

# Brighton & Hove City Council

**Tourism, Equalities  
Communities & Culture  
Committee**

**Agenda Item 59**

**Subject: Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival**

**Date of meeting: 9<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**Report of: Executive Director for Economy, Environment and Culture**

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**Ward(s) affected: All**

**For general release**

## **1. Purpose of the report and policy context**

- 1.1 Brighton Dome and Brighton Festival (BDBF) is a key cultural asset, enhancing the city's reputation nationally and internationally. The organisation is recognised for artistic excellence, as well as for supporting a wide range of creative initiatives for young people and communities across Brighton and Hove.
- 1.2 The Council provides annual funding for Brighton Dome and Brighton Festival as part of the building's lease arrangements. In March 2021, this committee requested an annual report, detailing the impact of the organisation throughout the previous 12 months, combined with plans for the year ahead.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Committee notes the achievements of the organisation despite challenges presented to them, including significant delays to the capital works at the Corn Exchange and Studio Theatre.
- 2.2 That Committee support the Trust's plans for the forthcoming year 2023/24.

## **3. Context and background information**

- 3.1 Brighton Dome and Brighton Festival (BDBF) holds a long term lease with the Council, with 27 years remaining on the current agreement. The Council contributes £274,529 towards a sinking fund for maintenance of the Grade I listed building. In addition, an annual grant of £1.938m supports the annual Brighton Festival and a wealth of activities across all art forms.
- 3.2 BDBF is a long-standing Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and this year successfully secured their position in the Portfolio for the next three years. Income is also sourced through commercial activities, fundraising and membership schemes. The organisation delivers the citywide Create Music education scheme on behalf of the Council.

- 3.3 The organisation is a significant employer in the city with a permanent staff team of 148 employees, 84 casual music teachers and approximately 170 casual staff working across venue operations.

#### Activity Report 2022-23

- 3.4 The past twelve months has been an extended period of pandemic related recovery for Brighton Dome and Brighton Festival. Challenges presented by reduced audience numbers compared with pre-pandemic levels have been compounded by delays to the capital works at the Corn Exchange and Studio Theatre, and the impact this has had on programming and revenue limitations.
- 3.5 The organisation is on track to end this financial year with a planned deficit of £350,000, as forecast at the time of budget setting. This was due to the upfront costs of preparing for the reopening of the Corn Exchange and Studio Theatre, both staffing and infrastructure costs out of scope of the main capital works. There has been an inevitable delay on commercial income before the spaces can be properly marketed and operational. An increased in-year deficit has been mitigated through drawing on the organisation's reserves.
- 3.6 The return of full capacity events in the Dome Concert Hall, as well as delivering in person classroom music lessons, enabled earned income during the year of £5,369,999. This was a significant increase to 2021 when earned income was £1,843,983.
- 3.7 During the last 12 months the organisation earned 44% (18% in 2021 and 60% prior to the pandemic) of its normal operating income from ticket sales, sponsorship, catering and the private event income channeled through the trading company, Brighton Dome and Festival (Trading) Limited. 56% (82% in 2021 and 40% prior to the pandemic) of income came from grants and donations. Brighton Dome hosted 218 performances up to 31st March 2022, with audiences totaling 124,706. These results show an organisation steadily returning to the financial stability of 2018/19.
- 3.8 Create Music generated income from tuition and workshops totaling £1,778,137 (£1,617,107 in 2021). Total expenditure on Creative Learning activities increased to £3,482,933 (£3,134,932 in 2021). Create Music delivered school holiday programs under the Council's HAF scheme, offering music sessions with a healthy lunch for children in receipt of free school meals. Over 640 young musicians across Brighton and Hove and East Sussex, aged 7 to 16, took part in a Create Music Summer School.
- 3.9 The annual Brighton Festival in 2022 saw a return to a full programme of events since 2019. It was the 55<sup>th</sup> festival for the city. The theme of 'Rebuilding' brought people together and resonated throughout the city and beyond, restoring confidence in attending live performance without restrictions in place.
- 3.10 Brighton Festival had an estimated audience reach of 103,042 people (150,581 in 2019), which accounts for around two thirds of the usual audience reach (2019 and before), demonstrating an ongoing hesitancy to return to live events. This was mirrored nationally across many live events. There were 296 media stories related to the festival, including coverage on ITV News and two major Radio 4 shows focusing on the two guest directors.
- 3.11 Significant delays to the capital works on the Corn Exchange and Studio Theatre, caused by the pandemic and volatility of supply chains created by the war in

Ukraine, have caused a continuing background of challenges for the organisation. The project has faced rapidly rising costs, fundraising pressures, and significant delays to the programme. Generous additional financial support has been secured (over and above initial contributions) from Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Garfield Weston Foundation, Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust and the Lawson trust.

- 3.12 A commercial tender process for the newly built restaurant resulted in local business, Red Roaster, successfully being awarded the contract. This long-standing local business shares in BDBF's values around inclusion and sustainability. This will add an exciting new element to Brighton Dome's visitor experience.

#### Community Participation and Engagement Highlights

- 3.13 Community participation and engagement events took place throughout the year, notably symbolised by the construction of a 'Riwaq', which is a place of meeting and exchange. This was designed by Guest co-Director Marwa Al-Sabouni and erected on Hove Seafront for the duration of Brighton Festival. Over 22,000 people participated in 150 events, including community takeovers by partners including, Little Green Pig, Carousel, Best Foot Music and In-House Records.
- 3.14 The successful 'pay it forward' scheme, encouraging existing audiences to match-fund the organisation's contributions, offering free tickets to those unable to afford them, resulted in 650 redemptions in the festival alone. An Audience Club has also been established, offering supported opportunities to attend events for those facing barriers to doing so.
- 3.15 Two flagship projects for vulnerable young people continued. Miss Represented ran weekly sessions in schools and in Pupil Referral Units with young women at risk of exclusion. REPRESENT, delivered in partnership with Sussex Violence Reduction Partnership, is a team of artist-mentors and young men referred through the Probation service. Through weekly meetings they focus on creativity to open up conversation, develop talent and build a creative community. The project is co-designed by the participants as they discover what they need to move forward positively in their lives. Activities include studio time, ongoing education, mentoring and/or tuition.

#### Planning for 2023-24

- 3.16 This year will be a pivotal year for the organisation. With completion of phase 1 of the Royal Pavilion Estate Masterplan, restoration of the Grade I listed Corn Exchange, the organisation will focus on ensuring the successful opening and operation of two restored venues. Seating capacity in the Corn Exchange will increase to 500 and substantial improvements have been made to the 200 seated Studio Theatre. A new street-facing restaurant on New Road, new bars and front of house areas will improve the visitor experience. This will add further value to the city through increased visitors.
- 3.17 Production and back-of-house facilities will be upgraded, and a new heritage interpretation will help people to understand more about the history of these important buildings. A new rehearsal and development space, dedicated for artistic

use, will enable more effective partnerships with a wider range of community groups and arts practitioners.

- 3.18 The completion of the capital works will contribute to a decrease in running costs and enable a more efficient operation of the building. The new spaces offer BDBF the opportunity to generate increased earned income, to invest in the upkeep of the heritage building and offer an increased programme of artistic and community participation activities.
- 3.19 Highlights for the year ahead include the world famous Van Gogh Alive exhibition, which will be the first major event hosted in the Corn Exchange. The long run will enable the team to program other ambitious events for the remainder of the year. The 2023 Festival will take advantage of international partnerships, co-commission installations & mid-scale performances. CreaTech and the 5G testbed will support the organisation, their artists and international partners learn about new forms of creative collaboration. Children and young people's work will be showcased at all stages and there will be greater community ownership of venues.
- 3.20 After a successful pilot year, the In-House Artist scheme has been revised and extended. The scheme offers two diverse artists from the city financial and in-kind support, including free use of Anita's Room, the new creative space available as part of the capital works. In addition, monthly Creative Catch Ups in partnership with Ironclad Creative, are artist-led sessions at the venues which aim to connect, support, and make space for writers, directors, actors, producers and creative people.
- 3.21 The organisation is a member and financial contributor of the newly established Brighton & Hove Culture Alliance. As one of three leading organisations alongside the Council and Sussex University, the alliance will bring together key cultural organisations and individuals in the city to establish collective priorities, fundraise and deliver citywide projects.
- 3.22 Astute financial management and planning will continue to be a priority, particularly aligned to new operating business models, increasing costs resulting from inflation and an escalating cost of living crisis. Planned investment from designated funds in strategic initiatives to improve financial performance and protect unrestricted reserves will remain key objectives.

#### **4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options**

- 4.1 There are no alternative options to consider. BDBF is a well-established organisation which operates successfully. It remains the case that the assets are best placed in an independent organisation which is supported by the city council.

#### **5. Community engagement and consultation**

- 5.1 The organisation delivers a range of community focused initiatives, as outlined in paragraphs 3.13-3.15.

#### **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival have successfully recovered elements of their business after a significant impact from successive lockdowns, resulting in forced building closures and subsequent loss in income. Challenges remain with uncertainty about the future and audience numbers due to external factors, including the impact of inflation and rising cost of living pressures.

- 6.2 BDBF is entering an exciting new phase over the coming 12 months, with the opening of two restored venues. This will add significant value for Brighton and Hove residents and visitors to the city. The organisation's leadership team and its board of Trustees are carefully mitigating risk associated with opening and operating new buildings. A full programme of Festival events for 2023 will continue to build on the internationally recognized excellence of Brighton and Hove as an arts and culture festival host city.

## **7. Financial implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The Council contributes an annual grant paid to BDBF based on a legal agreement between the parties and to a sinking fund for planned maintenance items, and this is included in the Council's Planned Maintenance Budget held by Property & Design. The contributions are treated as ongoing commitments within the Council budget.

Name of finance officer consulted: James Hengeveld  
Date consulted: 27/2/23

## **8. Legal implications**

- 8.1 BDBF has the benefit of a 50-year lease commencing 1 April 1999. The lease requires the Council to provide revenue support via a Sinking Fund and an Arts Fund.

Name of lawyer consulted: Alice Rowland          Date consulted: 13/2/23

## **9. Equalities implications**

- 9.1 Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival's Equality and Diversity Action Plan incorporates all aspects of the organisation's operations. BDBF is recognised nationally for the diversity of its programming in both the year-round Brighton Dome programme and in Brighton Festival. They continue to invest staff resource and technical infrastructure into accessibility schemes, offering a wide range of interpreted, audio-described and captioned performances, relaxed and multi-sensory performances and assistance for those with hidden disabilities through the Sunflower Lanyard scheme.

- 9.2 Brighton Festival 2022 saw an audience of 11% identifying as deaf and/or disabled. Two new works were presented by integrated dance companies, Extraordinary Bodies and SMOOSH, a high-energy parade with wind and brass band and a troupe of dancers from Paraorchestra, in East Brighton and on Hove seafront.

- 9.3 BDBF have established an Anti-Racism Strategy with clear targets to diversify its workforce, as well as ongoing work to ensure the artists it presents and the audiences it attracts, are reflective of the communities the organisation serves.

## **10. Sustainability implications**

- 10.1 In 2021-22 BDBF carried out work to reframe their Environmental Policy and Action Plan from 2022 onwards. This looks towards 2030 as a milestone when they aim to have minimised Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions and offset carbon that cannot be eliminated from the operation. By 2030 the organisation will have firmly

embedded expectations set for suppliers and value chain. This contributes to the overarching aim of becoming Carbon Net Zero.

## **11. Other Implications**

### **Social Value and procurement implications**

- 11.1 BDBF have adopted a policy on Social Value, mirroring the Council's approach in the commissioning and procurement of services. They consider the ethical and environmental impacts of all purchases and activities through specific policy frameworks and allocate at least a 10% qualitative evaluation to social value in tenders. It has demonstrated, through recent appointments of restaurant partners and drinks suppliers the consistent application of its sustainable, local and ethical principles.

### **Crime & disorder implications:**

- 11.2 The Creative Learning strand of BDBF, which works with over 5,000 young people each week, engages young people in the arts and creativity. This provides meaningful activities during the evening and at weekends reducing the risk of engaging in antisocial behaviour.

### **Public health implications:**

- 11.3 Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival's community work supports health and wellbeing through their various community focused initiatives.