

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 28 NOVEMBER 2011

REPORT ON: PROPOSAL FOR THE FUTURE USE OF THE WHITEHALL THEATRE

**REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, LEISURE AND COMMUNITIES**

REPORT NO: 532-2011

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Committee with an update on the discussions which have taken place between the Whitehall Theatre Trustees, Leisure & Culture Dundee and the City Council and to seek the Committees approval to proceed with a one year pilot to ensure the continued operation of the Whitehall Theatre

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that:

- The City Council request that Leisure & Culture Dundee enter into a Service Level Agreement with Dundee City Council for the provision of the services specified in Paragraph 4.2 of the Whitehall Theatre for the 12 month period from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012.
- The Education Department commit to the booking of the Whitehall Theatre on a regular basis for Dundee Schools Music Theatre Education and Shows, and as an additional venue for music education where appropriate.
- The Finance Department provide advice and support to the Whitehall Theatre Trustees in relation to the development of a longer term Business Plan which would look at the operational model and viability of the Theatre.
- The City Council provides the Whitehall Theatre with access to any appropriate procurement contracts available to the Council.
- The City Council would appoint a Duty Manager for the Whitehall Theatre and this person would be seconded to the Whitehall Theatre to manage the day to day domestic arrangements for Public and Cast and Health and Safety. This post would be funded by the City Council for the pilot period up to 31st December 2012, and the appointment would be a tripartite agreed appointment, made by Dundee City Council, Leisure & Culture Dundee and the Whitehall Theatre Trustees

2.2 It is further recommended that the City Council ask Leisure & Culture Dundee to:

- Provide the administrative co-ordination for the operation of the Whitehall Theatre.
- Provide a ticketing and box office service for the Whitehall Theatre.
- Liaise with promoters and co-ordinate future bookings of the Whitehall Theatre.
- Agree and deliver a marketing and promotion plan for professional events.
- Provide web based promotion and listing for all bookings at the venue.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Whitehall Theatre (Dundee) Ltd has provided detailed financial costings based on their accounts for the financial year up to December 2010. Based on these accounts the Whitehall Theatre (Dundee) Ltd has provided a projection on the likely expenditure and income if this proposal were to proceed. Based on these projections and the commitments received from local potential users, including the Education Department, it is the Council's opinion that the Theatre is a financially viable option

The City Council has been asked to provide support for a twelve month period, effectively three months from the current financial year 2011/12 and nine months from the next financial year. This support will be in the form of the appointment of a seconded Duty Manager at an estimated cost of £30,000 per annum, and this cost will be met from the Chief Executives Revenue Budget in the current financial year, and appropriate provision will be made in the 2012/13 Revenue Budget.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

The Whitehall Theatre is owned and maintained by the Whitehall Theatre (Dundee) Ltd, a body which currently has funds available for the ongoing maintenance. The Theatre was managed and operated by a discrete and separate operating company, Whitehall Theatre Ltd. Members will be aware that, during the recent past, the trading company, Whitehall Theatre Ltd., has found it increasingly difficult to trade on a viable basis.

The company went into receivership in late August 2011, and the Trustees of the Whitehall Theatre (Dundee) approached the City Council requesting its assistance to ensure that there can be continued access to the venue and to ensure that it is saved for the future benefit of the citizens of Dundee.

When the venue was first established, it was envisaged that the Whitehall Theatre would become the focal point for amateur dramatic groups in the City. As such, its programming has traditionally not competed with either the Caird Hall or Dundee Rep. Latterly, to try and ensure its viability, the range and diversity of commercial shows was expanded. While initially successful as a strategy, this has contributed to the exposure of the operating company to financial risks and, in part, accounts for its insolvency.

In the intervening three months there has been a series of discussions between the Whitehall Theatre Trustees, Leisure & Culture Dundee and the City Council to identify an arrangement that would see the Whitehall Theatre continue to operate. The following is the outcome of those discussions and what is now being proposed to the three respective parties.

4.1 Whitehall Theatre Trust

The Whitehall Theatre Trustees will continue to own the building and will be responsible for holding the appropriate licences and for ensuring that the venue is fit for purpose.

The Theatre must be fit for purpose and any health and safety issues identified and addressed in an appropriate manner.

An immediate programme of health and safety works has been identified by the City Council and this must be instructed, completed and paid for by The Whitehall Theatre Trustees.

There are further property surveys scheduled to be completed over the next two weeks, the outcome of these surveys may require further work over the medium to long term, and these works will also be agreed and instructed and paid for by the Whitehall Trustees

Whitehall Trust would be responsible for day to day arrangements, opening, closing, allocation of dressing rooms, cleanliness, health and safety, staffing and access and egress arrangements.

4.2 Leisure & Culture Dundee

Leisure & Culture Dundee will provide the following services:

- With immediate effect Leisure & Culture Dundee would provide a booking agent service to allow bookings for 2012 to be taken.
- Leisure & Culture Dundee would operate the Box Office for the Whitehall Theatre.
- Leisure & Culture Dundee would be the booking agents for both professional and amateur shows and will follow up leads forwarded by the Whitehall Trust and any that may be generated from other sources and will negotiate terms and conditions that would be agreed and favourable to the Trust within the terms of a service level agreement.
- Leisure & Culture Dundee would supply technical guidance and support within the terms of a service level agreement and also advice on Health and Safety legislation.
- Leisure & Culture Dundee would advise on best front of house practice and would assist in delivering this.
- Leisure & Culture Dundee would assist in promotion of the theatre.

It is important to stress that the Whitehall Theatre Trustees would continue to own the theatre and that Leisure & Culture Dundee would be providing the above detailed services , but would have no liability for the operation or condition of the theatre.

4.3 Dundee City Council

The City Council will provide the following input to the proposed arrangement:

The City Council would appoint a Duty Manager for the Whitehall Theatre and this person would be seconded to the Whitehall Theatre to manage the day to day domestic arrangements for public and cast and Health and Safety. This post would be funded by the City Council for the pilot period up to 31st December 2012, and the appointment would be a tripartite agreed appointment, made by Dundee City Council, Leisure & Culture Dundee and the Whitehall Theatre Trustees

The Education Department will commit to the booking of the Whitehall Theatre on a regular basis for Dundee Schools Music Theatre Education and Shows, and Theatre as an additional venue for music education, where this is appropriate.

The Finance Department will provide advice and support to the Whitehall Theatre Trustees in relation to the development of a longer term Business Plan which would look at the operational model and viability of the Theatre.

The City Council will provide the Whitehall Theatre with access to any appropriate procurement contracts available to the Council.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This report has been screened for policy implications in respect of sustainability, strategic environmental assessment, anti-poverty, equality impact and risk management.

It is considered that the continuation of the Whitehall as a venue for community and theatrical events will contribute to the promotion of inclusion and will have positive benefits for the City of Dundee.

There are no major issues arising.

6.0 CONSULTATION

The Director of Education, Director of Finance and the Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) have been consulted in the preparation of this report and are aware of the implications arising. The Trustees of Leisure & Culture Dundee have been consulted and are in agreement with the role their organisation and staff are being asked to play.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

David K Dorward
Chief Executive

Stewart Murdoch
Director, Leisure & Communities

23 November 2011