

Title of Report:	Riverside Theatre Service Contract Review
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	19 October 2021
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Resilient, Healthy & Engaged Communities
Outcome	Council will work to develop and promote stable and cohesive communities across the Borough
Lead Officer	Head of Community & Culture Arts Service Development Manager
Cost: (If applicable)	£107,500

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£107,500
Included in Current Year Estimates	yes
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	10302
Staffing Costs	n/a

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Aug 2016 (CAH strategy)
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date: 2019
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: n/a
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to review Council's current service contract with the Riverside Theatre - 1 August 2021-31 July 2022 and approve their annual support of £107,500.00.

2.0 Background

Council adopted its first Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategy in May 2016. The strategy spans a five-year period, effective until 2021.

The strategy focuses on 5 key themes and associated strategic aims, the first of which is of key relevance to this report, namely *'Enhancing our cultural venues & assets'*, with a view to *'use our landscape and our cultural assets and activities to enable opportunities for both local people and visitors to participate in the culture, arts and heritage of the area.'*

- The relevant outcomes from within the strategy for this project includes:
- Increased participation in cultural activities and programmes.
- Increased and appropriate partnerships in place.
- Cultural assets maximised by working in partnership; increased levels of collaboration.

Riverside Theatre is owned and managed by the Ulster University and is located in Coleraine. It has been specifically designed and marketed as the only operating professional theatre venue within the Borough, seating up to 360. The theatre can facilitate an orchestra pit in the centre of the auditorium for up to twenty players.

The unique nature of the Riverside theatre facility is described by the University as

'The Riverside is unique, in a Northern Ireland context, by having both a totally variable stage and seating facility..... Overall, Riverside's main auditorium can be configured and used in up to six different ways - hence our claim to uniqueness in an NI context.'

In contrast, Council's facilities are designed as multi- functional spaces and do not have the same capacity in terms of design and available formatting. Roe Valley Arts & Cultural Centre uses a 221 seat auditorium for a variety of activities, however its stage is limited in terms of capacity. Flowerfield has a 150 seater auditorium and specialises in musical provision. Ballymoney Town Hall's auditorium is 350 capacity multi-function civic space with raised staging.

A report was brought to the Leisure & Development Committee on 15 October 2019 reviewing the legacy partnership arrangement with the Riverside and providing options moving forward including a proposed 10% reduction in financial support. This proposal was declined by Council at a subsequent meeting on 5 November 2019, during which Council agreed to maintain the annual funding support of £107,500.00 and defer decision on any potential amendments to the contract for consideration in 2021.

The value of the contract is £107,500 per year and it includes the following key elements:

- The delivery of a range of music events, drama, dance, talks and literary events, including professional productions, schools' and educational productions and community/amateur presentations.
- Participation in joint programming working groups with Cultural Services staff to ensure alignment of provision across the Council area and ensure complementarity.
- Development of joint cultural programmes.
- Development of joint marketing materials to maximise the promotion of arts provision across the Borough.

3.0 Review of Riverside Theatre Provision 2020-21

The contract sets out a number of targets for the theatre. A summary of achievements for 2020-21 and proposed targets for 2021-22 is as follows:

Description of activity	Indicative target	Achievement 2020-21	% target achieved	PROPOSED 2021-22 TARGETS
Public events - these include drama, music, dance, talks, literary events, exhibitions & workshops	60 events	70 events	117%	64 events
	7,500 participants /attendances	2,150 participants /attendees	29%	8,100
Exhibitions	4	1	25%	0
Creative workshops for young people	50 workshops	43 workshops	86%	50
	1000 participants	470 participants	47%	900

2020-21 was an exceptionally challenging year for the cultural sector in terms of the pandemic with many venues striving to establish continuity of service through new and challenging methods such as virtual/online activity and outdoor activities when restrictions have allowed.

4.0 Riverside Theatre Provision 2021-22

4.1 Working in partnership with Council

The Riverside Theatre has previously exceeded the targets set for 2017-19 and continues to provide a varied programme of events, which equally supports both professional performance in a range of art forms and community arts activities.

Regular meetings take place between the Arts Service Development Manager and the Riverside Theatre Manager to ensure a co-ordinated approach to programming and complementarity in provision between the theatre, Roe Valley Arts & Cultural Centre and Flowerfield Arts Centre.

Collaborative programming opportunities between venues this year include Halloween, NI Science Festival, Diverse Futures NI and creativity and well-being initiatives. Opportunities to maximise and enhance the marketing and promotion of all the venues, both in print and online, continue to be developed.

4.2 Widening access to under- represented or disengaged groups

Many of the programmes detailed below will be offered free to the local community and specific programmes such as Diverse Futures NI specifically target Section 75 communities. Ulster University Widening Access department also offers bursary places to the youth theatre for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The events will be delivered both in person and online to reach as many participants as possible in the local community.

In the eventuality of any restrictions imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic, Riverside will endeavour to deliver the outlined programme by the following methods: **Online** – via

website / virtual spaces / social media channels /Zoom/YouTube & Facebook Live and pre-recorded; **Socially Distanced** and using alternative (larger) University spaces; **Outdoors**– making use of the large outdoor spaces on campus and in the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough.

4.3 Activities/projects to be delivered on behalf of council

The following activities are not inclusive of the broader activities delivered by the theatre, such as comedy acts, pantomime, music etc. Council would have traditionally made a contribution to the operational costs of the theatre in general.

However officers have been working in conjunction with the University to ensure activities the council may agree to fund will be closely aligned to CC&GBC’s cultural strategy in order support the agreed outputs and outcome commitment of both our strategy and business plans, particularly in relation to:

- Supporting young people to improve existing, or to gain new skills.
- Offering new creative experiences in order to increase learning opportunities and recognise the value of the arts in terms of wellbeing.
- Increase accessibility and usage of Council supported cultural facilities or services.
- Greater levels of appreciation of arts and heritage by the public.

Proposed Programme October 21-March 22				
Collaborative Project Descriptor	Performance Indicators / Outputs	Projected Cost	Alignment to CC&GBC Cultural strategic objectives	Alignment to CC&GBC Cultural Strategy Outcomes
Riverside Youth Theatre - Theatrical skills workshops for primary and secondary school children - with opportunity to perform in a public production.	40 x sessions 1,000 participants	£30,000	To support the creative development of our young people and creative practitioners through training, skills development and providing opportunities to showcase work.	Young people supported who improved existing or gained new skills.
Fighting Words Free Creative Writing/ Literacy programmes for children & young people.	12 x workshops 300 participants	£15,000	To support the creative development of our young people and creative practitioners through training, skills development and providing opportunities to showcase work.	Young people supported who improved existing or gained new skills.
Riverside Live Lounge – Free drop in live art events (performing arts/ cabaret/ music/ drama/ visual arts) showcasing work of emerging young artistic talent from Ulster University and the local community.	48 x live sessions 1000 participants	£15,000	To support the creative development of our young people and creative practitioners through training, skills development and providing opportunities to showcase work.	Young people supported who improved existing or gained new skills.
Halloween Programme – series of events / lectures and podcasts – 3 initiatives exploring local historical perspectives.	6 x initiatives 1000 participants	£2,500	To use the landscape, cultural assets and activities to enable opportunities for both local people and visitors to participate in culture, arts and heritage of the area.	Increased accessibility and usage of Council supported cultural facilities or services.

			To promote a sense of pride, identity and deeper understanding of our area by bringing together the many stories, histories, identities and languages.	Clients find engagement with service to be enjoyable or useful, or have learned or discovered something.
SYLVAN – Outdoor Promenade theatre piece in the UU campus woodland trail with Tinderbox Theatre Company.	4 x events 2 x free workshops 200 participants	£5,000	To use the landscape, cultural assets and activities to enable opportunities for both local people and visitors to participate in culture, arts and heritage of the area. To promote a sense of pride, identity and deeper understanding of our area by bringing together the many stories, histories, identities and languages.	Increased accessibility and usage of Council supported cultural facilities or services. Better appreciation of arts and heritage by the public and public institutions.
BEING HUMAN FESTIVAL – series of events / talks and podcasts	5 x events 5 x talks 5 x podcasts 1000 participants	£15,000	To use the landscape, cultural assets and activities to enable opportunities for both local people and visitors to participate in culture, arts and heritage of the area. To promote a sense of pride, identity and deeper understanding of our area by bringing together the many stories, histories, identities and languages.	Increased accessibility and usage of Council supported cultural facilities or services. Clients find engagement with service to be enjoyable or useful, or have learned or discovered something.
NI Science Festival programme of events - a series of workshops, talks and events exploring the connectivity between art & science for children & young people and the theme of science and Healthy Ageing for adults.	6 x workshops 5 x talks 2 x events 1000 participants	£15,000	To support the creative development of our young people and creative practitioners through training, skills development and providing opportunities to showcase work	Young people supported who improved existing or gained new skills. Clients find engagement with service to be enjoyable or useful, or have learned or discovered something Better appreciation of arts and heritage

				by the public and public institutions
Diverse Futures NI / Books Beyond Boundaries -The aim of the project is to provide a platform and opportunity for previously underrepresented ethnic minorities, residing in Ireland and Northern Ireland, to engage with genres of speculative fiction.	1 project 10 x sessions 500 participants	£10,000	To ensure increased access to and participation in culture, arts & heritage to excluded groups To promote a sense of pride, identity and deeper understanding of our area by bringing together the many stories, histories, identities and languages.	Increased accessibility and usage of Council supported cultural facilities or services Clients find engagement with service to be enjoyable or useful, or have learned or discovered something Better appreciation of arts and heritage by the public and public institutions

The proposed continuation of Council support of £107,500.00 represents an estimated 34.6% of the overall projected budget for Riverside Theatre for 2021-22. 62% of Council's support is directly attributed to artistic programme delivery, with 22% towards technical and management costs, and 16% towards marketing, promotion and necessary licensing costs, as illustrated below:

Item	CCG Council Contribution (£)	CCG Council Contribution (%)
Direct support for Programme Fees/ Production	66,500.00	62%
Technical Programme /Duty Management Costs	23,850.00	22%
Marketing, Licencing, Overheads contribution	17,150.00	16%
	107,500.00	100%

5.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that subject to satisfactory annual performance reviews and Council budget setting process, Council continue to support Ulster University's Riverside Theatre to the sum of £107,500 p.a. through a service-based contract for a period, not exceeding two years in order to maintain the operation of the only professional, bespoke theatre venue within the Borough.