

Report of the Assistant Director of Sport & Culture to the meeting of Regeneration and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 22 December 2016

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Subject:**Theatres Strategy****Summary statement:**

This report gives the Scrutiny Committee further detail of the Theatres Strategy as requested in the meeting on 22 September 2016, plus an update on the development and refurbishment of St George's Hall.

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This report gives the Scrutiny Committee further detail of the Theatres Strategy as requested in the meeting on 22 September 2016, plus an update on the development and refurbishment of St George's Hall.
- 1.2 Bradford Council owns and runs four theatre venues: the Alhambra Theatre, the Alhambra Studio, St George's Hall (all city centre) and the King's Hall & Winter Gardens in Ilkley.
- 1.3 The venues are managed by Adam Renton, Theatres General Manager, reporting to Phil Barker, Assistant Director, Sport and Culture and Steve Hartley, Director of Environment and Sport.
- 1.4 This report should be read in conjunction with the City Centre Plan and the Cultural Strategy.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Alhambra Theatre is one of Bradford's principle visitor attractions and is renowned throughout the region for bringing the biggest touring productions to Yorkshire, such as *The Lion King*, *Billy Elliot*, *Jersey Boys*, *Wicked* and *Mary Poppins*. The theatre has a varied programme which also includes international dance, ballet, comedy, drama from the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company and the North's biggest annual pantomime (the second biggest selling panto in the UK.)
- 2.2 The Alhambra Studio is a versatile 200 seat small theatre / rehearsal space adjacent to the Alhambra main house. It has a wide range of uses including small scale theatre, music and comedy performances, rehearsals, meetings, conferences and exhibitions. It is also used for workshops and educational activity and to facilitate ballet / dance and the large scale, long running productions in the Alhambra Theatre main house, which require an additional space.
- 2.3 St George's Hall is a traditional shoe box shaped Victorian venue, the first public building to be commissioned in what was to become Bradford City Centre and one of the oldest purpose built concert halls in Europe. The venue is currently closed for refurbishment, funded by BMDC and the Heritage Lottery Fund, and is due to re-open late in 2017.
- 2.4 The King's Hall and Winter Garden in Ilkley comprises a traditional theatre with an adjacent glass-roofed spa hall. The King's Hall and Winter Gardens host a wide range of events and community provision, from local amateur dramatic and performing arts companies, weddings and parties to lifestyle fairs and community events. The venue opened in 1908 and has had significant improvement work in the last decade, supported by the local fundraising group The Friends of Kings Hall.

3. Bradford Theatres Mission Statement & Programming Policy

3.1 Bradford Theatres recognise the arts and entertainment as central to the resurgence of Bradford; enhancing the quality of life for Bradford's communities; contributing to the local economy; and strengthening the regional, national and international reputation of the Bradford district. Consequently, we aim:

- to present and promote a wide and exciting range of performance arts and entertainment activity of the highest possible standard, and thus to enhance the reputation of Bradford as a District of Culture
- to offer the whole community opportunities of choice, participation and access to a rich provision of the performing arts and entertainment.
- to develop new audiences for Bradford Theatres, especially amongst young people and ethnic minority communities, which are currently underrepresented. To promote "Access for All", working with communities to break down real or perceived barriers to arts attendance or participation
- to improve, by working together as a team, every aspect of our service, valuing and encouraging the contribution of every individual within the organisation, as we work towards the common objective of providing the best possible quality of experience for audiences, artistes and staff.

3.2 Bradford Theatres provides a wide ranging theatre provision within the allocated financial resources available with the following aims:

- To provide a rich, well balanced theatre programme which gives a wide variety of product reflecting the needs and expectations of the local community.
- To raise the regional and national profile of Bradford as a City of Culture, enhancing tourism and attracting visitors.
- To develop and serve audiences of the future.
- To contribute to the artistic and social development of the district's communities.
- To build relationships with practitioners, theatre companies, agents and producers to become a first choice on the touring circuit.
- To provide and maintain an infrastructure of performance spaces which are available for hire.

4. Financial and Resource Appraisal

4.1 The ticketed attendance figures for the city centre venues over the past three years (to 2015/16) is as follows:

	Alhambra	Studio	St Georges
15/16	269,001	4,526	76,650
14/15	290,031	3,571	84,919
13/14	235,790	2,798	75,151

4.2 Average capacity of tickets sold against potential occupancy was 65% in 2015/16, 70% in 2014/15 and 59% in 2013/14 (target 64%.) The national average taken from a benchmark of ninety UK Theatre venues data is 60%.

- 4.3 Bradford Theatres turnover is between £6 million and £8 million a year depending on programme.
- 4.4 The current controllable budget for Bradford Theatres is a subsidy of £418,000 (2016/17). This will be achieved this year despite the closure of St George's Hall due to the high profile programme and excellent attendance. Theatres have come in on line or under spent against budget for the last 3 years.
- 4.5 Budget cuts of £578,500 have been achieved since 2011/12 and there is a further planned cut of £120,000 to achieve in 2017/18.
- 4.6 Bradford Theatres has 68 permanent staffing posts , 61.39 FTE. Of that 50.47 FTE are currently in post. There are 12 vacant posts, a number of which are being covered by casual positions to give the service flexibility while St George's Hall is closed. The staffing structure is being reviewed while the Hall is closed and the changing needs of the venue accounted for prior to re-opening in late 2017.
- 4.6 The development and effective management of the bars and catering function is vital to the financial contribution to Bradford Theatres. This has been developed to cover reduction in budget as the figures below illustrate:
- 15/16 = turnover £1,118,987 contribution to budget £154,866
14/15 = turnover £1,019,492 contribution to budget £122,093
13/14= turnover £896,005 contribution to budget £81,143

5. Business Development / Investment

- 5.1 The Alhambra Theatre's last major investment was in 1986, when the current front of house spaces were added and improvements to the stage size, fly-tower and backstage facilities were made. This investment has served Bradford well, enabling the largest touring productions to visit which over the years have included *Les Miserables*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Lion King*, *Billy Elliot*, *Wicked* and *Mary Poppins*.
- 5.2 A regular programme of maintenance has kept the theatre in good condition, with recent projects including external painting (2014), new boilers and refurbishment of the private members bar (2015) and improvement works to the Studio (2016).
- 5.3 The restaurant was created on the top floor of the Alhambra. Optimising the fantastic views of City Park. This area was always unused pre-show. A kitchen was installed along with a disabled WC and passenger lift. The restaurant can now seat up to 85 people and is accessible for wheelchair users. This adds to the unique package the Alhambra can offer compared to local competition.
- 5.4 The studio theatre has a capacity of 250. In the past it has suffered from no investment resulting in a very dark, underused space. The studio has been identified to possibly trade more commercially supporting the theatres budget in the future. The bar has now been separated from the auditorium with sound proofing

and a kitchen and cellar has been built making the studio self sufficient for meetings, private hires, weddings, birthdays, small conferences etc.

- 5.5 The Laidler bar was previously designed to be a corporate sponsorship bar. Over the years companies no longer put money into such schemes and our membership dropped. Realising the need to offer something other theatres could not, we created the Laidler Lounge, an upmarket champagne bar that 30 people per night can exclusively use. Guests receive a glass of champagne on arrival and their programme. Private rest room facilities were also built. This area is fill for most commercial shows and spend per head dramatically improved adding to the theatres overall bottom line budget and creating exclusivity and a unique offer.
- 5.6 The King's Hall and Winter Garden were in a poor state of repair a decade ago but a series of investments including restoration of the glass roof, lighting, heating, kitchen and stage improvements have made this a very attractive and busy venue. Many of the works have been contributed to by a local volunteer charity, The Friends of King's Hall, and there is a strong sense of community pride and involvement in the venue. The Hall is well used for events including functions, shows and wedding receptions, and is now able to attain and exceed income targets due to the investments made.

6. St George's Hall Update

- 6.1 St George's Hall as one of Bradford's oldest buildings has been in need of major investment for some time due to the crumbling sandstone façade common to many of the city centre's buildings dating back to the Victorian era. The Hall is currently closed for refurbishment which includes maintenance to the stonework, windows and roof, re-wiring and essential health and safety improvements, minor reconfigurations to the bar and front of house areas, installation of a passenger lift and re-decoration, plus improvements to the comfort and sightlines within the auditorium. The project budget is £5.2 million, of which £1.5 million is a Heritage Lottery Fund grant and the remainder BMDC.
- 6.2 Plans for the auditorium seating changes and staging re-modelling have now been submitted for planning approval. Historic England have been invited to comment and are broadly supportive of the plans. They have asked for some additional information regarding the impact of proposed changes on any original features and will be making a site visit in December. It is not anticipated that this will have any effect on the overall timeline of the project.
- 6.3 Four companies have been invited to tender as principle contractor for the works at St George's Hall. At the tenderer's request and in order to allow sufficient time for comprehensive bids to be put together including details of specialist subcontracted works, the tender preparation period has been extended to Monday 19 December 2016. Tenders will be evaluated from 20 December 2016 and concluded over the building industry Christmas shutdown, with the option to interview if required w/c 9 January 2017.
- 6.4 Unless there are unexpected complications, the contract will be awarded w/c 9

January 2017. Depending on the successful tender's programme, work will start on site in early 2017 and the Hall is due to re-open in late 2017.

7. Future Delivery Options

- 7.1 It is possible that a future options appraisal could be made considering the following four management options for Bradford Theatres:

Remain in Council control and run with the existing management structure as part of Bradford Council. There is considerable pride in the venues, in particular the Alhambra and St George's Hall, and the service has a strong part to play in delivery of the council's goals including the Cultural Strategy and City Centre Plan. The restoration and development of St George's Hall will enable us to develop new and larger numbers of visitors and support the wider Council aims more effectively while reducing subsidy.

- 7.2 Commercial management company. This is unlikely however to provide significant cost savings as the service has already reduced controllable budget over the last decade, using similar methods as a commercial theatre provider (eg: the selection of more commercial product, investment in bars, catering and packages, introduction of booking fees.)

- 7.3 Charitable Trust. There are many examples of theatres and arts venues running successfully as charitable trusts. There is possibly more potential for attracting grant aid from foundations, personal donations and sponsorship if the future governance took this course, plus tax benefits and greater commercial flexibility. The Council has recently commissioned a consultancy report on the possible financial benefits of moving many of the sport and cultural facilities to a trust model, the results and recommendations of which will be reported to members in due course.

- 7.4 Management buyout. It may be possible, especially under the terms of New Deal, for the current management to propose a buyout and run the theatres independently as a public interest company.

8. Education and Access

- 8.1 Bradford Theatres education and outreach team budget and staffing were cut in 2008, following which the majority of educational offer has been provided by visiting production companies. This includes free Q&A sessions as part of the dance programme, dance and drama workshops where these are available, and development of young audiences particularly through schools performances.

- 8.2 The annual visit from Northern Ballet includes audience development activity aimed at first time dance attenders in hard to reach sectors and children through primary schools. Participants are offered free or reduced price tickets and receive a free workshop or talk, supported by Bradford Theatres and funded by Northern Ballet.

- 8.3 In December 2014 the Alhambra Theatre was one of only ten venues nationally to

be involved in Matthew Bourne's exciting Lord of the Flies project, which encouraged and developed participation in dance from boys and young men. There were more than 250 participants involved in the project in Bradford. The final selection of 22 young men went on to perform alongside a professional cast in the Alhambra main house. Since the performance many of the participants have gone on to professional dance training and one young man was successfully cast in the lead role of the Billy Elliot national tour, which included a 4 week run back at the Alhambra this spring.

- 8.4 The Alhambra Theatre has been a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Learning and Performance Network since 2013 working with Bingley Grammar School, Samuel Lister Academy and approximately 20 cluster schools. Working in partnership with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) Bingley Grammar School had their Shakespeare Festival at the Alhambra in which more than 200 children participated and 1,500 people attended. This was followed by the RSC's professional production which included children's casting from Samuel Lister Academy, joined exclusively in Bradford by a Blue Peter presenter, resulting in a broadcast piece in the programme.
- 8.5 The Alhambra Theatre is a member of the Touring Consortium, which produces new accessible drama twice annually and has a commitment to providing accessibly priced schools tickets and free educational and outreach activity alongside their productions. Work has included community and youth casting, pre show performance opportunities, free venue and set tours, workshops, a young reporters scheme, photography and filmmakers competitions and community access days.
- 8.6 The Alhambra Theatre is one of the leading venues in the country for the provision of access assisted performances for deaf and visually impaired theatre goers. The majority of main house productions offer signed, captioned and audio described performances and touch tours. The recent Mary Poppins touch tour was attended by 50 people and offered blind patrons the opportunity to feel and view up close the set and costumes, followed by listening in to a description of the visual elements of the show, which greatly enhances their experience.
- 8.7 The Alhambra Theatre ran it's first Relaxed Performance for learning disabled people at the 2015/16 pantomime which was highly successful and is being repeated this season. This provides a safe and friendly environment for patrons on the autistic spectrum or with other learning difficulties and their families to attend the theatre. Lights are maintained on in the auditorium throughout the show and patrons may move around should they wish to, plus additional support is provided such as quiet areas and storyboard pre-show information.
- 8.8 For many years, the Alhambra Theatre offered a 'Panto Roadshow' aimed at local primary schools. A free workshop on the history of pantomime was offered in schools including an interactive theatre in education performance with staff and pupils. The children then later attended a performance of the pantomime at the theatre, this being for most their first theatre attendance. Families were then targeted for the following season, encouraging independent bookings separate from

the school. Schools in areas of deprivation and with a low attendance rate were targeted for this work. Having exhausted the list, for the last two seasons the Alhambra Theatre has instead offered subsidised seats and assisted travel to pantomime to targeted Bradford schools, enabling hundreds of local children to experience their first visit to the theatre.

- 8.9 As part of the funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), a new Heritage Outreach post is being created based in St George's Hall who will deliver an activity plan targeting underrepresented groups and city centre schools. Accessible heritage activities, including free workshops, open days and a tour linking other historical buildings will be offered, increasing footfall through the building and knowledge / ownership of the space. The recruitment of the new post is planned for mid 2017 to develop activities and relationships alongside the physical works and is funded for 3 years by the HLF.
- 8.10 We constantly take throughout the year requests from school children who are thinking of pursuing a career in theatre. Successful candidates are given a full weeks intensive insight into how the theatre operates and the very different departments that all work quite individually yet knit together for the end product.
- 8.11 For over 8 years now we have worked in conjunction with social services to create Open House. This is based at either St Georges Hall or the Alhambra and is manned by volunteers. Reduced price catering is offered and free room hire aimed at reducing isolation and loneliness and offering training services suitable to the over 60's community.
- 8.12 The dance consortium has membership from around the UK, predominantly made up of large scale number one venues. Bradford Theatres has been a member for the last 10 years. The aim of the consortium is to bring the best large scale international contemporary dance companies to the local regions. This consortium has received regular funding from the arts council and involves education packages and encourages participation in their masterclasses. Such companies as Alvin Ailey (American Dance Company), Australian Dance Theatre, Batsheva and Nederlands Dance Theatre have appeared to name just a few.
- 8.13 The Alhambra Theatre has made significant improvements to access for wheelchair users with a new level access area at the rear of the stalls which has improved choice, comfort and sightlines. Half price tickets for disabled people and essential carers are available through our Access and Carers scheme.

9. Environment and Sustainability

- 9.1 Theatres have been included in the majority of the Council's environmental and sustainability programmes, with energy reduction achievements through replacement of both internal and external lighting to LED.
- 9.2 Recent developments and improvements in stage lighting technology means that LED is now an option for some stage lighting for the first time. These options are being explored for replacement where possible at all venues.

- 9.3 All Bradford Theatres venues have had new more boilers fitted as part of FM's maintenance and development programme within the last three years, reducing heating costs and improving efficiency.
- 9.4 Environmental improvements such as installation of double glazing have been considered for the re-development of St George's Hall but single glazing is preferred by Historic England for the listed exterior. Significant thermal improvements will still be made by making the venue watertight, plus through improvements to sash frames and fittings.
- 9.5 A planned grey water harvesting system at St George's Hall will not be able to be progressed due to the massive weight implications of water storage tanks. Similar siphoning techniques will be used to take excess water from the roof direct to drainage which will reduce the impact of water damage on the building.
- 9.6 A preference for local materials, reducing the environmental impact of transportation, has been made in the Hall tender documents.
- 9.7 Bradford Theatres follows the Council's guidelines regarding sustainable and local food and equipment supplies.

10. Tourism and Marketing

- 10.1 Bradford Theatres main marketing tool is the season brochure, which includes the programmed events at all venues and is produced three times a year with a print run of 120,000. Of these, 35,000 are mailed to previous attenders and 10,000 copies are distributed locally. 45,000 copies are distributed via national of Sunday newspapers in the local area and a further 5,000 – 10,000 are distributed via hand to hand promotion and door drops, thereby ensuring a good spread of existing and potential new bookers receive information. The remainder are picked up from the venues, leisure centres and city centre sites. The brochure results in a return of more than 20% which is a high return on investment.
- 10.2 Bradford Theatres has the most visited website in Bradford. Stats for Jan – June 2016 were as follows:
 - Total traffic - 977,864
 - Page Views - 5,160,526
 - Average session duration – 3mins 49 seconds
 - Bounce rate - 31.21%
 - Visitor split – New visitors: 51.9% / Returning visitors: 48.1%

The majority of website traffic comes from outside Bradford, as these Google Analytics figures show:

- Leeds - 25.08% of all traffic
- London - 14.46% of all traffic
- Bradford - 14.07% of all traffic
- Huddersfield - 4.75% of all traffic
- Sheffield - 3.29% of all traffic

This illustrates the ability of Theatres to showcase Bradford regionally and even nationally in a positive light and the tourism gains for the city.

Nearly half of web traffic is from mobile devices and investment has been made to make the website accessible in this format, especially with regard to ease of booking on line.

- 10.3 Bradford Theatres has a regular email list of approximately 73,000. Facebook support is high with 23,800 'likes' and we have 9,500 Twitter followers. Social media is used for regular updates and interaction with customers as well as paid for advertising campaigns. Theatres are investigating further ways that digital media can be used.
- 10.4 The majority of marketing spend on individual productions is negotiated as part of the deal with visiting companies, especially for the large budget Alhambra Theatre productions. In addition, occasionally bespoke campaigns are undertaken to promote the venue as a first choice destination, for instance the Alhambra Theatre has undertaken marketing campaigns based on it's unique selling point of offering 'the Total Package'. It is rare for venues and unique in the local area for a large theatre to be able to offer such attractive bar, restaurant and front of house facilities, as well as easy access and local parking offers. The campaign makes the most of these features and encourages audiences to spend longer in the city rather than just coming to see the show on stage.
- 10.5 Bradford Theatres takes part in an customer data analysis report 'Spotlight' undertaken by &Co, the regional arts marketing agency. This includes audience mapping, geographical data, financial yield analysis, hotspots, drive-time and mosaic audience profiling. The report also gives access to other regional venues data for benchmarking purposes. Information from this report is used for targeted marketing activity and audience development, ensuring that spend is planned based on the best available market intelligence.

11. Recommendations

- 11.1 Members are invited to ask any further questions they have of the Theatres Service at this time.