

PLAYHOUSE THEATRE ACTION PLAN

Head of Service/Contact: Andrew Lunt, Head of Venues and Facilities

Urgent Decision?(yes/no) No

If yes, reason urgent decision required:

Annexes/Appendices (attached):

Other available papers (not attached): Report and minutes of the meeting of the Community & Wellbeing Committee, 23 January 2018.

Report and minutes of the meeting of the Audit, Crime & Disorder and Scrutiny Committee, 23 November 2017

Report summary

In January 2018 the Community & Wellbeing committee received a report of the scrutiny review task group on the Epsom Playhouse. As a result of this service review report, the Committee asked that an action plan be presented at its October 2018 Committee meeting outlining a list of actions for the development of the playhouse.

Recommendation (s)

- (1) That the Committee notes this update on the action plan for Epsom Playhouse.
- (2) That the Committee agrees to the implementation of a charge of £1.50 per transaction, with income generated in excess of budget from this charge being set aside for a rolling programme of improvements to the venue.

1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy

- 1.1 This report and its implications for the Epsom Playhouse contributes to the key priorities of: Managing Resources and Supporting Community.

2 Background

- 2.1 During 2017 the Epsom Playhouse was the subject of a Scrutiny Service Review. This review looked at all aspects of the operation of the theatre.

Community and Wellbeing Committee

9 October 2018

2.2 Six main objectives were included within the review Terms of Reference:

To outline the current service provided by the above named venue including (but not limited to):

- **Services delivered**
- **Method of providing the current services**
- **Detailed budget for the last three years including revenue and capital expenditure**
- **Provision of performance data and comparison with others (where possible)**

To measure and assess the effectiveness of the present service, including staff, to identify the best use of resources.

To identify key issues that affect the service in the day to day operation of supplying the service.

To understand the needs of the customer base and how the service could be developed to generate further income or reduce costs.

To identify alternative ways to deliver the service including the do nothing option.

To evaluate the different options put forward (including but not limited to):

- **Service delivery outputs**
- **Financial implications including any invest to save investment required**
- **Key risks and how they can be mitigated**
- **Timeline for implementation.**

2.3 This very thorough review of the Scrutiny Task Group was extremely positive and in particular highlighted the good work of the Playhouse staff. The report however also highlighted issues with theatre equipment and the fabric of the building.

2.4 The Community and Wellbeing Committee agreed the findings of the Scrutiny Task Group and in particular agreed that the Epsom Playhouse should continue to deliver its services to the community and that the Playhouse team continue their work in reducing overall costs.

2.5 The Committee also asked that an action plan be produced exploring the possible implementation of the items listed in the conclusion of the Scrutiny Review report under the headings of 'Income Generation', 'Equipment' and 'Building'.

Community and Wellbeing Committee

9 October 2018

- 2.6 The items listed in the Scrutiny review report are listed below, with accompanying actions/responses.

3 Income generation

- 3.1 **Digital Advertising display board outside the Playhouse Theatre.** Meetings have been held with two possible providers and two potential locations have also been identified. Information relating to these locations has been sent to the planning department for comment and advice. All installation costs will be covered by the provider and the Council could receive a minimum additional income of £10k per annum.
- 3.2 **Sponsorship of the Epsom Playhouse and Playhouse bar.** Exploratory discussions have taken place with several potential sponsors of various sizes and consideration is now being given to an appropriate benefits package.
- 3.3 **Development of the Epsom Playhouse membership scheme to be completed.** An analysis of competitors' membership schemes has been completed and proposals for the new Epsom Playhouse scheme are in the process of being financially assessed by the Playhouse team with a view to launching the scheme in the new year.
- 3.4 **Concessionary priced tickets offered to local businesses for shows with lower uptake of seats.** Concessionary tickets are already offered on a case by case basis, in discussion and with the permission of the relevant promoter.
- 3.5 Further to the above, in January of this year the Playhouse was compelled, along with all other businesses in the country, to cease charging booking fees for credit card sales. Almost all of the Playhouse's competitors immediately put in place an alternative transaction charge to replace the credit card booking fee.
- 3.6 Having assessed the reaction to our competitors' new charges it is now proposed to that the Playhouse apply a charge of £1.50 per transaction. – This charge would generate the theatre an additional circa £33,000 per annum, of which, the income in excess of budget, estimated at £10,500, could be used for the ongoing maintenance of the venue.

4 Equipment

- 4.1 **Exploration of external funding sources, for example the Arts Council.** The Playhouse is a 'receiving house' which means that it does not produce any of the shows, but merely acts as a host venue. The majority of available external funding sources tends to centre around those theatres that fall into the category of being 'production houses' and this is particularly the issue with funding from the Arts Council. This being the case the Playhouse team will continue to investigate additional opportunities for further external funding.

Community and Wellbeing Committee

9 October 2018

- 4.2 **Establishment of rolling replacement/refurbishment plan for the technical equipment at the playhouse.** The Service Review Task Group identified that the onsite technical team provided an excellent service with regard to maintaining the ageing equipment in the building. The Task Group also noted that there were a number of pieces of technical equipment in need of replacement. It is therefore proposed that the £33,000 per annum transaction charge income mentioned above is set aside to bolster technical maintenance budgets, to enable the Technical team to commence a rolling replacement programme.

5 Building

- 5.1 **Further consideration of the best use of the members' bar.** The members' bar is located above the ground floor bar and is accessible only via a flight of stairs. This lack of disabled access limits the usage options for that space. It must also be noted that the members' bar area typically generates between £40,000 and £52,000 per annum when it is used as additional dressing room space by Laine Theatre Arts and a variety of other dance/stage schools that make use of the theatre. Repurposing that space would significantly impact the amount of income received from these types of hirers and could result in some of these groups no longer using the theatre.
- 5.2 **Refurbishment of the public toilets.** The public toilets were re-decorated during early 2018, addressing all the issues raised during the review.
- 5.3 **Any potential redevelopment opportunity to provide greater space within the foyer.** A capital bid has been submitted to replace the front entrance doors and move the box office counter. This project will not only improve the heating and energy efficiency of the foyer but will also increase the circulation space, therefore reducing the problems of congestion and bottle necking that regularly occur in that area.
- 5.4 **Potential to create theatre boxes upstairs in the main auditorium.** The creation of the boxes would limit the flexibility of that space which on occasion needs to be used by companies hiring the theatre. The installation of boxes may also create sight line issues which would need to be addressed.
- 5.5 In addition to the above, the theatre dressing rooms have all been fully refurbished thereby addressing the recent bacterial issues, and the stage floor has been replaced. A capital bid to refurbish the Playhouse bar has also been submitted, with the aim of this project being to address the bottle necking and queuing that occurs each evening and which is preventing the bar from fully maximising on sales.

Community and Wellbeing Committee

9 October 2018

6 Proposals

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Committee notes the update provided by this report, and agrees to the implementation of a charge of £1.50 per transaction, with the income above the budgeted level of previous credit card fee income, generated from this charge being set aside for a rolling programme of improvements to the venue.

7 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 7.1 **Chief Finance Officer's comments:** Included in budgets up to 2017/18 was credit card booking fee income of £22,500 per annum. This was removed to reflect legislative changes in January 2018, representing a cost to the Council.
- 7.2 To maintain a budget neutral effect, the first £22,500 income from transaction fees should be retained within service revenue budgets. Any income in excess of £22,500 would be available as a contribution to an equipment repairs and renewal fund.

8 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

- 8.1 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** There are no legal issues arising from this report.

9 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

- 9.1 There are no implications with regards to the contents of this report.

10 Partnerships

- 10.1 The Playhouse has very close relationships with a significant number of local community groups and businesses, and the work outlined above will strengthen those links.

11 Risk Assessment

- 11.1 The Playhouse Theatre plays an important role within the community, the nighttime economy and cultural of the Borough. Therefore failure to provide adequate support for the venue would have a significant detrimental on the town.

12 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 12.1 It is recommended that the committee notes the contents of this report and agrees the proposal to the implementation of a charge of £1.50 per transaction as detailed in section 3 of this report.

Ward(s) Affected: (All Wards);