

Report to Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Agenda
Item:
A.3

Meeting Date: Thursday 6th April 2017
Portfolio: Culture, Heritage and Leisure
Key Decision: Not Applicable:
Within Policy and Budget Framework NO
Public / Private Public

Title: Old Fire Station Arts Centre (Progress and Performance Report)
Report of: The Deputy Chief Executive
Report Number: CS07/17

Purpose / Summary:

This report provides the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel with an update on operations and performance at the Old Fire Station since it's opening in May 2015, and more particularly since reopening following reinstatement after Storm Desmond.

Recommendations:

The Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel are asked to consider the report and comment on progress and performance to date.

Tracking

Executive:	N/A
Overview and Scrutiny:	N/A
Council:	N/A

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The development of the Old Fire Station on Warwick Street, Carlisle took place during 2014 and marked a significant step forward in achieving the vision for arts and culture as set out in the Carlisle Plan.
- 1.2** Between January and June 2014 local artists and the community were invited to come in and use the building, before work actually started on the refurbishment. During the pilot period 237 people participated in a mixed range of art & performance, with many more attending the performances. This period of time taught us a lot about how to use the building and also worked as a really positive way to engage with artists, performers and potential audiences. Feedback was extremely positive and it proved to us that there was a need for such a venue in the area.
- 1.3 The Opening**

The venue officially opened in May 2015 offering a variety of entertainment including music, theatre and comedy, alongside workshop, meeting and rehearsal space.

Between 16th May and 3rd December (6 ½ months) 75 events were held at the Old Fire Station and over 4,000 people visited the venue. This averages out at just over 11 events per month and over 600 people per month.

In December 2015 Carlisle was hit by flooding. The Old Fire Station was hit by over 8ft of water destroying everything on the ground floor. The flood destroyed the main venue area and the Bistro including all the equipment, stage and furniture.

Prior to the building being reinstated after the floods officers took the opportunity to review the versatility of the venue and make minor improvements. This included painting the main room black, installing a new stage, improving the PA equipment and creating a box office.

During this period a four shows were also relocated to Harraby Theatre and The Brickyard. These events were sell out shows and were moved as they could not be re-scheduled. Throughout the reinstatement phase we received a lot of positive feedback from the public, agents, performers and the media, which really embedded again the message that the venue was something the area really needed.

2.2 The Re-opening

The venue reopened at the end of September 2016 and audiences began to build again. The programme was once again varied but this time we had much more community contact and local people wanting to put on their own events. Having the opportunity to start again helped us to learn some valuable lessons and to come back with more confidence. In our first period we relied heavily on a number of outside agents to assist us with booking and artist deals, since the reopening we have undertaken many more bookings ourselves.

Alongside our mainstream programme we also engage with local groups such as charities, schools, students, local bands and theatre groups. Although we now do most of the programming ourselves, we have developed some really productive working relationships with local arts and community groups, promoters and agents, some of which are listed below:

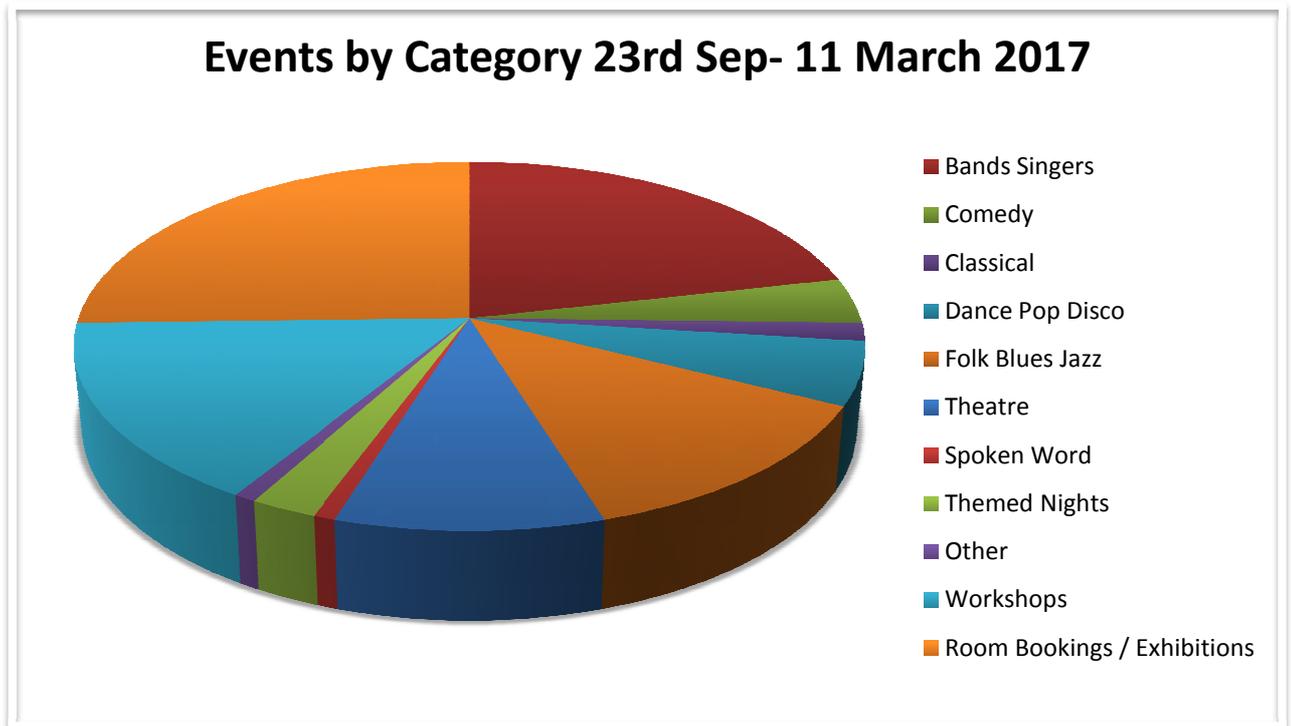
- University of Cumbria now lease our Dormitory Room as a long term exhibition space
- Highlights North handpick theatre and drama from events such as Edinburgh Fringe and bring these to Carlisle
- SSD Concerts are major national music promoters who are now working with us to provide a balanced programme of musical acts from long standing classics to fresh new local talent
- Music in the Round supply our classical music programme
- Mighty Boof, our local promoters programme mainstream music acts

Between 23rd September 2016 – 11th March 2017 (5 ½ month period) 126 events were held at the Old Fire Station, an average of 23 events per month. In comparison to the pre-flood period at the Old Fire Station the number of events per month has increased by over 50%.

Since reopening, the demand for the venue has increased significantly, to the point where the demand is now greater than our booking capacity. By this February the programme for 2017 was already so full we have started to take bookings into the middle of 2018. We are becoming more efficient in programming and are continually looking at ways to improve the venue.

In the 5 ½ month period since reopening over 7,994 people have visited the venue, an average of 1453 people per month and 63 people per event. See tables below:-

Event Types	Number of events	Event Types	Number of events
Bands/ Singers	27	Theatre	12
Comedy	5	Spoken Word	1
Classical	2	Themed Nights	3
Dance/ Disco/ Pop	7	Other	1
Folk & Blues/ Jazz	16	Workshops (RB)	20
Room Bookings inc Exhibitions32			



2.3 Recent analysis of Old Fire Station customers has identified the following trends in service users*

Gender of Ticket Buyers	%
Male	64%
Female	36%

Age of Ticket Buyers	%
Under 18	4
19-29	33
30-39	29
40-49	18
50+	16

Location of Buyers	%
North West	67
Scotland	24
North East	9

Customer Locations	Number of sales
Carlisle	3.4k
Dumfries	416
Whitehaven	129
Newcastle	97
Lancaster	80
Kendal	37
Glasgow	31
Kilmarnock	31

Top customer sales locations	Area	Number of sales by %
1	North West	67
2	Scotland	24
3	North East	9

*Data taken from Skiddle (online ticket sales) Feb 2017

3. FINANCES

3.1 The net annual budget for the Old Fire Station is £251,800. As of the end of March 2017 the actual spend to date was £252,819 (23/03/2017). A small degree of further income and expenditure is expected before the year end but we anticipate the outturn to have the Old Fire Station almost exactly on budget for 2017/18.

3.2 Expenditure - Total budgeted annual expenditure for the Old Fire Station is £356,700 and actual expenditure is £306,654 (23/07/2017). This is below budget for a full year, but effectively over profile for the trading or operational period that the venue has been back open for. However, expenditure within this year includes a £20,000 contribution from the general revenue budgets into the capital works to fund increased flood resilience and (uninsured) 'betterment' works to improve operational elements of the building during reinstatement.

We also took the opportunity while 're-stocking' after the floods to invest a further £13,000 in upgrades to the technical equipment above and beyond like for like replacement (as covered by insurance). This means we will have to hire less equipment in in future years.

This year's expenditure also includes 'forward booking costs' – the deposits paid on shows and acts well into 2018, so there is always an element of forward counting within Old Fire Station expenditure.

3.3 Income - Total budgeted income expectation for the Old Fire Station is £104,900. Actual income to date is £56,508. While this is down against the whole year budget it is broadly correct for the 7 month trading period we have had since re-opening (and income is obviously not subject to any 'forward' benefit so there is always a degree of lag between expenditure and related income).

The effective annual shortfall in income (as a result of being closed for 5 months) has been managed by appropriately controlling expenditure to ensure that the net annual financial position for the Old Fire Station has been achieved.

There are five principle income streams (outlined below).

Income stream	Annual target	7 month achievement
1) Grants	£27,000	£7,000
2) Sale of Meals and Refreshments	£6,100	£0
3) Ticket Sales	£56,200	£46,705
4) General Letting	£11,900	£800
5) General Rent	£3,700	£1,946

3.4 Grant income is down as we were ineligible to apply for a further Arts Council funding until we had completed the programme agreed in 2015/16 (interrupted by the floods). We completed this in December 2016 and received the final balance of payment. We are now in the process of submitting a bid for 2017/19.

Our profit share from sales of meals and refreshments are settled in arrears with our caterer based on his audited accounts (which are produced at the end of a financial year).

Ticket sales have been strong, we have delivered 83% of our annual target in a short 7 month trading period and, with further income still due, by the end of the financial year we should nearly meet the 12 month target in a much curtailed trading period.

General letting income is effectively on hold. We have completed discussions with the University of Cumbria for them to occupy office space for large periods of the

year in 2017/18 (which would deliver the required income in entirety) and potentially through 2018/19 too, so we have not pursued short term tenancies this year.

5. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel are asked to consider the report and comment on progress and performance to date.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES

6.1 Further develop sports, arts and cultural facilities to support the health and wellbeing of our residents

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**Appendices None
attached to report:**

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- **None**

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS/RISKS:

Corporate Support and Resources - None

Community Services – None

Economic Development – None

Governance & Regulatory Services – None