

G Live Annual Report Presentation meeting Wednesday 27 November 2018 at 10:00

Present

From GBC:

Jonathan Sewell (JS)
Charlotte Brindley (CB)
Kevin Hopkins (KH)
Cllr Pauline Searle (PS)
Cllr John Redpath (JR)
Cllr Tom Hunt (TH)

From HQ Theatres:

Alvin Hargreaves (AH)
Derek Aldridge (DA)

ITEM		ACTION
1.0	Apologies for absence & introductions	
1.1	Apologies were received from Cllr Patrick Sheard, Cllr Graham Eyre, Cllr James Steel and Peter O'Connell.	Info
1.2	The meeting began by everyone introducing themselves. The Venue Director, Derek Aldridge (DA) then presented the executive summary and a tour of the venue was then undertaken. For the purpose of the minutes, the executive summary is noted under item 3.1 below and some of the comments made during the tour are also included under the appropriate section.	Info
2.0	Presentation of the Annual Report by Derek Aldridge	
2.1	DA provided a summary of HQ Theatres & Hospitality (HQT) which now has 13 contracts, following the recent successful award for the operation of New Theatre, Cardiff. DA then introduced the Annual Report, which covers the period 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019, G Live's eighth full year of operation. DA welcomed questions and comments throughout the presentation.	Info
3.0	Main highlights & Executive Summary	
3.1	DA began by presenting some of the main highlights for 2018/19 and the executive summary. DA was very pleased to report that G Live saw attendances grow again, with 258,000 main hall attendees during the period, the highest number yet. G Live also won the HQ Theatre's 'Venue of the Year' award for 2019 and it was also shortlisted for the 'Most Inclusive Venue' in the Blue Badge Awards (in the People's Choice category). The Customer Survey results were also very promising, with 99% of customers rating the venue 'good' or 'very good' and 96% for staff friendliness rated as 'good' or 'very good'. Mystery guests scores were also very strong, with an average score of 91.7% over a 6-month period. HQT is proud to be working with so many groups within the local community and the building is able to host various activities at once. DA commented that today, Busy Lizzies are in, as well as a conference for Heartlands (NHS Trust) in addition to the	Info

	Shakespeare School's festival rehearsals. During the venue tour, DA explained that many venues do not have the luxury of being able to host numerous activities at once due to noise ingress and limited access to certain facilities, however this is not the case for G Live.	
3.2	HQT have replaced the use of plastic water bottles with recyclable aluminium cans and are continuing their commitment to the environment by introducing 100% plastic free cups for all hot and cold drinks taken in to the auditorium. HQT has also reduced their energy consumption through the installation of LED lighting within the foyers.	Info
3.3	The ability for customers to pre-order refreshments via the mobile app or website is contributing to the improved overall customer experience through alleviating the queues and providing that 'extra special' service when the drinks are delivered to the seats. DA commented that it is pleasing to see customers enjoy this service and the take up has been very good. This service also provides an opportunity for staff/ customer interaction while also enabling staff to better prepare the drinks because they are ordered in advance.	Info
3.4	PS wanted to pass on her thanks to the staff at G Live who were fantastic and looked after her granddaughter very well when she became unwell when attending a concert recently with her mother. DA thanked PS for her feedback.	Info
4.0	Programme Balance and Range	
4.1	DA then provided an overview of the year's programme. DA was pleased to report that 390 events were undertaken in the main hall, against the contract target of 265. A breakdown of these events is shown in the table on page 6 of the Annual Report. The number of community events also exceeded the Council's target, with 125 events taking place. DA was asked how much of an impact Hillsong Church has on this figure. DA confirmed that a large part of this figure (approx. 50-70 events) accounts for this however there has been a lot of work done to attract a number of groups and DA is pleased with the variety of community groups that use the venue, such as schools, charities, Guildford Vivace and hirers who return each year.	Info
4.2	DA was asked about the 'GPO' line on page 6. DA confirmed that the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra are no longer in operation, hence the zero figure. The meeting discussed the KPI's that were set prior to the building being built and therefore it was not known how the venue would perform and indeed what would be available/ on tour. PS added that the Civic Hall was historically the house for the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra and so the council had this in mind when setting the KPI's. DA agrees that targeting is required as it allows performance to be measured. DA confirmed that ideally, the new KPI's that are set for the new contract would be appropriate and flexible to allow for industry changes. JS agrees and explained that G Live is not a producing house and therefore is reliant on what is touring. If companies believe they can be successful at G Live, then they will book the venue if it is available.	Info

	<p>AH explained that the acoustics mean that the auditorium, which is a natural, dry space lends itself to spoken word and amplified performances. AH explained how the balances are made for different performances. Some buildings that are not naturally dry (i.e. known as 'lively') can be a challenge to soften.</p> <p>AH/DA emphasised that community use is integral to G Live overall and that the commercial success of the venue is very reliant on community use. It is therefore not considered by HQT as a 'bolt on' or just to satisfy a KPI. HQT work with various community groups to establish the right spaces and venues for them. Through engagement with the local community, HQT is able to develop key relationships while also giving the opportunity for HQT to cross sell and raise awareness of G Live and what it has to offer.</p>	
4.3	<p>DA then provided examples for each genre to highlight the breadth of the programme at G Live. Further examples can be found on pages 7 to 9 of the Annual Report.</p> <p>DA explained that the Children/ Family shows tend to be booked on a Friday and Saturday. Sunday's are limited due to the Hillsong hire, however DA is looking at other slots that are suitable for the audience, such as school holidays. These shows vary from orchestral productions of 'The Snowman' to adaptations of popular books such as 'Awful Auntie' by David Walliams.</p> <p>DA was proud that the International Concert series saw over 5000 attendees. The 2019/20 season has seen an increase in ticket purchases.</p> <p>Comedy and spoken word are very popular at the venue, due to the auditorium's capacity and acoustics. DA commented that he believes performers really want to perform at G Live and can be a perfect venue for comedians starting out or well known comedians adding to their large scale tour.</p> <p>DA added that live work has been very successful and appears to be increasing in popularity. G Live saw Sir Bradley Wiggins and Harry Redknapp and look forward to welcoming more speakers, such as Astronaut, Tim Peake. DA added that HQT's connections, such as the links with Surrey University enable G Live to host a number of technology related events.</p> <p>Dance and Musicals have also been popular at the venue, although it does have its challenges and so it's crucial to ensure communication with other Theatres to ensure the programming compliments each venue so that each operator can get the very best out of the booking. The past year has offered a variety of contemporary and traditional performances. Dirty Dancing proved to be very popular, as well as performances by Diversity which sold out. Performances linked with Strictly Come Dancing continue to be popular. DA is working hard to ensure the offering delivers quality performances (over quantity) so that the customers' experience is as good as it can be, as well as the performers having a packed audience to perform to.</p>	Info

	<p>The music programme was very broad. G Live was pleased to host National Touring Bands such as Scouting for Girls. Adam Ant is also booked in and the venue has been able to be part of large scale tours due to its strong reputation. This can be challenging due to the size of the venue being very different to the venues that put on large acts (i.e. arena size) however HQT is proud that these large acts are wanting to perform at a smaller, more intimate venue. DA does not want to dismiss the genres but highlighted the importance of selecting the right performances to compliment the programme and venue.</p>	
4.4	<p>DA then went on to outline the types of activities that take place in the other spaces; the Bellerby studio and Reception rooms.</p> <p>These rooms provide a space for a number of activities, such as Adult & Child classes, rehearsals, meetings, conferences, parties and so on. Many comedians who are starting out or trying new material will use the studio over a number of nights as it can accommodate 100 people.</p> <p>DA was asked whether HQT ever get the programming wrong. DA confirmed that the bookings are made 9 to 12 months in advance, during which time the profile of the act might change, there may be competition locally that wasn't known at the time and the number of attendees is more or less than anticipated. Marketing and promotion also play a big part as well as learning from historical data.</p> <p>Interestingly, the appetite for live entertainment has increased and is still increasing, even through uncertain times. AH referred to the recession in 2008, whereby attendances did not drop compared to other industries such as the travel industry. Customers seem to want to continue to go to the Theatre. The location of G Live and its accessibility means that many people can get good value and good quality entertainment at a convenient location. DA added that it is vital to keep the programme fresh and new so that G Live remains an attractive venue for everyone.</p>	Info
5.0	Creative learning	
5.1	<p>DA commented that Creative Learning is an integral part of G Live. HQT is proud of the relationships that have been built and are keen to work with local partners further to discover where the gaps are and what HQT can do to improve. Creative Learning plays a big part in the holiday programming i.e. it is not just theatre performances that take place. Some of the most successful activities are around computing and robotics which is really positive as HQT can then reach out to those that might not necessarily be so familiar with Theatres or the industry. TH commented that the Creative Learning provision at G Live is fantastic but suggested that the timings of it might limit attendance for those who may not be local or are trying to fit it around working hours. DA/AH thanked TH for his comments and confirmed they would look in to this, with the possibility of introducing 'bolt on' options.</p>	DA
5.2	DA went on to summarise the various school partnerships HQT	Info

	has, such as with the Guildford County school and Gosden House. HQT work closely with the teachers to produce sessions that meet the needs of the school. This could range from additional drama or music to sessions such as internet safety to meet curricula requirements.	
5.3	<p>DA highlighted a number of other Creative Learning projects, such as the Community choir that was set up by the Halow project, for those with learning disabilities.</p> <p>G Live also puts on Creatively Curious which are monthly sessions, based on different art forms, that vary from month to month with the purpose of breaking down isolation in communities across the board. DA commented that it is great to see the building and its many spaces used in this way. Attendees can be doing anything from poetry to arts and crafts. HQT continue to develop sessions in order to meet the mental health agenda, and is currently in discussion with veterans to establish a suitable programme.</p>	Info
5.4	<p>PS asked whether HQT have worked with the council in relation to the FISH (Fun In the School Holidays) programme. DA confirmed that he has in terms of marketing and promotion but is happy to liaise further with JS and the FISH Team.</p> <p>DA confirmed that HQT has done themed weeks during the holidays in the past but this time, he is looking at focusing on something different for each of the 8 days in August. DA is aware of the many venues locally that offer holiday clubs and so is working to compliment what is already on offer in the town.</p>	DA
6.0	Food, Drink and Hospitality	
6.1	<p>DA is pleased that G Live is supported by many staff who have a strong catering background both at the venue and also at Head Office.</p> <p>HQT continue to work hard to raise the awareness of the Mezzanine restaurant, which is a key task for the 'Meet and Greet' staff to ensure customers are informed of the different options available to them. DA explained that this is sometimes challenging in the industry, as regular visitors are defined as those that might attend once or twice per year and so the communication does take time and must be maintained to ensure customers are aware and reminded of the catering options.</p> <p>DA was asked how busy the restaurant gets. DA confirmed that this is dependant on the show but generally, if a show attracts the older demographic, then the restaurant tends to get booked up quite quickly in comparison to events that attract a younger demographic who generally are more sporadic and book nearer the time. DA confirmed that booking is not essential and the venue is stocked appropriately although customers are recommended to book.</p> <p>DA explained during the venue tour that customers are allocated a table for the night and so they are able to enjoy their second course during the interval, for example, rather than feeling rushed.</p>	Info

	<p>There are other events at G Live that are more relaxed and the catering is varied to compliment the type of event i.e. curry and a pint. A number of adjustments and additions have been made to further develop the catering offer and make it a more pleasant experience for the customer, such as the expansion of the bars with more till points and additional beer pythons at the café to help alleviate the queues at peak times. This, in addition to the mobile app (as mentioned earlier) makes for a smoother and more pleasant experience, particularly during what can be a very short interval to cater for a high volume of people.</p>	
6.2	<p>G Live is also able to cater for banqueting events for up to 450 people. The sales team on site are crucial to ensure the spaces are used and compliment what is already booked in. Christmas parties are also selling very well for next year and so it is clear G Live is developing a reputation for its ability to deliver these type of large scale events.</p>	Info
6.3	<p>DA then went on to summarise the bespoke customer service training scheme called Four Pillars that all staff are provided with. G Live is seeing the benefits of customer service training, which covers a number of areas, such as Customer types (align and adapt), product awareness, exceeding customer expectations and overcoming challenges. This programme has been extremely valuable as customer service is key to ensure people want to return in the future while also ensuring cross selling and up selling opportunities are taken. Staff also feel invested in, particularly casual staff that might not receive training at that level elsewhere. Staff are also incentivised through the 'star of the show' scheme. DA is keen to drive this on to the next phase of development, now that the venue is well established in its eighth year.</p>	Info
7.0	The Operator Agreement & Key Performance Indicators	
7.1	<p>DA explained that the main hall attendance figure for year 8 was very positive as although it is expected to grow year on year, this rate of growth is exceptional. DA referred to row 9 of the KPI table on page 18 of the Annual Report where dark days were at 57, G Live's lowest yet. DA explained that a number of dark days are required, particularly in August where the opportunity for maintenance is taken, some of which requires a number of consecutive days to complete.</p>	Info
7.2	<p>JR referred to recent discussions over the future procurement and asked DA what is important to HQT as an organisation in terms of measuring performance.</p> <p>DA confirmed that customer service is absolutely key. DA explained that the KPI that is used is based on how a customer were to rate the catering and hospitality. In the period, 67% of customers rated this at 'good' or 'very good' however this does not allow HQT to understand which areas require improvement i.e. HQT do not know whether the feedback relates to the quality of the food, the service, the queuing etc. and so further questions are required to seek understanding. This is done via monthly audits which include a bigger range of questions so that HQT can drill down in to the feedback and better understand customers' needs so that improvements can be made.</p>	Info

	DA also referred to the no. of events as a KPI. DA explained that HQT want to see a busy venue however it is important to not be 'busy fools'. DA explained that the programming needs to be right and be of a high quality. DA emphasised the importance of getting a strong audience attendance and high customer satisfaction rather than being wedded to the quantity of events.	
8.0	Customer Satisfaction	
8.1	The meeting was then taken through Customer Satisfaction Information (ref. page 18 of the report). DA explained during the venue tour that G Live is very accessible in terms of its lifts, including a lift which provides access to back of house areas which can be quite rare in older venues. DA explained how HQT is working hard to improve accessibility. This does not just focus on the physical provision i.e. the building but looks at improving the information to customers in terms of what they should expect and the lay out of the building so that the barriers that might be preventing those from attending are removed. DA commented that the Meet and Greet staff are crucial for this as they are able to identify customers' needs and can communicate the options for customers so that their visit is made as smooth and as pleasant as possible. DA added that HQT is currently looking at signage improvements as this too will help customers navigate around the building.	Info
8.2	DA then referred to the Friends of G Live scheme, that provides customers' with offers and discounts. DA confirmed that the annual charge for this scheme is £47.50. DA is pleased that most members renew and so retention is high. DA was asked why he thought this was. DA explained that some members are motivated by the financial discounts and others take up the membership so that tickets can be secured. Customers also receive a free bottle of wine at the restaurant when they renew.	Info
8.3	DA was asked about ticket touts. DA confirmed that this does happen occasionally and HQT work closely with producers on a local and national level as it is in everyone's interest to be vigilant on this i.e. artists want to protect their audiences and all parties want the event to be accessible and affordable. Information is also shared between parties in terms of patterns of purchasing so that ticket touts can be identified. AH explained that in instances where peak demand is known, customers are required to collect tickets from the venue. There are also restrictions put in place i.e. 2 or 4 tickets per person. Information and advice about tickets via certain re-sale websites e.g. Viagogo is also made very clear, as well as the Terms & Conditions about re-sales where the tickets can be voided. HQT will work very hard to relocate those customers who have purchased these types of tickets but it is not always possible. Members of the public can also go back to the organisation through credit card protection. HQT understand that customers cannot always attend and so a service is offered to those customers so that they can sell their ticket.	Info
9.0	Facilities and Health & Safety	

9.1	DA explained that Health and Safety continues to be a pivotal part of the venue operation. G Live is audited on a quarterly basis by an independent company whereby the overall score has increased. HQT will always be continuing to look at opportunities for improvement and make sure high H&S standards are maintained at all times.	Info
9.2	DA provided examples of various investments that were undertaken in the period, such as the installation of LED lighting in the foyer, CCTV upgrade, and faulty radiator replacement as well as upgrading the digital signage and installing additional pythons for the bar as mentioned earlier.	Info
10.0	Financial performance	
10.1	The profit share for the period is at its highest level, with over £70,000 being returned to the Council. The subsidy per attendee is down to £1 per attendee which equates to £1.88 for subsidy per head in the borough representing best value to date. DA is keen to continue this, the key of which is to increase income through up selling and seizing secondary spend opportunities, particularly as some income is not controlled i.e. hirer/ booking and overheads are controlled.	Info
10.2	JR made reference to discussions about what would happen if the subsidy would be reduced. It is accepted that the financial agreement needs to work for both parties.	Info
10.3	<p>DA was asked why the administrative costs were higher in August. DA explained that part of this could relate to a one-off redundancy. This is also a key month as Autumn activities are launched. DA is happy to circulate the August report, where the finances are broken down for the month. As above, a great deal of maintenance is undertaken during this period which might increase staff costs as well as a big focus on Creative Learning work, looking at the summer youth programmes.</p> <p>DA commented that August tends to be a quieter month for many theatres due to holiday trends, with London and other holiday destinations such as Blackpool being an exception where an increase in attendance is seen. A lot of the product is unavailable during this time of year due to performances being held elsewhere e.g. outdoor festivals.</p>	DA
11.0	Economic impact assessment	
11.1	DA then referred to the last page of the Annual Report (page 24) where an Economic Impact assessment was undertaken, which was new for this year's Annual Report.	Info
11.2	Everyone thanked DA/AH for their time and the meeting closed.	Info