I am deeply concerned about the handling of Kandu Arts Community Projects CIC’s funding application by the Town Council. This organization has been pivotal in providing essential services to our community’s vulnerable for over 25 years.

It was surprising to learn during the Town Council community donations sub-committee meeting on June 16, 2023, that Kandu Arts’ application was rejected due to a breach of clause 5.3 in the council’s donation policy, citing criticism of the council by any member of an applying organization. This decision, particularly referencing comments made by Ed Deedigan, seems unjustified and not in the spirit of constructive community engagement.

The policy to disqualify applications based on criticism appears to undermine the democratic process and freedom of speech, potentially silencing valuable community feedback. Such a stance could deter essential services provided by organizations like Kandu Arts, directly affecting our town’s youth and vulnerable populations.

I urge the council to:

- Reassess Kandu Arts' application based solely on its community value, disregarding non-related comments.
- Reevaluate the funding policy to foster transparency and encourage constructive dialogue.
- Address these issues publicly, outlining steps to ensure fair and transparent governance.

Our community thrives on open dialogue and support for the vulnerable. I await your prompt action and response.”

APPENDIX B

Response to Public Questions - Full Council 27 March 2024

The following statement was read out at the meeting by the Director of Community Services on behalf of the Corporate Management Team:

Thank you for all comments and questions raised at this Full Council meeting, the Council will provide written responses to these following the meeting. The Council support organisations within the town that assists residents and communities through the Council and Climate Donations Schemes.

These statements and questions have raised topics of transparency, open criticism and feedback to the Council, and asked the Council to reconsider the application from Kandu Arts, to review the Council Donations Policy and to provide a timeline and framework for addressing these concerns.

- 1. The decision referred to in these questions was properly made, collectively by the Council Donations Sub-Committee, on behalf of the Council. The Council and its individual Councillors have followed due process correctly in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's governance processes.*

The application referred to in these questions from Kandu Arts will not be reconsidered in this financial year which ends on 31 March 2024. The Town Council have funded Kandu Arts in the past, awarding £2000 in 2020/2021 and £4,475 in 2021/2022.

Any organisation may apply for funding in the next financial year starting on 01 April 2024 in accordance with our Council Donations Policy.

- 2. The Council will review the Council Donations Policy in accordance with the agreed timeframe, it is anticipated the next review will take place in 2025.*
- 3. The Council has existing mechanisms in place which ensure the proper democratic processes, governance and accountability in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972.*

The Council does not anticipate allocating further resources to this matter which is considered closed.