

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE - 23 JULY 2013

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING, HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY SUPPORT

HERTFORD THEATRE – REQUEST FOR CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN
NEW TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT AND AUDITORIUM SEATING

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To present a request for up to £164,500 capital to upgrade: a) lighting, audio and other technical equipment, and b) the seating in the auditorium.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE: To recommend to Council that:

(A)	£64,500 is added to the Capital Programme for essential upgrades to audio, lighting and technical equipment at Hertford Theatre (as specified in Essential Reference Paper C); and
(B)	£100,000 is added to the Capital Programme for upgrading the seating in the auditorium at Hertford Theatre.

1.0 Background

1.1 Since re-opening as Hertford Theatre in December 2010, following refurbishment, remodelling and rebranding, the theatre has exceeded its original business plan targets cumulatively by approximately £115k (subject of annual review report to Community Scrutiny 24/09/13).

1.2 The works carried out in 2010 were confined to areas outside of the main auditorium; creating new studio, gallery, bar/café, foyer and meeting room/multi use spaces. Aside from the installation of new digital cinema equipment, the main auditorium remained in its

previous condition.

- 1.3 Because of the success of the venue since re-opening, both in terms of the quality and range of its programmes and of the increase in footfall and usage, the technical equipment and seating serving the main auditorium have been exposed to greater than anticipated wear and tear. There are increasing levels of demand and expectation from customers, production companies and performers.
- 1.4 Following consideration of a project initiation document (PID) at its meeting of 28/05/13, the council's corporate management team agreed to support a proposal to seek Executive approval for investment of up to £164,500 of capital to upgrade the technical equipment and seating in the theatre's main auditorium. The case for such investment was agreed in order to enable continued growth in the business within the context of better than anticipated performance against original business plan targets.

2.0 Report

Technical equipment

- 2.1 The technical manager at the theatre has set out a detailed argument and rationale for the proposed upgrades to lighting, sound and other technical equipment as attached at ERP B.
- 2.2 In summary the costs associated with the specification are as follows:

Lighting equipment £16,368
Sound equipment £34,587
Technical back stage equipment £13,544
Total £64,499
- 2.3 The technical equipment is needed for the start of the new season in autumn 2013.

Seating

- 2.4 The seating is now nearly ten years old and was designed to be split into three parts to cater for the previous programmes of use characterised by markets, antique fairs, dinner dances and wrestling rather than the current programme dominated by drama, music, dance, cinema and professional pantomime.

- 2.5 There are two main problems with the current seating:
- a) the design requires an inordinate amount of time and resource to retract for flat floor events and then to re-instate for shows, limiting the theatre's ability to respond flexibly to customer demand, and
 - b) the infrastructure is creaky and noisy, proving unacceptable levels of interference particularly during some of the more sensitive drama, film and musical performances.
- 2.6 Initial research shows that these defects could be resolved either through refurbishment or replacement for an approximate cost of up to £100,000.
- 2.7 An independent technical surveyor will be commissioned to ensure that the specification for the upgrade will meet the theatre's needs and provide good value for money. The specification will include outcomes that will deliver a step-change in a) the quality of customer experience in relation to intrusive noise, sense of stability, access and general comfort, and b) the flexibility and utility of the mechanism for retracting and reconfiguring the seating.
- 2.8 The actual contractual cost for the optimum solution will be determined through appropriate procurement route in line with the council's standing orders and financial regulations.
- 2.9 If approved, the work will be scheduled to take place during summer quiet period of 2014.

Funding options

- 2.10 Additions to the Capital programme will be funded in the same way that the rest of the Capital programme has been funded for 2012/13 to 2015/16. Funding is through the application of Capital receipts and internal borrowing.
- 2.11 Hertford Theatre has exceeded the original business plan targets that were set by almost £115k since the start of the scheme. The additional benefits that have been generated have not been ringfenced to the Theatre for re-investment into the scheme and have formed part of the general fund accounts of the Council. It is

therefore appropriate that the costs of internal investment be covered by the General Fund.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

1. Original business plan approval 11 May 2010:

http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/Data/Executive/20100511/Agenda/Item_6_-_Castle_Hall_Investment_Proposals.pdf

2. Second annual report 28/08/12:

<http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s15835/Hertford%20Theatre.pdf>

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