

# **CULTURE & LEISURE REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**17<sup>th</sup> February 2009**

## **A PLACE TO PLAY – A REVIEW OF MUSIC VENUES IN SUNDERLAND**

### **REPORT OF THE CITY SOLICITOR**

**Strategic Priority : Healthy City, Learning City  
Corporate Improvement Objectives: CIO1 & CIO3**

#### **1. Why has this report come to the Committee?**

- 1.1 This report provides Members of the Culture and Leisure Review Committee with an update on the progress in relation to the policy review on music venues in Sunderland.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 At the Culture and Leisure Review Committee meeting held on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2008 Members agreed to invite a selection of musical groups to attend the review committee to add to the evidence base as part of the policy review process.

#### **3. Current position**

- 3.1 As part of the research into the policy review, and to provide some of the evidence base on which the committees recommendations will be founded, it is proposed to invite a variety of music performers to the review committee over the coming months to perform and more importantly share their experiences of music performance in Sunderland.
- 3.2 One of the objectives of the review is to identify the major barriers to music performance and rehearsal. Inviting performers from a range of musical styles to the review committee will allow members to hear first hand the experiences of these performers in relation to the Sunderland music scene.
- 3.3 Members will be able to find out from performers what makes a good venue, what it is like playing in Sunderland and through the knowledge of experienced performers, who have played extensively across the region, be able to draw comparisons with other areas.
- 3.4 Focus groups have now been held with music promoters, venue owners, young people from the Oxclose Music Project and most recently with council officers.

#### **4. Sunderland University Big Band**

- 4.1 The University Big Band was formed with assistance from funds obtained by the University Development Team. Not only is the Band one of a growing number of non-academic opportunities for Students at the University, but it has catalysed the University of Sunderland Big Band Jazz Competition. The funding for this event was sought by the Trust from a number of sources including the Arts Council, the City of Sunderland and Boddingtons, and we are very grateful for their support.
- 4.2 The band currently meets for rehearsals every Tuesday evening in the Priestman Building of the university at 6.15pm. All levels of musicians are welcome and the band leader is Bill Watson.

#### **5. Timetable for the Review**

- 5.1 Also attached for Members information is the review timetable which outlines the various activities and evidence gathering that has taken place and is to still to be undertaken as part of the review process.
- 5.2 Members of the review committee will be invited to attend the various focus groups and visits that are to be undertaken as part of the policy review and will be kept informed of all review activities as and when they are arranged.

#### **6. Visits to Music Venues**

- 6.1 The first of two visits to music venues took place on Wednesday 28 January 2009 when members of the committee visited a diverse range of venues located in neighbouring authorities. This included the Sage in Gateshead, the City Hall and Cluny in Newcastle and The Studio in Stockton.
- 6.2 The diversity, programming of events, organisation, management set-up and day-to-day running of the venues differed from one to another and each had seemed to find or developed its own niche within the marketplace.
- 6.3 Unfortunately the scheduled second visit was due to take place on Monday 2 February 2009 but due to the atrocious weather conditions a late decision was taken to postpone and rearrange this event to another day.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 Members may wish to give consideration to any particular aspects of music performance that they would like to ask the performers in relation to the policy review work.

## **8. Recommendation**

- 8.1 That the Committee note the comments provided and that the evidence gathered is submitted and used as part of the research for the policy review on Sunderland venues.
- 8.2 That the Committee note the timetable for the policy review.

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**Possible Questions for the Sunderland University Big Band**

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Can you tell us a little about the band and where you have played in Sunderland and elsewhere?

How does Sunderland compare with other parts of the region as a place to play?

From your own experiences is there a healthy audience in Sunderland for music?

Do you think Sunderland has the right mix/types of venues to cater for the city in relation to music styles, audiences and locations?

Do you think any existing venues have the potential to be developed to meet the requirements of Sunderland as a music city?

Could Sunderland benefit from a new venue in the city, is there that demand?

What barriers, as performers, have you experienced either playing in Sunderland or elsewhere?

How easy is it for music performers to get a gig and play in Sunderland?

How could Sunderland improve in music venues from a performer's point of view?