

XX. HAZLITT THEATRE OPTIONS

The Leisure Manager introduced the report which had been produced following a consideration of the Council's Strategic Plan by the Policy and Resources Committee in September from which flowed several actions to inform the prioritisation required to enable the council to deliver services within budgetary constraints and respond to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. These included a review of the Hazlitt theatre.

The Theatre had been closed since the March 2020 lockdown period. It was hoped that the theatre would have reopened, with performances having been rescheduled to accommodate this. However, this had not been possible.

The Council and Parkwood Theatres, who hold the contract for the theatre, had entered into a 6-month interim arrangement, between April 2020 to September 2020, whereby the Council's monthly payments to Parkwood Theatres increased by £3.1k to allow the Theatre to re-open when feasible. Half of the additional funding had been used, with the remainder to be returned to the Council. The company's funding bid to the Cultural Recovery Fund had been denied and was in the process of appeal. The Council would be obliged to make the originally agreed monthly payments irrespective of whether the appeal was successful.

The Leisure Manager highlighted the issues of staff and building management in considering the contract's suspension or termination. It would be more cost effective for the Council to manage the building itself and re-examine the service provision in the future. The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development confirmed that discussions had taken place with different organisations concerning continued use of the building.

The Committee recognised that opportunities to resume services from the Hazlitt Theatre Complex would be considered in the future, given its importance to the Borough.

RESOLVED: That

1. It be recognised that subsidy paid to Parkwood Theatres to operate the Hazlitt Theatre is not sustainable under the Council's new Medium-Term Financial Strategy;
2. The Council should seek to reduce its monthly expenditure on the Hazlitt Theatre complex to a maximum of £8,630, that being the amount it would cost for the Council to mothball the building;
3. The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development enter into discussions with Parkwood Theatres and terminate the Hazlitt Theatre contract; and
4. Alternative uses, in the short and medium term, be looked into.