

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 13 July 2023

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director –  
Environment and Regeneration

**PORTFOLIO:** Employment, Learning and Skills, Community  
and Culture.

**SUBJECT:** The Brindley Theatre

**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To set out the financial position of the Brindley since its opening and request Members delegate the full commercial programming of the Brindley Theatre to the Brindley Manager and Leisure Services Divisional Manager.

This matter was discussed in detail at the Employment, Learning and Skills, and Community Policy and Performance Board (ELS & C PPB), on 19th June 2023. Members of the PPB presented reasons both in favour of and against the proposal. The PPB emphasised the need to take into account the wider views of Members. After careful consideration, PPB Members agreed to submit the report to the Executive Board.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- 1) the report is approved; and**
- 2) the Board delegates the full commercial programming of the Brindley Theatre to the Brindley Manager and Leisure Services Divisional Manager in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Employment, Learning and Skills, Community and Culture.**

**3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Brindley Theatre opened in 2004 and operated with a large subsidy from the Council, in excess of £1 million per annum.
- 3.2 By 2011 the Brindley was generating income of £477,333 with expenditure of £1,042,751 and therefore still running at a £565,418 deficit. This deficit had to be reduced if the venue was to continue to

operate.

- 3.3 In order to reduce the deficit a commercial management review was embarked upon for the Venue in 2012, with the former Chief Executive and the former Strategic Director Enterprise, Community and Resources. Instrumental to this review was an overhaul of the venues programming to a more varied and commercial programme, to be more inclusive and engaging for the local community and to provide something for everyone. Please follow the link to current programme <https://thebrindley.org.uk/> brochures will be provided at the meeting.
- 3.4 Pre Covid (2017/18) the Brindley was generating income of £1,263,659 with expenditure of £1,263,051 with a £393 deficit. The change in fortunes was directly as a result of the varied programme.
- 3.5 Through the Covid period (2019 – 2022) the venue continued to break even due to Government Grants from the Culture Recovery Fund.
- 3.6 In 2024 a large extension will commence at the venue as part of the Town Deal Fund - Reconnecting Runcorn programme. This will make the venue an aspirational cultural hub for the borough. The refurbishment will naturally require additional revenue in order to function, as the extension adds a considerable amount of new floor space. It is important therefore, to look at ways to protect the reputation that has been built through the Brindley brand as a sub-regional theatre and increase income opportunities, wherever possible.
- 3.7 The commercial programming of the venue is critical to maximising income and to maintain the venues break even position in a highly competitive and challenging marketplace. The Brindley Manager and Leisure Services Divisional Manager would resume full responsibility for the programming and when the need arises, consult the Operational Director for Community and Greenspace and the Executive Director for Environment and Regeneration.

#### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Brindley supports all the Council's priorities.

#### 5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 As outlined in the report, the figures speak for themselves. Operating commercial programming has been critical to reducing the subsidy requirement from the Council. If the programming is restricted, then new subsidy will be required.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children & Young People in Halton**

The current programme provides ample opportunity for children and young people not only to come and watch performances, but to be involved in performances, which can improve confidence and raise self-esteem. We have over 90 Dance Schools who regularly use the Brindley for rehearsals and shows. In addition, the Halton Primary Arts Network schools regularly use the performance space.

### **6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The Brindley supports the Council's priorities from an employment learning and skills perspective as it is a key employer in the town with over one hundred staff, largely made up of casual staff with flexible hours.

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

The venue is a social gathering place and can help reduce loneliness. The venue also has free to use spaces; the gallery and café area, with free Wi-Fi and as it becomes home to the Runcorn Old Town Library and a larger café/ restaurant area the opportunities for local people will increase and include free PC access.

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

Advice has been taken from Cheshire Police Counter Terrorism Unit for the existing Brindley and the extension, to promote a safe venue for customers and staff.

### **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

The theatre is an important selling point when attracting inward investors and businesses to the borough and is the key flagship project within the Reconnecting Runcorn programme.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The most significant risk to the Brindley theatre is that to its reputation and long-term financial sustainability. We acknowledge that it is a Council run venue and it needs to compete with commercial run venues in the sub region. The Brindley's reputation can be damaged by cancelling acts and uninviting performers. The agents and promoters of shows are in a contact with each other. We want to avoid putting doubt into any agents' minds that their show could be next. If the Brindley gets tarnished as censorship venue, we will lose performers and by losing performers, we lose income.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The Brindley Theatre is open and fully accessible. As part of the new extensions a Changing Places facility will be installed which will not only serve the Brindley, the wider town centre.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no direct climate change implications as part of this report. However, the Brindley extension project is including significant climate supporting measures. These were reported to Executive Board on 20 April 2023 (EXB111).

10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

10.1 None under the meaning of the Act.