

OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

8 November 2016

Present: Councillor T Williams (Chair)
Councillors S Cavinder, K Crout, J Dhindsa, A Dychton, K
Hastrick, A Joynes

Also present: Councillor Taylor (Portfolio Holder for Client Services)
Jo Ditch, Theatre Director, Watford Colosseum (HQ
Theatres) (items 12 to 15)
Alvin Hargreaves, Operations Director, HQ Theatres (items
12 to 15)

Officers: Corporate, Leisure and Community Client Section Head
Contract Monitoring Officer

12 Apologies for Absence/ Committee membership

There were two changes of membership for this meeting; Councillor Dychton replaced Councillor Rindl and Councillor Crout replaced Councillor Kent.

13 Disclosures of interest

There were no disclosures of interest. It was noted that councillors were customers of the Colosseum.

14 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2016 were submitted and signed.

15 Contract with HQ Theatres

The Panel began by thanking the representatives from HQ Theatres for providing a tour of the Colosseum.

The Corporate, Leisure and Community Client Section Head provided the Panel with some background to the annual report. This was the first such report that had been produced and followed good practice demonstrated in other contracts. Officers held monthly client meetings with HQ Theatres covering landlord issues, performance indicators and customer feedback.

Alvin Hargreaves provided members with an overview of HQ Theatres and the venues operated. He described the role of head office underlining that responsibility for programming lay with the Theatre Directors who best understood the venues and the local communities. The programme offered by the Colosseum was diverse and included high-profile entertainment, comedy and music. HQ Theatres focused on the whole customer experience and hospitality was therefore an important part of the offer. This enabled them to reduce the reliance on the revenue grant from the council. He invited the Panel to consider whether there were ways that HQ Theatres could better report on their activities to the council, including direct and indirect economic and social outcomes.

Jo Ditch underlined how the venues operated by HQ Theatres differed and that there was a strong network of venue directors. She provided examples of recent successes in programming.

Alvin Hargreaves outlined the challenges experienced by the venue. These included the availability of acts as it was not a producing theatre. They were dependent on tours and this meant there were busy seasons and quieter seasons. They were open to suggestions on how the programme could be developed and improved. However, the Colosseum offered hospitality and themed events which they produced themselves.

Officers described that they worked well with HQ Theatres to help them achieve their objectives and to ensure the building remained in a good condition.

There was a discussion about the programming process following a suggestion that there could be more music to appeal to the black and minority ethnic communities in Watford. It was explained that programming needed to be on the right scale for the venue. HQ Theatres were open to considering the acts described. The Colosseum was a commercial and receiving venue. All sections of the community were part of the outreach work undertaken. Representatives from HQ Theatres undertook to look at whether there would be any suitable acts and to meet with Councillor Dhindsa separately to discuss the matter further.

Following a question about community events, officers explained that the hire rates had been negotiated and the community days were no longer part of the contract. It was found that the special community hire rates were intended for Watford residents or Watford-based groups. The Panel were reminded that

other venues in the town, such as the community centres, were available for smaller community events. It was hoped that community rates could be agreed for other areas of the Colosseum than the main auditorium.

The Panel considered the Colosseum's use of volunteers. Representatives from HQ Theatres described how the volunteers were a part of all their theatres. They were motivated and volunteered due to their interest in the area or for social reasons. They were valuable ambassadors for the Colosseum. The use of volunteers kept costs down. They described how they were working with West Herts College and offered work experience.

Considering the financial performance of the venue over the previous year, the Panel were advised that it had not been the best year financially but the income was on track. The autumn/winter season was the busiest time for the venue. It was agreed that in future this information could be refined to enable comparisons between contract years.

Councillors discussed the use of the marketing budget. Alvin Hargreaves explained how some of budget was recharged to producers. He described the marketing activity which took place including paid-for advertisements in the press, on the radio and on Facebook. The customer database was used to send targeted emails and social media was also a valuable tool.

Following questions about the status of the staff, it was confirmed that certain staff had no fixed hours in their contracts and the seasonal nature of the work played a part in this. It was agreed that an updated overview of the staff be circulated in January to include the numbers from the black and minority ethnic communities and the number of disabled staff.

Discussing the relationship with the council, it was confirmed that there was a good relationship and the building asset was well-maintained. The representatives from HQ Theatres asked the meeting to consider the Colosseum for events and meetings.

The Panel considered the feedback provided by customers. The ways that feedback could be given were described to councillors. The number of complaints and the number of compliments were questioned. There was a view that the number of complaints significantly outnumbered the number of compliments about the service provided by the venue. The likelihood of registering a complaint versus a compliment was discussed, particularly in the context of a business like the Colosseum which customers tended to visit on an occasional basis. The value of complaints to improve a service was underlined. The Portfolio Holder drew the Panel's attention to the impact of the inclusion of

an additional quarter's feedback which had a disproportionately high number of complaints.

Officers noted that the Community Survey would ask about satisfaction levels with the Colosseum. It was suggested that councillors could use their networks to encourage feedback about the service. The social value of the contract was reviewed annually in a report by the Procurement Manager and provided information which could not be captured by performance indicators including the impact of the supply chain and the sustainability of the contract.

HQ Theatres were thanked for their time and input.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Panel note the report.
2. the actions requested be undertaken.

16 **Conclusions and recommendations**

Officers provided an overview of their working relationship with HQ Theatres which was positive. The company was making longer-term plans which demonstrated their commitment.

The Panel considered the conclusions.

The following was agreed:

- the end of year report be noted.
- that the Panel recommend that more consideration be given to sourcing musical acts for the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities.
- that more detail be brought to members on staff ethnicity and disability.
- that further customer satisfaction feedback be sought by the Colosseum staff.
- that monthly meetings with officers continue and Members to be kept updated on the financial situation.

Councillor Dhindsa agreed to share the contact details of the relevant person at the Prison Service who arranged work placements.

Officers agreed to share the link to the customer satisfaction survey with the Panel.

RESOLVED

1. that the report and Members' conclusions be noted.
2. the actions requested be undertaken.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 8.45 pm