

The Playhouse, Epsom

Draft Status Report



December 2025

EPSOM
Playhouse

EPSOM
EWELL
BOROUGH COUNCIL



CONTENTS

Executive Summary	01
Introduction	02
Background	03
Strategic Context	05
Current Offer	07
Operations & Organisation	08
Governance, Risk & Performance Management	09
Asset Management	10
Financial Matters	12
Marketing & Communications	14
Future Opportunities	15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Epsom Playhouse is a key cultural and community asset within the Borough, owned and operated by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council (EEBC). This Status Report consolidates the current operational, financial, governance and strategic position of the Playhouse to provide a clear baseline for future decision-making and to support the development of a new Community Asset Plan. That plan will assess how the Playhouse can strengthen its community contribution, increase commercial viability and move towards long-term financial sustainability. It will also evaluate future stewardship options, including potential transfer to a local organisation, in the context of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the Community Governance Review (CGR).

The Playhouse occupies a distinctive building that blends three Grade II Listed former residences with a purpose-built 1980s theatre structure. It delivers a broad and diverse programme of live performances—comedy, music, theatre, opera, ballet, children’s shows and the highly successful annual pantomime—alongside community hires, studio events, workshops and a developing community programme. Recent investment in new management roles, upgraded facilities and strengthened marketing activity has brought renewed momentum to programming, audience development and income opportunities.

Operationally, the theatre is managed within the Council’s Venues Community Commercial Services team, supported by volunteers who contribute nearly 5,000 hours of stewarding each year—equivalent to over £84,000 of staffing value. The organisation benefits from cross-working opportunities with Bourne Hall, particularly in marketing, bookings and community engagement.

Financially, the Playhouse continues to require a Council subsidy, with the 2025/26 deficit forecast at approximately £360k. While expenditure has stabilised over recent years, income remains below pre-pandemic levels. A series of capital projects—funded through Council capital, grants, Shared Prosperity Funding and CIL—have improved accessibility, environmental performance and customer experience, including new lighting, solar panels, lift installation, auditorium works and foyer refurbishment. Further planned capital investment totals approximately £1.25m.

Marketing and communications have significantly improved in 2025, with a more proactive approach to campaign planning, digital engagement and audience development. Future enhancements will be shaped through a dedicated Communications and Marketing Plan, to be produced as part of the wider business planning process.

Looking ahead, key opportunities include broadening the Playhouse’s offer, increasing commercial income, embedding community programming, developing a membership or loyalty scheme, strengthening collaboration with Bourne Hall, and undertaking ‘true cost’ accounting to fully understand operational and investment needs. These actions will support a sustainable future for the Playhouse and enable it to continue playing a vital cultural, social and economic role within the Borough.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Status Report is to collate information about the management, operations, governance and financial arrangements for the Epsom Playhouse into a single comprehensive document.

It is intended to capture the 'as is' situation but also lay the foundation for a new high level business plan to be produced, which will consider ways in which the asset could be further optimised to deliver both a stronger community offer, as well as work towards becoming financially sustainable. Consideration will also be given to options around stewardship models and this work will be built into the future business planning process.

This work is being done in the context of **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)** and a **Community Governance Review (CGR)**, with Members keen to explore opportunities for key community assets to continue to be owned and managed locally. As such, this will also provide a foundation for a business case to support the potential transfer of this key Community Asset to a local organisation.



BACKGROUND

Epsom Playhouse is a building of two halves; part of the theatre incorporates the frontage of three Grade II Listed Buildings which were previously residential but are now home to the theatres' bar areas. The remainder of the building was built and opened in 1984 as part of a wider shopping centre and multistorey car park development, all of which is owned and operated by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (EEBC).

The Playhouse is operated as a theatre. The building itself sits within the wider Epsom town centre attached to the Ashley Shopping Centre and car park. The theatre comprises of a number of elements;

Main Auditorium

The auditorium has capacity for 450 people, accommodated on tiered seating to watch performances on a main stage. There is seating and access available for customers with additional needs

Myers Studio

The Studio accommodates up to 80 people. It has a small stage, providing a more intimate space for smaller performances & events. There is seating and access available for customers with additional needs

The Member's Bar

This area is upstairs, accessed by a new mezzanine level and lift, in the listed part of the building and has a bar. This space is available for private hire

Epsom Playhouse Bar

Located downstairs in the listed part of the building, the bar area is home to the main bar and kitchen area serving light refreshments both inside and outside of performance times

Foyer

There is a large welcoming foyer area which provides access to the rest of the theatre and is home to the Box Office. This area is currently being refurbished

Car park

The adjacent car park is for customers use on a pay and display basis with access to the theatre directly from the car park and Ashley Shopping Centre

BACKGROUND CONTINUED

Ancillary Spaces

The theatre has a number of ancillary spaces including changing rooms for hire, office space, storage, technical and lighting rooms, etc all of which support the smooth operations of the theatre

Solar Panels

90 Panels were installed on the roof of the Playhouse in 2024, providing a third of the facilities electricity requirements

Public Art

At the front of the Playhouse is a statue which is now seen by residents as an integral part of the identity of the theatre. Named Le Spectre de la Rose and created by John Gilpin, it was installed in 1999, 15 years after the Playhouse opened. The sculpture is on permanent loan from Tom Merrifield and his wife.

The theatre is an interesting building, blending modern architecture with 18th Century residential properties. Designed by The **Percy Thomas Partnership**, The Playhouse replaced the Ebbisham and Myers Halls which were Epsom's social centre up until this time and whose partial structure was incorporated into the development of Ashley Shopping Centre. The listed part of the building (47-51 South Street) can be found on the Historic England register.

The building is home to the theatre, a bar/café, a further upper-level bar and studio space, as well as various halls and ancillary rooms. Externally, the theatre sits on the edge of the ring road, at the rear or the High Street. There are a mix of residential and commercial buildings neighbouring the theatre.

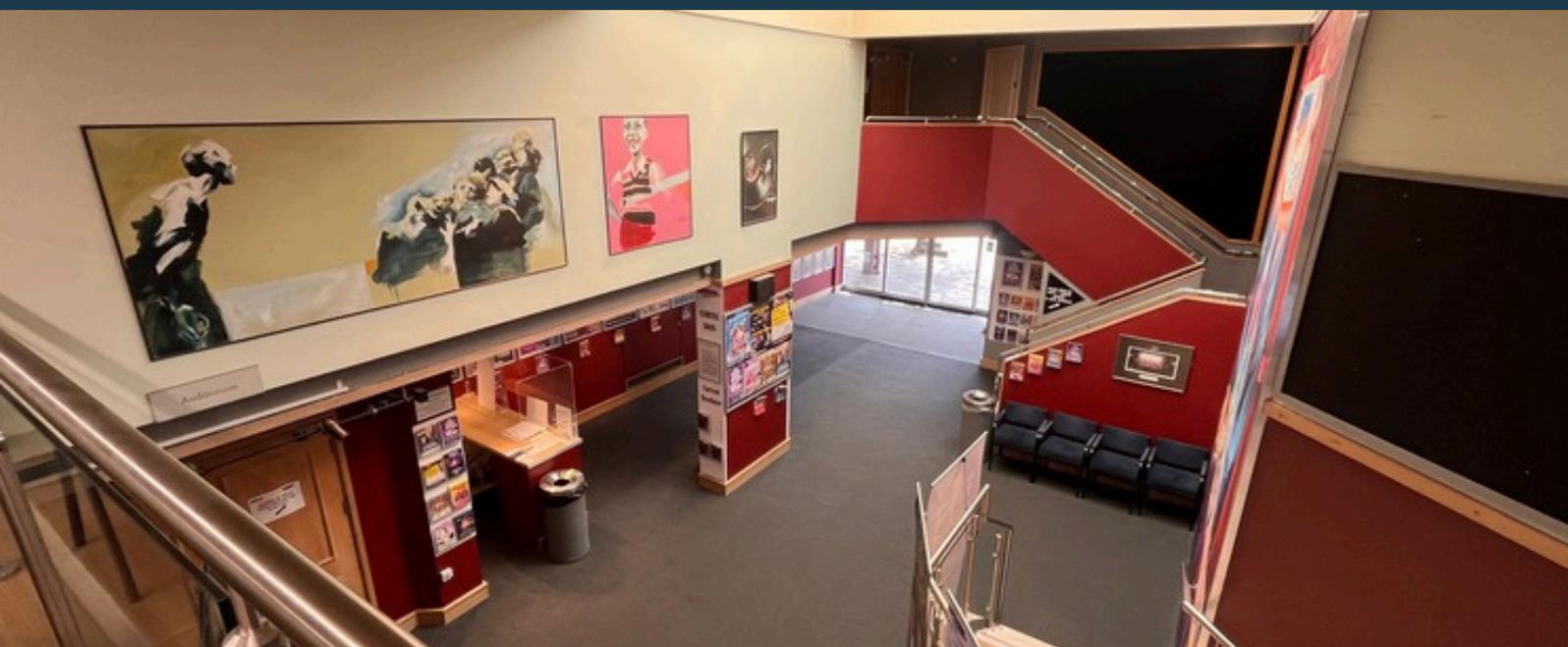
The theatre is operated by the **Venues and Community Commercial Services** Team within Epsom and Ewell Council for the benefit of the community. It accommodates a substantial programme of commercial performances (live music, comedy, opera and theatre), including a highly successful annual pantomime as well as community hires to local people/community groups. In the past couple of years, there has been an increase in marketing and programming alongside physical upgrades to the spaces within the building.

Further works are underway to improve the uses of the spaces within the theatre including extending the food and beverage offer and at different times of the day and providing a wider community programme to engage and inspire local people (especially children and young people) in culture and theatre.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Epsom Playhouse is a key community facility within the Borough. The Council owns, manages and operates it directly, providing both revenue and capital support, within the following policy framework;

- **Strategic Priorities (2025–2027):** the Council has recently adopted a set of core priorities in light of the LGR context. This includes a strategic asset review, with a focus on community assets, along with the consideration of options to transfer suitable assets to a new local governance organisation.
- **Four Year Plan (2020–2024);** it is noteworthy that community facilities and venues such as Epsom Playhouse have been a priority for many years, linking in with the broader focus on Health & Wellbeing and Culture.
- **Arts, Culture & Heritage Strategy;** makes clear reference to Epsom Playhouse, recognising its importance and significance in support of the strategy's core objectives.
- **Health & Wellbeing Strategy:** focussing on improving the mental health & wellbeing of the Borough's residents, recognising the important role that arts, culture and heritage facilities play.



STRATEGIC CONTEXT CONTINUED

The Covid pandemic had a significant impact on the theatre with it being closed for many months during both lockdown's and then visitor numbers/bookings taking time to recover in the subsequent years.

Through the council's annual capital programme, the team has requested capital investment into the Playhouse each year to enable the facilities to be brought up to date, meet current accessibility requirements (e.g. lift to the first floor) and play its part in the Councils Climate programme. Collectively, these investments will have had a positive impact on the bottom line and reduced the current subsidy provided by the Council.

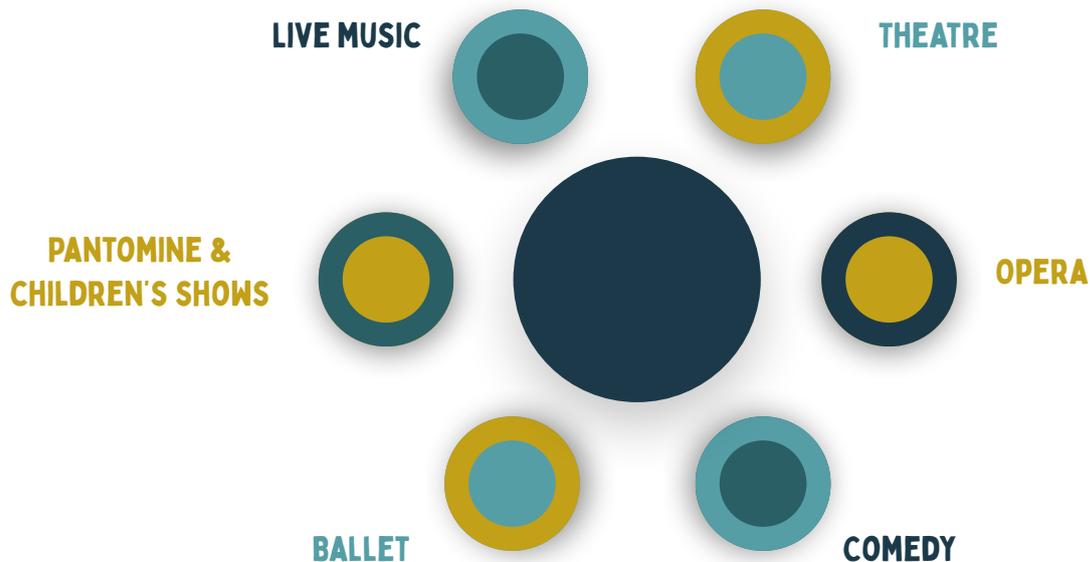
Alongside the capital programme, the staff team have worked tirelessly to increase bookings and put in place/trial other income stream opportunities.

In 2025, a new theatre manager and marketing manager have started working for the Council to run the Playhouse. These members of staff have brought fresh energy and vision to the work of the theatre, energising the implementation of new ideas and programmes and placing greater emphasis on community programming.

Further work includes a closer working relationship between the Bourne Hall and Playhouse teams to cross fertilise ideas and share potential clients/customers where appropriate to do so.

CURRENT OFFER

Epsom Playhouse offers a wide range of performances to the public, acting as a cultural and community hub for the borough and beyond. The team also provide reduced rates to local community organisations and dance groups who use the venue for summer schools, dance exams, performances and more. This constantly evolves as new opportunities arise and creative ideas are considered, with a current snapshot including;



In addition, the following are offered;

- Additional support including technical services, equipment hire, box office services, dressing rooms and rehearsal space
- Volunteer steward programme
- Emerging community programming offer, including Behind The Scenes tours & Theatre Box, the programme run weekly in term time for those aged 4-19
- Private hire of spaces, including enhanced promotion of the Myers Studio which lends itself to more quirky, unusual events and productions
- Host community projects together with the hire of the bar and café as a meeting, social and café space
- Commercial corporate days with meeting/training space, lunch and team building opportunities provided which link to the theatre's purpose

More detailed work, including a SWOT analysis will be carried out to look in more detail at the opportunities and challenges facing the facility, as part of a future business plan.

OPERATIONS AND ORGANISATION

Epsom Playhouse is operated and run by the Council, with staff employed directly. It sits within the **Venues Community Commercial Service** function, reporting into the **Interim Head of Service**. There are links across to staff within the Car Parking and the Property team.

The following sets out the current staff structure (FTE equivalent not known). For 24/25 the staff salary costs were reported as circa £417k (probable outturn). For 25/26 the reported forecasted cost is the same (circa £417k). A contribution to internal Corporate Support Services also forms part of the budget and this is set out in the financial matters section below.



The Playhouse benefits from the support of volunteer stewards who are essential to supporting each performance through helping to direct customers before, during and after performances. Each performance requires at least six stewards for at least four hours and with an average of four performances a week (with a £16.90 G11 hourly rate), this equates to an equivalent investment of £84,364.80 a year and 4,992hrs of volunteer time to support the operations of the facility.

GOVERNANCE, RISK & PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Epsom Playhouse is overseen by the **Council's Community & Wellbeing Committee**, with reports or decisions going to Full Council as required. The Council's **Constitution** sets out the formal governance and decision-making arrangements.

Performance & Risk Management forms part of the Council's Corporate Performance & Risk Management process, with regularly reporting in line with Council procedures.

The Playhouse Team work with the Bourne Hall Team to share and cross fertilise potential bookings and complementary activities. The Interim Assistant Head of Service actively encourages the teams to engage and support each other wherever possible. This broadens the depth of local experience and knowledge, helps to ensure that revenue hires stay within the two venues and creates a natural support network and level of resilience.



ASSET MANAGEMENT

The site is managed on a **Corporate Landlord** model, with operational matters dealt with locally (see Organisation and Operations below) and through the Venues Community Commercial Services. Repair and maintenance issues, as well as capital projects will be managed by the Property and Facilities team through the normal processes, with relevant offices from the Car Park team liaising as appropriate.

The Council's **Strategic Asset Management Plan (AMP)** 2020-2030 sets out the Council's approach to the strategic management of its land and property assets. It includes a 10 year Planned Maintenance Programme (PMP), which is reviewed annually and indicates the long term financial cost, underpinned by condition surveys undertaken on a five year rolling programme. Of note;

- **Routine maintenance and repairs** will be a mixture of planned and reactive works, met from the revenue budget. Minor day to day repairs are covered under the facilities management contract.
- **Maintenance works** are currently categorised in three levels of priority and are undertaken as soon as possible, as budget allows.
- Approval for **major capital works** and improvements is through a project basis through the capital programme bidding process.
- Forecasts around **capital expenditure** will be mindful of emerging legislation, guidance and priorities around **Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES)** and associated work to continue to decarbonise the estate.



ASSET MANAGEMENT CONTINUED

The AMP sets out an average annual maintenance forecast as a 'global' figure for the key venues comprising Bourne Hall, Epsom Court House, Hook Road Arena and Ewell Court House of £256,260 per annum, equating to £2.56m over 10 years.

The AMP notes that 'the buildings that will require the highest level of capital expenditure will be the Town Hall at circa £1.5m followed by Bourne Hall at £1.1million and the Epsom Playhouse at £0.87million.

A breakdown on current proposed capital works for Epsom Playhouse , along with indicative costing is set out below.

Works	Budget (indicative)
Front of house toilet refurbishment	£175,000
Heating replacement & air conditioning	£530,000
Flat roof recovering with insulation	£300,000
Pitched roof replacement	£250,000
	£1,255,000

FINANCIAL MATTERS

The Council oversees and manage the finances for the facility through its existing Council financial management arrangements.

The Council insures/arranges insurance as required, including public liability insurance. Users of the premises for events and venue hire will be required to provide appropriate public liability cover as part of their user agreement. Purchase of supplies and procurement of professional fees and building contracts is undertaken in line with the Council's existing procurement and purchasing rules.

Revenue

The following table is extracted from the Council's approved Budget Book 2025/26 and sets out the last 2 years high level revenue accounts, with a forecast for the current year.

It is clear that expenditure fell considerably from 23/24 to 24/25 and is predicted to remain broadly similar for the coming financial year. The costs of premises and suppliers & services has reduced, with small reductions in the cost of support services over that period. The costs of capital charges have increased since 23/24.

Income has also decreased over that period, although broadly stable over 24/25 and the forecast for 25/26.

	2023/24	2024/25	2024/25	2025/26
	Actual £	Original Estimate £	Probable Outturn £	Estimate £
Employees	389	373	417	417
Premises	304	259	288	228
Supplies & Services	1160	852	852	856
Support Services	244	216	216	222
Capital Charges	79	101	101	101
Total Expenditure	2176	1801	1874	1824
Sales	(1061)	(953)	(953)	(969)
Fees & Charges	(578)	(495)	(495)	(509)
Total Income	(1639)	(1448)	(1448)	(1478)
Contributions to (from) reserves	0	14	(29)	14
Net Expenditure/(Income)	537	367	397	360

These figures have been reviewed and explored in more detail. There are some reported operational discrepancies that need to be worked through. However, the current published proposed revenue deficit for 25/26 is currently forecasted at £360k.

FINANCIAL MATTERS CONTINUED

Capital

Capital projects to date have included the following;

Works	Completion	Cost (£)	Funding source
Windows replacement	2024/25	50,000	Revenue funding
Solar panel installation	2023/4	61,000	Grant funding
Foyer upgrade & mezzanine floor with lift	2024/5	307,000	Grant funding
Stage & house lighting	2024/5	280,000	EEBC Capital Programme
Auditorium refurbishment	2023/4	160,000	EEBC Capital Programme
	Total	858,000	

The current 'ask' for the 26/27 Capital Programme is circa £685,000, with further details provided in the Asset Management section above.

To date, the funding streams to support revenue and capital activities have primarily been direct Council funding and/or use of Community Infrastructure Level (CIL) funding, as well as Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF).

Moving forward, depending on the future ownership & stewardship model, other sources of funding may be secured including opportunities for grants and further income generation. This would be considered as part of a future business plan.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

2025 has seen significant enhancements to the marketing and communications approach of the Playhouse, with the new Playhouse Manager and Marketing Manager providing impetus and resource to this vital workstream.

The Playhouse Team meet with the Council's Communications Team once a month to support communications activity and pool resources. The approach is working but a Communications and Marketing Plan would be helpful to help define and focus activity further to maximise exposure and revenues.

The Playhouse has a range of communication channels from its printed programmes, to highly visible posters within and outside the venue, website and social media pages. Further work is planned and there will be opportunities to further enhance the Communications & Marketing offer going forward with a high level Communications and Marketing Plan to be included in the future business plan.

The Playhouse website is functional and includes a significant amount of information. The team will soon be working with the Council's IT team to improve the functionality and content of the website. This will help to drive traffic to the website and ultimately result in further income generation.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Moving forward, there are a number of areas to be considered in more detail, including;

- True cost' accounting to ensure full and transparent understanding of costs (existing and projects), alongside consideration of benefits.
- Further development of the 'offer' at Epsom Playhouse to move towards a positive financial position through increasing commercial income and strengthen the community benefit
- Look to further enhance the cross working between Bourne Hall and The Playhouse to mutual benefit and to conduct further work to add to the current community programming, securing external grants to underpin the costs of these projects together with how the Catering Hub can help to provide additional services to visitors of the Playhouse
- Consideration of an Epsom Playhouse membership/loyalty scheme
- Consideration of options around future stewardship models including Community Council, Charitable Trusts etc.
- Development of a Communications and Marketing Strategy.