

Title of Report:	Riverside Theatre Service Contract Review
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure and Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	11 th June 2019
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 Cultural Services Manager

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

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

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to review Council's current service contract with the Riverside Theatre - 1 August 2017-31 July 2019.

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. Riverside Theatre accounts for an average of 47% of the total number of arts centre based activities funded by Council through its own dedicated arts venues and through the funding it provides to the theatre. Similar activities are provided in terms of external hires, music events, drama, dance, talks and literary events, however Riverside 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 238 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 14 June 2016 reviewing a legacy partnership arrangement with the Riverside and providing options moving forward. A recommendation was agreed and subsequently approved by Council on 28 June to provide continued support through a service based contract with the University, to be reviewed after one year, in order to maintain the operation of the only professional, bespoke theatre venue within the Borough. 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 marketing materials to maximise the promotion of arts provision across the Borough.

Subsequently, in September 2017, Council agreed to award the contract for a further two year period. This is due to end on 31 July 2019 and is now subject to a review.

3.0 Review of Riverside Theatre Provision 2017-19

The contract sets out a number of targets for the theatre. A summary of achievements for 2017-19 is as follows:

Description of activity	Indicative target	Achievement 2017-18	% target achieved	Achievement 2018-19	% target achieved
Public events – these include drama, music, dance, talks, literary events, exhibitions & workshops	60 events	189 events	315%	144 events	240%
	11,676 participants /attendances	21,903 participants /attendees	187%	25,710 participants /attendees	220%
Exhibitions	4	5	125%	4	100%
Creative workshops for young people	26 workshops	88 workshops	338%	100 workshops	384%
	950 participants	962 participants	101%	2927 participants	308%

The Riverside Theatre has 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 Cultural Services Officers 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. Opportunities to maximise and enhance the marketing and promotion of all the venues, both in print and online, continue to be developed.

4.0 Resources

The targets agreed by Council in 2016 for the delivery of theatre based activity had been based on existing outputs. The Theatre has exceeded the targets on a year by year basis, with a need therefore to reconsider the original targets contained therein.

However, the budget for this project has remained static with no uplift for the last 3 years at £107,500. With continuing pressures on Council budgets, no additional budget available and no uplift within other programming areas within the service area, it would be recommended therefore, that targets be amended, but that these are limited to a modest uplift to mitigate against the budget available.

5.0 Recommendation

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, to coincide with the duration of Council’s Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategy and in order to maintain the operation of the only professional, bespoke theatre venue within the Borough.