



Report to Policy Committee

Author/Lead Officer of Report: Hilary Coulson;
Interim Head of Libraries, Archives and Information Services

Tel: 0114 474 2084

Report of: Ajman Ali, Executive Director Operational Services
Report to: Communities, Parks and Leisure
Date of Decision: 13th March 2023
Subject: Library Theatre Hire Fees Increase

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? 1485				
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-				
<p><i>“The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).”</i></p>				

Purpose of Report:

To seek approval for the proposed increase in hire fees for the use of the Library Theatre, to reflect increasing cost pressures and the need to ensure financial sustainability for the future.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Communities Parks and Leisure Committee:

- Approve the proposed Scale of Charges for the Library Theatre to take effect from June 2023 set out at paragraph 1.6 of the Report.

Background Papers:

Lead Officer to complete:-							
1	<table border="1"> <tr> <td rowspan="4">I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.</td> <td>Finance: Kerry Darlow</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Legal: Nadine Wynter</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Equalities & Consultation: Ed Sexton</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Climate: Jessica Rick</td> </tr> </table>	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: Kerry Darlow	Legal: Nadine Wynter	Equalities & Consultation: Ed Sexton	Climate: Jessica Rick	
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<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>							
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Date: 02 March 2023							

1. PROPOSAL

- 1.1 The Library Theatre is a venue available for hire by members of the public, located in the basement of the Central Library on Surrey Street. It has been the home of community theatre in the city for over half a century, providing an affordable venue located in the heart of Sheffield's Theatreland that is conveniently situated, close to public transport routes and a variety of city centre hospitality venues. The Library Theatre has an audience capacity of 247. This is slightly reduced from 260 due to air filtration machines to improve ventilation.
- 1.2 The theatre has provided a platform for a wide range of community theatre groups, dance and performing arts groups, children's and youth theatre groups, schools, festivals, concerts, as well as professional and touring productions, allowing a diverse range of Sheffield's population to engage in affordable creative cultural activity.
- 1.3 Library Theatre hire fees were last increased in 2014, when fees were increased by an average of 33% to reflect increasing costs and pressures on the Library Theatre budget.
- 1.4 Following closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Library Theatre reopened in June 2022 with no increase in hire fees. This was to support restarting the Theatre's event programme.
- 1.5 Since June 2022 inflation and utilities costs have increased significantly and staff salary budgets have increased in line with the 2022 NJC agreed pay award, all of which have seen the costs for operating the Library Theatre increase above the allocated budget.
- 1.6 It is therefore proposed to increase the Library Theatre Hire Fees as per the proposed Scale of Charges:

The Library Theatre – Proposed 2023-24 Scale of Charges

Setup / Rehearsal Rates

Period of Booking	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning (0900-1300)	£90 (+20%)	£120 (+20%)	£190 (+18.75%)
Afternoon (1300-1700)	£90 (+20%)	£120 (+20%)	£190 (+18.75%)
Evening (1730-2230)	£180 (+20%)	£240 (+20%)	£240 (+20%)

Performance Rates

Period of Booking	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning (0900-1300)	£150 (+25%)	£200 (+25%)	£250 (+25%)
Afternoon (1300-1700)	£150 (+25%)	£200 (+25%)	£250 (+25%)
Evening (1730-2230)	£275 (+25%)	£325 (+25%)	£375 (+25%)

Additional Hours

Period of Booking	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
Daytime (0800-1800)	£20.00	£40.00	£50.00 (+20%)
Evening (1800-0000)	£40.00	£40.00	£50.00 (+20%)
Evening/Night (0000-0800)	£50.00 (+20%)	£50.00 (+20%)	£50.00 (+20%)

Hourly rates are available for additional time beyond the default slots listed above, or for unusual hire periods. Please note that there is a 3 hour minimum charge.

All Library Theatre Hires include a 1 hour grace period beyond the booked time on the last night of the booking for loading-out of scenery/equipment. Overruns beyond this will be charged at the hourly rates as above.

Week-long Hires:

Hirers who book the Theatre for an entire week (Sunday to Saturday) will be entitled to a 25% reduction on the charge for the Sunday. If the Theatre is let for a stage play the hirer may use the time from 10.30pm to 11.00pm without extra charge for the **dress rehearsal and final performance only**.

Off-Season Rates:

Hirers who book the Theatre during the off-season (defined as the months of January-February & August-September) will be entitled to a 25% reduction on the charge for the whole hire.

Bank Holidays:

Bank Holidays will be charged at Sunday prices.

Extras:

Piano Tuning: £40.00 + VAT

- 1.7 The proposed changes equal a 23% increase for a weekly hire. Week-long bookings are the norm, particularly amateur dramatic societies, although we will continue to offer daily hire. This will increase the average weekly rate charged to companies hiring the Library Theatre from £1788 to £2037 (including average load-in/out times and rehearsal times).
- 1.8 If fees had been increased annually since 2014 this would be equal to a 29% increase. As such, we are trying to balance high levels of inflation in recent years, whilst covering running costs and ensuring the Theatre's long-term sustainability.
- 1.9 We have endeavoured to benchmark the proposed increase against equivalent local venues. This indicates that the Library Theatre will remain the most affordable Theatre for hire in the city centre after the proposed increases are in place.
- 1.10 The increase would come into effect from 3 months after the decision on fees is made to allow companies to factor this into ticket prices if needed.
- 1.11 In future years, the Library Theatre hire fees will be considered alongside wider fees and charges for the Service and reviewed as part of the Council's budget setting process.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

- 2.1 A thriving Library Theatre contributes towards the Corporate Plan in terms of helping to boost the City Centre night-time economy by driving visits to the City Centre, and thereby bringing ancillary benefits in the form of driving business to local restaurants, bars, car parks, public transport and the like.
- 2.2 A report produced by consultants Chamberlain Walker for the South Yorkshire Mayor's office (<https://www.sheffieldculture.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Sheffield-CR-Culture-Arts-and-Heritage-Report-final.pdf>) found that Sheffield's Culture, Arts and Heritage sector makes a substantial direct and indirect contribution to both the local economy and to individual wellbeing, and that it was well placed to play an important role in the economic recovery of the city despite having been badly hit by the pandemic.
- 2.3 The benefits to individual wellbeing of participation in cultural life have also been well established, including improved mental health, reductions in social isolation and strengthening community cohesion.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 3.1 A survey has been sent to regular / recent / upcoming Library Theatre hirers (around 20 companies) inviting them to respond to a short series of questions regarding the impact of the proposed increases on their activities.

- 3.2 All respondents accepted the proposed increase, rather than opting for a lower fee increase; reflecting the need to make some improvements to the Theatre's technical equipment. It is worth noting that overall number of respondents is small (with 4 responses – 20% return rate)
- 3.3 The survey also asked hirers' what the likely impact of the increase would be on their use of the Theatre and on their own audiences. Responses indicated that the impact of the proposed fee increase would mean a slight rise in ticket prices by £1-£2 per ticket (for the majority). No responses said the fee increase would mean they would stop or reduce their use of the Theatre.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality Implications

- 4.1.1 Access to an affordable Cultural offer in the City Centre is essential to all who live in Sheffield. The Library Theatre has been part of this offer for many years. The increase in fees will have an impact on those who hire the Theatre and everyone who has attended or proposes to attend a performance, especially during the current cost of living crisis.
- 4.1.2 In mitigation the increase has been kept to a minimum to cover the increased operating costs, and make some minor improvements, aimed at making the venue a welcoming space for all who use it. It would still remain the lowest priced City Centre performance venue both for hirers and audiences.
- 4.1.3 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. This assesses that the proposal would have low impact on voluntary groups hiring the theatre (supported by the consultation findings) and on audience members, who will see costs passed on through estimated £1-£2 ticked price increases (which would still make the Library Theatre cheaper than alternatives). The EIA also identified the potential to assess whether an increase in Hire Fee may make possible small improvements to the experience of audience members (for example, people with hidden disabilities).
- 4.1.4 However, the EIA will need to be reviewed in-line with monitoring of the effects of the decision.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

- 4.2.1 In 2223 the Library Theatre is expecting to achieve just under £14K of hire and lettings income vs a £18K budget. Increasing Library Theatre Hire Fees should help the service achieve it's current income target and also help mitigate future rising costs of running the venue.

4.3 Legal Implications

- 4.3.1 Section 20 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 gives the Local Authority the power to allow its premises to be used for the holding of meetings and exhibitions, the showing of films and slides, the giving of musical performances, and the holding of other events of an educational or cultural nature. This section also allows the Local Authority to charge for use of its premises.

4.4 Climate Implications

- 4.4.1 A Climate Impact Assessment is not required in relation to the proposal to increase the Library Theatre hire charges.

The outcome of consultation with current and past Theatre hirers favoured increasing the hire charges by 23%. This would cover the increase in utilities and staffing costs and allow for the replacement of some equipment, and or, make improvements to some of the facilities. At this point, any proposed improvements would be assessed to consider the impact they would make in helping us to work towards net carbon zero.

These should not only enhance the facilities but help to reduce the running costs of the Theatre.

4.5 Other Implications

There are no other implications

5. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 The option of keeping fees at their current level was considered. However, this would put the Library Theatre in a situation where it will cease to cover its running costs and will no longer be financially viable. Removing the Library Theatre as a venue would reduce the options for lower priced venues and have a particular impact on amateur dramatic and community group performances.
- 5.2 The Library Theatre's bar prices have been increased to raise revenue and reflect increasing costs of stocking the bar. However, this is not a viable alternative option for the longer term, as the bar cannot generate sufficient revenue on its own to cover the wider increased running costs.

6. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 It is recommended that Committee approve proposed increase to Library Theatre Hire Fees.

6.2 It is recommended that this increase comes into effect 3 months after Committee make their decision.