

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 16 March 2023 Advance Questions

Agenda Item 4 – Leisure & Culture Strategy

Question 1

In the last six months what has been the average attendance at the music tribute shows held at the Harlequin?

Written Answer

The Harlequin Theatre offers a diverse range of shows throughout the year, in which music tribute acts play a small but important part. The acts or shows that we book are researched and balanced to ensure that we are only booking the highest quality performances for the venue.

Over the last six months, we have welcomed 15 live music tribute shows to the venue which have seen an average audience size of 252.

Question 2

Is there a trend developing post COVID on the number of these shows and attendance level?

Written Answer

The return to live theatre was initially slow once all of the Covid restrictions were lifted. The industry started to see customer patterns return to their pre-Covid levels around September 2022, since when the venue has seen ticket purchasing and attendance increase month on month - over 16,000 people attend the venue for both the Pantomime and 'The Night before Christmas' (a live show within the Waller Studio).

Whilst the live theatre sector has seen audience numbers return, cinema continues to struggle nationwide whilst the film industry reworks to re-establish and re-assert itself after Covid. The rise of many of the streaming platforms in (and after) the pandemic has changed the way many people watch films, including 'straight to stream' films which aren't shown in the cinema, but has also meant that 'on release' films are now more quickly attainable.

The challenge of cinema audience numbers, coupled with the opening of The Light in 2023, will continue to have a direct effect on our cinema business. As such, and as part of our ongoing diversification work, we have ensured that the Waller Studio is ready to host live shows rather than just act as a cinema space.

Question 3

In view of the anticipated 60% plus reduction in the number of programmed events on at the Harlequin once The Rise is up and running what are the budget implications?

Written Answer

2022 was an extremely busy year for the venue, and 2023's calendar is busier still. We are not expecting a 60% reduction in the number of programmed events.

Cinema will continue to be an active part of our business, and we will continue to show films from The Harlequin. There is, however, a renewed focus on the cinema space also being available for smaller shows and used as a studio. At Christmas we hosted our first live show in the studio, and the space is now proactively booked with promoters as a space with a smaller seating capacity.

This alongside cinema screenings will mean that the Harlequin is not reducing its output. Whilst we are absolutely not able to rely on the cinema income in the way we have over the last few years, the reduction in this area will be more than mitigated by the rise in income from our other income streams.

Question 4

What has the Council/Harlequin team done in the last year to attract new types of events and what is planned in the next six months?

Written Answer

The venue has been through huge transformation over the last few years –physically, technically, and operationally - and the theatre team continue to raise the profile of the venue to attract returning and new customers.

The venues income comes from 5 main sources: Live shows; Cinema; Room hire & conferences; Outdoor theatre and the Café, and we proactively seek new marketing possibilities and partnerships through our new marketing team.

We are always investigating new revenue opportunities and are in talks with new promoters and agents daily. We work hard at forging those positive connections and relationships to ensure we continue to make a name for ourselves within their touring schedules.

The venue is in contact with other local authority owned theatres to share information and support each other. The venue attends many events within the area to continue with the positive story of the development of the Harlequin, and partner with local groups and offer support to help to jointly raise the profiles – this is a focus with the Leisure & Culture Strategy.

The 'business first' focus for the venue, and the actions we are taking within that approach (including our constant pursuit of raising our profile and our audience numbers) are reflected in the use of the venue. We are delivering more live shows and bigger audiences, alongside which our café continues to be increasingly busy, cinema

attendance is constant and room bookings are the highest they have been ever. We are not complacent about this, though, and know that we need to continue to be proactive in our leadership and approach, including exploring new arts opportunities and new income streams.

Importantly, this focus has led to a significantly reduced financial subsidy from the Council and are on track to remove this subsidy completely by 2025.

Agenda Item 6 – Place Portfolio Holders Briefing

Question 5

Page 64 - How many of the business support grants went to the voluntary and community sector (noting that the grant programme for these ended in 2022/23). Please provide details.

Written Answer

For the financial year 22/23 zero Business Support Grant applications were received from the voluntary and community sector. Please note the grant is available to micro enterprises looking to start, develop or grow.

Question 6

Page 66 - Please provide details of the Redhill Market current situation and engagement and view of stall holders. How has the management of Redhill Market changed over the last year, and what is the number and variety of stalls on market days compared to pre-pandemic levels. For example, this last week there was no flower stall at the market. Why is the market contract being retendered?

Written Answer

In line with the national picture, traders at Redhill market have been hit hard by the pandemic and the current economic situation. Traders have commented that there has been reduced footfall at lunchtimes as there are less people working in the town centre with more office employees working from home. However, trade at the hot food stalls remains good. Stall holders were engaged with in December 2022 and asked their view of the market and how it could be improved.

Tudor Markets were awarded the Redhill market management contract in 2017 and this was extended during the Covid 19 pandemic. Tudor no longer wish to run Redhill market as they are focusing on running events elsewhere. It's fair to say that the management company have been hands off in recent months.

There are currently 14 regular traders at the market, not all of the regular traders do all three days, and 15 casual traders. The numbers of stallholders has reduced, a

number of traders no longer trade since covid or have found paid employment elsewhere. The busiest day on the market was the Friday, this has now changed to Saturday.

Trader figures w/c 23/2/2023

Day	Stall numbers
Thursday	17.5
Friday	15
Saturday	18.5

Trader figures w/c 20/2/2020 (pre pandemic)

Day	Stall numbers
Thursday	28.5
Friday	29
Saturday	23

The market runs incentives to attract new stall holders, these traders do not often sign up when the incentive period finishes as it does not make commercial sense for them to do so.

The flower stall market trader was unwell but expected back on the market this week.

The market is being retendered as the current contract is coming to an end. As part of a procurement process a 'Request for Information' was sent out to market operators in January 2023. Prior to this we sought feedback from traders about what improvements they would like to see and their views on the market. We received responses from three Market Operators. Following evaluation, it has been decided to award a contract to one of these operators.

We are transitioning to a new operation at the beginning of April; the new operators introduced themselves to the traders, market manager and set up team on 9 March.

Question 7

Page 73 - This noted that the playing pitch study has been completed. Please can this be shared so we might scrutinise this at the meeting. What future need does the playing pitch study identify?

Written Answer

The study has very recently been completed by the consultants, but it is still being reviewed by Officers who are attempting to summarise the outputs. As a comprehensive and detailed study, amounting to over 500 pages in total, assessing a number of different sports and facilities by different geographical areas, it is difficult to draw any sweeping conclusions but rather it will be an evidence base for which to consider individual planning applications, support funding bids, develop future strategies and inform decisions on future provision of facilities. The documents have been shared with members of LPAG for comment and will shortly be circulated to all Members when the relevant work has been completed.

Question 8

Page 80 - Please share (including where published) the council's response to the recent National Planning Policy Framework consultation.

Written Answer

The Council's response to the consultation is attached. This was sent directly to the Government portal and has not been published. However, it was circulated as a draft to all Members and was the subject of discussion at LPAG, to help inform the response.

Question 9

Page 89 - What is the scope of the Council's forthcoming development strategy, and when is it expected to be completed?

Written Answer

Officers are preparing the draft scope for the proposed development strategy. It is anticipated that the development strategy will provide the Council's vision; objectives; types of development schemes and the proposed delivery mechanisms to bring them forward. It is anticipated that the strategy will outline a delivery programme of short, medium and longer term sites that the local authority will bring forward. It is intended that the development strategy will be developed in the 2023/24 financial year.

Question 10

Page 98 - Please provide a schedule setting out the anticipated timescale and target completion dates for the Phase 3 roll-out of the recycling service.

Written Answer

Following the completion of Phase 1 & 2 of the flats recycling rollout in 2021, it was agreed that remaining flats would be assimilated onto service as part of the Council's normal business activity. Therefore, there is no 'Phase 3' of the project.

Since the completion of Phase 1 & 2 a further 415 flats have been added to the full recycling service. All new build flats receive the full service as part of the development process, and this has totalled nearly 1,000 flats over this same period.

At present 5,888 flats are identified as awaiting the full recycling service. Members are aware that the progress of the rollout is dependent on Landlords and Freeholders making alterations to bins stores and access routes, so the pace of these improvements is outside of the direct control of this Authority.

However, as opportunities arise, flats will be included on the full service.

Planning continues and, at the moment we are looking to rollout another 450 flats, whilst we are working on agreements with 300 more, and targeting the development of a further 500 flats. The current schedule is to upgrade between 50-100 flats per month to the full recycling service.

Question 11

Page 107 - Please can the criteria for the In-bloom awards be shared with members to help us understand what these are assessed on?

Written Answer

The criteria for all categories, that the RBBC Greenspaces enter, will be shared by email with all ward councillors.