

G Live Annual Report Presentation Meeting Minutes

Friday 2 December 2021 at 14:00

Present:

From GBC:

Cllr James Steel (JS) (Lead Councillor)

Cllr Ramsey Nagaty (RN)

Cllr Pauline Searle (PS)

Jonathan Sewell (JBS)

Kelvin Mills (KM)

From Trafalgar Theatres (TT):

Andy Locke – Trafalgar Venue Director

Chris McGuigan – Group Commercial Director

Apologies:

Cllr Graham Eyre (GE)

Cllr Colin Cross (CC)

Ian Doyle (ID)

Alvin Hargreaves (AH) – Trafalgar

Fiona Martin (FM) - Trafalgar

Ref:	ITEM	Action
1.0	Introduction	
1.1	CM introduced himself and provided background into the transition of G Live whereby HQ Theatres integrated into Trafalgar Theatres (TT) in 2021. AL, the newly appointed Director of G Live, introduced himself. AL/CM wanted to recognise that this was JS' last meeting before he leaves the Council. CM thanked JS for his input and involvement into G Live throughout the years; his support through involvement and management is greatly appreciated. Cllr PS also thanked JS on behalf of the Cllrs and added that he would be sorely missed.	Info
2.0	Presentation of the G Live Annual Report by Chris McGuigan and Andy Locke	
2.1	TT's full report will be circulated to everyone after the meeting.	CB
2.2	CM provided an overview to the report's Executive Summary. This report covers the operation of G Live between 1 October 2021 and 30 September 2022. This is G Live's 11 th contract year and is the first year of the contract extension. The venue re-opened in August 2021, having been used as a vaccination centre. The period saw full operation throughout, but the emergence of the Omicron variant impacted the venue, by a number of cancelled shows and a further reduction in consumer confidence. CM added that due to the	Info

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	<p>pandemic some shows were rescheduled up to four times. CM explained that the frequent movement of the programme through rescheduling meant that it was an unusual year and the programming overserved the market at times as a result with similar audience events being scheduled much closer together than would normally be the case. TT considers this period to be a 'recovery year' with its main focus of getting people back in to use the building after a significant dormant period.</p>	
2.3	<p>CM outlined the challenges G Live faced through staffing shortages. The technical and kitchen teams were impacted the most, and CM explained that this was an industry-wide issue and one of the reasons for this was that some staff took the opportunity (during the various lockdowns/ covid closures) to look at different career paths. There was also more work in the television/ film sector too, which recovered more quickly than theatres/ entertainment venues.</p> <p>Despite this, CM was pleased to report that the programming was still a success, with 255 events delivered in the main auditorium. CM explained that this number was partly driven by the re-scheduled shows, which meant there was approximately 18 months' worth of programming within the 12-month period. This meant that typically quiet months (July & August) were unusually busy.</p> <p>Cllr PS is aware that much of the planned maintenance takes place during August and asked if this still took place. CM confirmed that there were less dark days and that these essential works were completed around the programme, which was a challenge.</p>	
2.4	<p>CM went on to explain how Covid had impacted the programme in terms of availability of audiences and touring product, and how different target audiences recovered at different rates. CM confirmed that comedy was very quick to return. There was a huge appetite for comedy, and the performers were also very keen to return following a significant time during which they were unable to perform and therefore earn.</p> <p>In contrast, classical music and similar genres to this were slower to recover. There was a subdued return for conferences and private hires due to the impact of new ways of working. CM confirmed that this is coming back but slowly, and similarly Hillsong have returned but at a reduced level, with only 1 service per week.</p> <p>Despite this, SM was very pleased to report the main hall attendances of just under 180,000.</p>	Info
2.5	<p>CM was pleased with the delivery of community events, which saw 125 community events and just over 3,000 participants.</p>	Info

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	The Summer Youth Project, Aladdin Jnr was a great success and there are plans to take this forward.	
2.6	The food, drink and hospitality provision re-opened very quickly but trading has been a challenge, particularly relating to pre-show dining as a result of staffing issues and chef availability.	Info
2.7	<p>AL provided a summary overview to the programming during the period.</p> <p>Music saw a strong recovery, and it was pleasing to see all community groups (both performing and non-performing) return. As CM illuded to earlier, comedy saw a particularly strong return, and G Live was pleased to host a number of 'big' names; Jimmy Carr, Romesh Ranganathan, Bill Bailey and many more. Ricky Gervais' warm up gig was put on sale just 24 hours before and was a sell out.</p> <p>Dance continued to be well received, with a number of Strictly events taking place.</p> <p>Spoken word also bounced back, with speakers including Miriam Margolyes, Claudia Winkleman and Steve Backshall. Tim Peake's event sold out, and G Live was able to put on a third showing, which also sold out.</p> <p>Children and family audiences were also well served, with a variety of shows, from The Tiger Who Came to Tea to Dinosaur world.</p> <p>Classical music did return but this was a harder audience to attract due to the general audience age and associated confidence to return post pandemic. Despite this, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's performance sold out. The industry also saw touring challenges as a result of Brexit, visa challenges and the conflict in Ukraine which meant that some Classical Music was simply unavailable.</p>	Info
2.8	<p>The next slide showed the Programme against the Contractual KPI measures. The success of comedy and spoken word can be seen here, with it superseding the target at 140%. Rock and Pop events have also bounced back, with an overall 200% target although it is recognised that some smaller shows saw a decrease.</p> <p>The venue did not see any sport on the programme during this period, against a targeted 6.</p> <p>JS outlined that the KPI targets were set prior to the operation of the venue and were based on the venue's predecessor. They are therefore out of step with the modern marketplace and how the business has developed since opening.</p> <p>In response to a question, JS added that sports in the Civic Hall included Snooker, Darts and Boxing, however the venue</p>	Info

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	<p>is reliant on what is touring. AL confirmed that a Kickboxing enquiry has recently been received but that generally there are very few sporting enquiries.</p> <p>GBC confirmed that the genres and targets will definitely be reviewed for the next procurement and will likely be a range/ guide in the future contract to reflect the fluidity of the programme and how it relies on the market/ touring product.</p> <p>KM referred to Health and wellbeing and how important this is to Councils and that the future agreement would incorporate targets on that too. JS referred to the Community event target which does get exceeded, but that the original targets were based on the main hall alone, and some community events are better suited to smaller areas. AL referred to the 61 main hall community events which took place in the period, of which 49 were Hillsong. TT is proud of G Live's range of programme and product offering which is able to serve the local community and attract visitors from afar.</p>	
2.9	<p>The meeting was then provided with an overview to the Creative Learning provision which is integral to G Live's operation. This year, Creative Learning has been relaunched following the appointment of a new CL Manager.</p> <p>The meeting was encouraged to read the Creative Learning section of the Annual Report, where it summarises the variety of activities, outreach and events which serve the community.</p> <p>Cllr RN asked whether G Live has partnered with Watts Gallery. CM confirmed that G Live hasn't but that TT would certainly look to do that.</p> <p>The health and wellbeing festival, 'Rooted', was also a success, aiming to reach and work with communities offering access to excellence through participation and creativity.</p> <p>There were also a variety of initiatives for young people, with a number of activities during holiday periods. CM outlined how diverse the activities were, from drama, and arts and crafts to more technology-based sessions such as computer programming. Pyrography also proved very popular amongst the young people</p> <p>Cllr JS wondered whether E-Sports would fall under the sporting category and whether there would be an appetite for such an event.</p>	Info
2.10	<p>Trafalgar Theatres Group is excited to roll out a new artistic programme from January onwards. The Aladdin Jr was so successful in the studio, that this is going to be expanded to</p>	Info

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	the main hall allowing for more participants (varying from ages 8-18yrs).	
2.11	The Creative Learning programme for adults, saw a number of introductory workshops looking at comedy (writing and performing) and play writing. The Halow choir also continues to meet weekly at G Live and there are a number of other community projects (such as TALK surrey) and school partnerships (e.g. Gosden House and Guildford County School) that G Live has engaged with.	Info
2.12	<p>CM then went on to summarise performance of Food, Drink and Hospitality.</p> <p>CM explained that the recovery of this was far less certain than the live programme, with the main challenges driven by recruitment which is a nationwide issue. Each provision within G Live was remobilised following the pandemic and there was a strong appetite for bars and retail. G Live is proud of its product range and availability, and the pre-booking mobile application continues to enhance the customers' experience. The new ice cream offering also proved very popular and is a more exciting provision to the traditional ice cream tubs you would ordinarily see at theatres. The meeting discussed the expectations surrounding drinks, as while customers are prepared to purchase drinks at the price being charged, there is an expectation surrounding the quality and presentation.</p>	Info
2.13	<p>The recruitment challenges and staff retention has impacted on pre-show dining, banqueting events and hospitality overall. Consumer confidence has also been slower and so while many purchase drinks during the interval or prior, there were a very small number of attendees (2,800) who opted for pre-show dining which makes up for only 1.5% of total attendees. CM explained that as a result of the pressures, TT made the decision to pause this service during the Autumn, in order to focus on the areas which were able to cater for more. Cllr PS asked whether these services could be bought in. CM confirmed that agency staff had been used and that the catering provision is being reviewed as a whole, with the potential of offering a more simplified model over the traditional three course meal which currently exists. JS fully appreciates the stresses and strains with staffing and recruitment but highlighted that there is a contractual requirement for pre-show dining and therefore it is a concern that this decision has been made, and that the client has not been consulted or informed, and as a result Cllrs were not informed. JS reminded TT that this is a management contract, and that the Council would expect a full package and that this decision has compromised that without consultation with the client. CM apologised.</p>	
2.14	The events during the period were then summarised, with various business awards taking place, as well as continued	Info

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	partnerships with Guildford Record Fair. The Whiskey and Gin Affair events were also well attended.	
2.15	<p>The next slide, showing the Operator agreement and KPI's shows a strong recovery for the venue. CM explained that it was important to note that the timing of the contract years (which run from October to September) meant that Covid has impacted 3 of the years (Yrs 9, 10 & 11).</p> <p>Despite the KPI target for audience numbers being met, the Omicron variant has impacted these figures. CM was pleased to see normal programming levels return and the product settle down. CM is proud of the delivery in terms of number of events while maintaining a high standard.</p>	Info
2.16	<p>The customer satisfaction for the period was then summarised. CM explained that all guests are contacted via email following their visit to rate their experience. G Live scored an average of 4.6 out of 5.</p> <p>Another tool used to generate customer feedback is the Net Promotor Score (NPS). JS commented that while the NPS is a useful tool, it should only be used as an indicator as it is a standard metric.</p> <p>The Trip advisor review scores averaged at 4 out of 5, with Google reviews scoring an average of 4.5 out of 5.</p> <p>CM explained that the feedback often reflects the customers perception of the event itself rather than G Live and the service within TT's control.</p> <p>Cllr JS is interested to know whether the customer review scores have changed post covid and asked whether an analysis could be done to see whether it had changed in the last 6 or 12 months.</p>	CM
2.17	<p>CB asked whether TT could drill down into the data and provide GBC with a summary of the feedback received so that it could be known what the feedback related to (positive and negative) and whether there were any re-occurring issues or trends. It would then be helpful to understand what action has been taken to improve/ resolve these complaints, and indeed continue the service where compliments were being received. JS referred to what has traditionally driven feedback in the past, such as waiting times for drinks, and how this was resolved by the introduction of the pre-ordering app. CM confirmed that he would arrange for this analysis to be done and will share the results with GBC.</p>	CM
2.18	AL then presented the Facilities and Health and Safety section of the report.	Info

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	AL summarised the works taken place during the period to ensure the asset remains at a high standard despite the wear and tear. New furniture was purchased for the Mezzanine restaurant, and some significant maintenance items were undertaken, such as the renewal of the emergency lighting system. The venue also saw the completion of the latent defect works by GBC, including the external cladding works.	
2.19	<p>AL was pleased to report that G Live won the 'Best Entertainment Venue in Guildford Award'</p> <p>AL went on to summarise the Health and Safety section of the report and outlined the benefits of being part of a wider group in terms of the central support function and expertise to support the venues. There is also a new Group H&S Manager role whose function is to ensure best practice is embedded across TT's portfolio.</p> <p>CLlr RN asked whether the arrangements had been tightened following the Manchester bombing. CT confirmed that emergency procedures are regularly reviewed and are shared widely across the building so that everyone is aware of their role in an emergency situation. CT added that each venue has counter terrorism risk assessments in place.</p> <p>As well as the central H&S support provided by TT, there is also a H&S scorecard mechanism in place, as well as quarterly audits. This means that G Live not only is answerable to a central function but that the venue and its staff also receive support for the venue.</p> <p>CM highlighted the need for staff to undergo aggression de-escalation training as a result of a number of issues that have arisen across a number of entertainment venues post covid, which were particularly prevalent on immediate opening up. This appears to have been an issue in a number of venues whereby aggressive and, in some cases, violent situations have escalated amongst the public. It is difficult to pin down the reasons, but some contributing factors could be alcohol consumption and the final release for people to enjoy themselves following such a long period of restrictions. This seems to be on the rise again and therefore TT is focusing on ensuring the teams are well equipped with the skills to de-escalate the situation where they possibly can, while also ensuring their safety. The meeting agreed that this issue is apparent elsewhere in terms of Council areas such as Parks sites.</p>	Info
2.20	CM provided an overview to the finances for the period, which show a strong performance following the re-opening post covid. CM reminded the meeting of the reduced subsidy	Info

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	<p>payment (of £275,000) that had been agreed as part of the contract extension. The surplus for this period was £276,931 and therefore GBC's 20 percent share of the profit will be £55,386.</p> <p>It was noted that the subsidy per attendance for the period was £1.22, which is the third lowest in the contracts' history. Based on Guildford's population of 147,899 (ONS 2018), the net subsidy per head for this year was at its lowest yet, at £1.26. JS commented that this was a very positive result and is its lowest cost in its contract following the revised 3-year contract extension arrangements.</p>	
2.21	<p>The final slide set out G Live's impact on the economy. CM explained how the economic contribution assessment is calculated by Arts Council England, and outlined the various areas that are taken into consideration, such the additional voluntary spend prior to attending (e.g. parking, shopping, bar / restaurants), as well as the impact on hotels and hospitality. Staff's contribution is also considered, in terms of spending locally, rent etc.</p> <p>For this period, the estimated economic impact figure is just over £3m.</p> <p>The presentation ended and questions were welcomed.</p>	Info
3.0	Questions	
3.1	<p>Cllr PS asked whether G Live retained its volunteers following the pandemic. CM/ AL confirmed that the volunteers are an integral part to the venue's meet and greet team, and that many have continued their role at G Live post the pandemic. AL confirmed that there are just over 100 volunteers currently and outlined how many of the volunteers have been involved in the venue since it opened. Their local knowledge, experience and perspective is invaluable, and compliments G Live's newer, younger and more fluid workforce. CM added that many of the staff were engaged with throughout Covid and throughout the changes so that everyone was invited to hear what G Live's future plans were and to ensure communication was maintained throughout the unsettling period.</p>	Info
3.2	<p>JS asked how TT sees things going forward with utility prices and increased pressure on the leisure pound.</p> <p>CM commented that utility price increases are enormous and if the rates continue in the way they are going, this will be hugely challenging. TT have not received the invoices through for October yet and so it is difficult to quantify as the market is so volatile and there are too many unknowns. JS commented that the Council's utility bills are excessive, with gas increasing by 50% and electricity by 33%, on what</p>	Info

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	<p>were already extremely high rates. The night-time electricity rate has seen an even bigger proportional increase than the daytime on the contracts that the Council is on.</p> <p>CM confirmed that in terms of mitigation, the venue has reduced consumption where possible through staff behaviour i.e. turning off lights etc. and also through investment such as LED lighting and renewal of stage equipment.</p> <p>CM confirmed that there has been an inflation effect on ticket pricing within the sector, whereby event organisers are increasing their ticket prices following increased costs. CM responded to Cllr RN's question over how this compares across different venues and explained that there is little elasticity with prices. TT has seen general inflationary increases across the board, and it is important to note that the prices are set by the promotor and are often consistent across the tour.</p> <p>Demand-based pricing (similar to airline pricing) has been explored but TT is yet to see a model that has worked in entertainment industry.</p> <p>Despite the cost-of-living crisis, events are selling more strongly than they were, in fact, sales have actually surged in the last 3 months across the board. Consumers appear to be booking more last minute (compared to pre-covid when people would book well in advance), possibly due to the historic level of uncertainty, and people are now looking to see what is on now that they know Covid will not impact their plans.</p> <p>G Live has also seen an increase to online ticket sales, and JS commented that this might partly be due to the venue not being open during the day which would reduce walk-in sales.</p>	
3.3	<p>CM referred to previous financial downturns, such as the recession in 2008, where G Live was not impacted. CM explained that while secondary spend was impacted and therefore people had to cut back on some aspects, they still wanted to have a good time and didn't generally want to cut back on live entertainment which meant that the industry actually thrived. Certainly now, people are excited to return to venues following a long period of not being able to and so it is hoped this will continue. Consumers are also willing to spend good money on named artist as they know that it is a guaranteed good night. Some newer acts therefore may be perceived as higher risk and so may not be so popular. CM confirmed that therefore G Live hasn't seen the impact of the cost of living in ticket sales. Whilst interest rates still remain</p>	Info

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	<p>low, there is an element of disposable income and there is still an appetite for people to enjoy live entertainment throughout these difficult times.</p> <p>CM is pleased that the programming is looking strong and that acts are already being booked for 2024. CM is confident that G Live will remain buoyant.</p> <p>JS wonders whether community groups may elect to use alternate/ smaller venues if they are under pressure to sell out in order to break even (for example).</p> <p>Cllr RM added that people have not received their bills yet and so may not have felt the impacts yet. Cllr PS agreed and commented that she would be interested to know the impacts post-Christmas</p>	
3.4	<p>JS asked what TT's plan for the possible power cuts which may be effective from January 2023.</p> <p>CM confirmed that TT has engaged with a company who supply generators and that a survey has already been completed to determine what is required. CB agreed to check whether G Live has facilities to couple a temporary generator in the past.</p>	CB
3.5	<p>No further questions were forthcoming, so the meeting closed. CM and AL were thanked for the presentation.</p>	Info