

## **Corporate & Social Inclusion Select Committee**

A meeting of Corporate & Social Inclusion Select Committee was held on Monday, 30th July, 2007.

**Present:** Cllr David Coleman (Chairman), Cllr Mrs Ann Cains, Cllr Aidan Cockerill, Cllr Mick Eddy, Cllr Mrs Suzanne Fletcher, Cllr Roy Rix, Cllr Mick Womphrey

**Officers:** S Chaytor (Tees Active); D New (RES); J Trainer, D Ladd, M Henderson (LD); R Kench (CESC)

**Also in attendance:** J Davey (Managing Director, Riverside Promotions); and I Broom (Accountant, Riverside Leisure Promotions)

**Apologies:** Cllr Andrew Larkin, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell

### **CSI 4/07 Minutes of the meeting held on 19th June 2007**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th June 2007 were approved subject to Cllr Eddy being added to the list of those present.

### **CSI 5/07 Review of Theatre Subsidy**

The Committee continued its review of Theatre Subsidy and undertook a tour of the Billingham Forum Theatre, guided by John Davey – Managing Director, Riverside Leisure Promotions

During the tour, and in response to Members' questions, information relating to the following issues was received: -

#### Access

- A hearing loop was available in the theatre and 2 boxes for people needing wheelchair access. There was no audio description facility for the blind.

#### Building, Fixtures and Fittings

- A policy of repair rather than renew had been adopted in respect of fixtures and fittings. Seats were periodically assessed and refurbished when necessary. A considerable amount of similar work had been undertaken in the Bar and Function Room
- The capacity of the Theatre could not be significantly expanded because of its design i.e. a round auditorium within square building.
- Cinema Equipment was still present and working in the theatre, however, it was only used for running advertising.
- The stage was one of the largest provincial stages in the Country and could host most West End shows.
- It was explained that when the contract had been first let £160k had been spent, by Riverside Promotions Ltd, on refitting kitchen facilities, however, following problems associated with the deterioration of the building, water damage had rendered the kitchen unusable and it was now used as a

Storeroom

Production

- the Theatre had made a production 3 years ago that had toured the UK.

Corporate Boxes

- the Theatre did have Corporate Boxes located in the Circle, but usage was in decline.

Following the tour, Members considered a number of papers that provide background information, including: -

- Customer Satisfaction Information
- A letter from Management providing information relating to the subsidy, attendance etc
- A Cabinet report relating to the condition of the Billingham Forum and identification of options for refurbishment/redevelopment
- Comparative Information with other theatres
- A copy of the contract between Riverside Promotions and the Council.

Mr Davey provided an overview of the work undertaken by Riverside Leisure Promotions, in connection with the Theatre and he summarised the key points of the contract his company had with the Council.

Members considered the information provided and asked the witnesses and officers a number of questions. Discussion centred around the following areas: -

- BVPI General Survey – clarification of who asked the questions was needed.
- Cinema – Could films be shown in the theatre during quiet periods? It was explained that this had been tried, however, it was found not to be commercially viable, due to low attendance, and had been curtailed.
- Wider Economic benefits – Theatre Management explained that it had undertaken a survey to gauge demand for eating facilities before or after performances. Responses indicated little demand.
- Running costs – Mr. Davey explained that his company had reduced running costs significantly, mainly via reducing staff overheads. Noted that Riverside Promotions had reduced the subsidy given per head on attendance.
- Theatre School – Members noted that there was a waiting list for 6 – 16 year olds to use this facility and queried if there was an opportunity to reduce the list. It was explained that the theatre relied on teachers to take the classes. There were a limited number of teachers who ran the classes ‘for the love of it’ and they received a relatively small payment. It was anticipated that teachers engaged on a purely commercial basis, would increase costs considerably.
- Advertising – The Theatre advertised in the Press, on T.V and 60,000 brochures were delivered twice every year. 35,000 of the brochures were sent

directly to individuals who were on the customer database. Outlets received commission on tickets sold so it was in their interests to display advertising material prominently. It was noted that blanket advertising was not always the best option; the theatre knew its customer base and targeted it. Members asked for copies of the brochure distribution list.

- Reviews - Members queried if the local press published reviews of performances. It was explained that the press were offered free seats but few, other than the Gazette, attended. Examples of reviews could be provided.
- Rolling Contract - Members noted that because of the rolling contract, Riverside Leisure delayed booking shows until signature. This had affected which shows were available this year.
- Incentives/Complimentary tickets – these were largely at the discretion of producers/promoters.
- Theatre Club – noted that there were currently 80 members of the Theatre Club and numbers had been steadily reducing. Members of the club had first call on booking shows and there was a 2 for 1 offer on Monday evening performances.
- Subsidy – In addition to the theatre subsidy it was indicated that there might be an indirect subsidy in terms of payment of utility bills.
- Questionnaire – Members asked for a breakdown of the specific areas the TS post codes related to.
- Programming - Members noted that there were no arrangements to specifically cater for different ethnic groups.

Discussion took place on issues relating to the programming of shows that included potentially offensive material.

The Committee considered the overall mix of programming at Billingham and was provided with similar details, from other theatres, as a comparison. Members accepted that the theatre experience offered at the ARC was different to that offered at the Forum Theatre. Equally, other theatres in the region had a number of different venues within the same complex, where different types of shows could be offered. It was therefore difficult to make 'like for like' comparisons.

- Bars and Function Room – A party night was sold as part of a show package. The bar was operated prior to shows and during the interval. Further details could be provided.

Concluded that:-

1. the Committee be provided with the distribution list for the theatre brochure.
2. in terms of the audience questionnaire, the Committee be provided with a breakdown of the specific areas that the TS postcode related to.

3. the clarification of the BVPI general Survey be provided to Members.

**CSI  
6/07**

**Work Programme**

Members of the Committee considered the project plan.

CONCLUDED that the project plan be noted.

**CSI  
7/07**

**Date of next meeting**

Members of the Committee discussed a date for the next meeting. It was agreed that the next meeting would be 30th August 2007.

CONCLUDED that the date of the next meeting would be 30th August 2007.