

At a meeting of the CULTURE AND LEISURE REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 17th JUNE, 2008 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor J.B. Scott in the Chair

Councillors Ellis, Errington, Foster, P. Gibson, G. Hall, Howe, Mordey and Wares

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the Committee on behalf of Councillors T. Martin and Wake.

Minutes of the last Meeting

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 22nd April, 2008 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

Item 8 – Empire Theatre Annual Report Update 2007-2008.

Councillors J.B. Scott and Wares declared a personal interest in the item as Council appointed Members of the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust.

Response from Cabinet – Policy Review – Not Treading Water

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with feedback from the Cabinet meeting held on 28th May, 2008 which considered the Committee's Policy Review, "Not Treading Water".

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Members were advised that the Cabinet accepted the findings and recommendations, save where there were any recommendations which had financial implications. The financial implications would be subject to the identification and availability of resources through the budgetary process.

Cabinet commended and congratulated the Review Committee and its Officers for their hard work in undertaking the Policy Review.

2. RESOLVED that the report of Cabinet's endorsement of the recommendations be received and noted.

Terms of Reference of Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with the opportunity to consider proposals for the future role and operation of the Review Committees which had been designed to better reflect priorities for the Council and Partners and to prepare for the implementation of new legislation.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Work Programme 2008-09

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached for Members' consideration a draft work programme for the Committee's work during 2008-09.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Rhiannon Hood, Assistant City Solicitor, presented the report advising that the Committee's recently appointed Review Co-ordinator, Nigel Cummings, would be taking up his post on 23rd June, 2008.

Councillor P. Gibson expressed the need to seek a greater engagement with the public. While he welcomed the provision of Officer reports he believed obtaining user opinions and public perceptions of the services to be reviewed was vitally important.

Councillor G. Hall referred to the user satisfaction survey at Appendix A of the report and asked how the information had been obtained. Sal Buckler, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, advised that the information had been derived from the 2007 Annual Residents Survey undertaken by MORI. The Survey comprised interviews with 1,200 Sunderland residents together with booster surveys carried out with various groups to ensure a representative sample.

4. RESOLVED the draft work programme be approved.

Priorities for Policy Review

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) which invited Members to identify priorities for the Committee's policy review work during the 2008-09 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Consideration was given to the report and Councillor Ellis stated that she would be particularly keen to see the Committee undertake a review of music development in the City.

Councillor Gibson referred to the topic of Arts in Education suggesting that paintings currently in stock within the City's Museum and Art Gallery could be displayed within the City's schools. Members noted that Art in Education could make an ideal topic for a mini policy review.

Accordingly it was:-

5. RESOLVED that Music Development be agreed as the Committee's main topic for Policy Review during 2008/09 and that Arts in Education form the subject for a mini review.

Empire Theatre Annual Report Update 2007-2008

The Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which invited Members to vote and comment on the work ongoing within the Sunderland Empire Theatre and the monitoring systems currently in place with regard to the contract with Live Nation.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Councillor Foster referred to the category of complaint 'unhappy with cast change' and asked if this occurred regularly. Vicki Medhurst, Principal Librarian, replied that it did not. The majority of complaints in this category referred to the production of Godspell whose lead actor was forced to withdraw after injuring his leg.

Councillor P. Gibson welcomed the clauses in the Contract with Live Nation which committed the Theatre to delivering a wide and diverse education and community outreach programme.

Councillor Errington highlighted the need to ensure that arrangements were in place to communicate to ticket holders if a performance was cancelled.

Councillor Hall expressed sadness at the small attendances for events such as Alice the Musical and Councillor Howe expressed his disappointment that the Empire catered mostly for musicals and rarely staged plays.

Chris Alexander, Head of Culture and Tourism, advised that to a certain extent attendances at the Theatre were secondary to ensuring it catered for the City's broader community. Live Nation were renowned for the types of shows detailed on the schedule rather than for a focus on plays. It was important to note that the Empire was a regional theatre and as such there was a balance between the range of shows put on at the Empire and those at the Theatre Royal. In addition, Mr. Alexander advised that the Royalty Theatre in Sunderland provided plays on a regular basis.

Councillor Wares recommended the Royalty Theatre as an excellent venue to see plays performed. He feared that if the Empire did seek to provide a regular series of plays it would threaten the viability of the Royalty and he would not wish to see this happen.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted and that the Committee continue to receive an update report on the Management and Performance of the Empire Theatre on an annual basis.

The Chairman then closed the meeting, having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance.

(Signed) J.B. SCOTT,
Chairman.