

The background of the slide features a large, light blue outline of the FTH Coat of Arms. The crest includes a crown with four maple leaves, a shield divided into four quadrants (top-left: saltire, top-right: stag's head, bottom-left: sailing ship, bottom-right: eagle), and a ribbon at the bottom with the motto 'A'NE FOR A'.

Agenda Item 7

FTH Closure: Voluntary Arts Support

Falkirk Council

Title: FTH Closure: Voluntary Arts Support
Meeting: Falkirk Council
Date: 14 December 2022
Submitted By: Director of Place Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update members on progress made to date in relocating hall hires for Falkirk Town Hall (FTH) from 8 February 2023 – 31 December 2023.
- 1.2 This report is linked to the 2022-27 Council Plan's strategic enabler of Financial Sustainability and has a secondary link to the strategic priority of Supporting Stronger and Healthier Communities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Falkirk Council:
- notes the update contained in this report; and
 - gives delegated authority to the Council's Culture and Helix Services Manager to increase the £10k voluntary sector fund to support local groups as required on a value for money basis from the £50k external match funding pot agreed at Council in September 2022.

3. CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 There are no significant climate change implications linked to the recommendations of this report.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 At the September 2022 Council meeting, Falkirk Council agreed to the permanent closure of Falkirk Town Hall Theatre (FTH) after the performances by Big Bad Wolf and McKechnie School of Dance, on 7 February 2023.
- 4.2 Elected Members also agreed at the meeting that officers should engage with the voluntary arts groups with regard to the financial assistance required to the sector to support the delivery of their programmes in alternative venues. Officers were also asked to report back on the engagement with groups to the next meeting. In total, £10k of funding was proposed to be set aside for this purpose, as well as a £50k allocation from the Change Fund on an annual basis to allow for external match funding bids for the new arts programme. This report represents the update on those requests.

5. CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Relocation of Lets

In addition to its professional programme, FTH hosted a range of voluntary sector, Council, and commercial hires which made up approximately 40% of its annual programme. The hires range from single night concerts, two-three night runs and week-long runs. The venue also hosted regular visits by the Scottish Blood Transfusion Service.

All lessees with both provisional and confirmed bookings in FTH for January 2023 - December 2023 were informed of the recommendation to close FTH in advance of the Council meeting on 28 September 2022. A confirmation email was issued once the decision had been taken with lessees advising that FTH would close with effect from 7 February 2023.

Over the past seven weeks since the Council meeting the officer's approach has been to work through all bookings at FTH with a priority focus on January 2023 - June 2023 to ensure that, where possible, we were able to identify alternative locations for all bookings, understand their various technical requirements and any cost implications. The table at 5.3 shows progress made to date. Work continues to relocate lets in the latter part of the year, June-December 2023.

Where possible lessees have been relocated to Falkirk Council venues, principally, Grangemouth (GTH) and Bo'ness Town Halls (BTH) and Larbert High School, all of which have reasonable facilities. Other non-Council venues which have offered availability include the Beancross, Trinity Church and the Dobbie Hall.

There is no other purpose-built performing arts venue in the Falkirk Council area and the nearest theatres in Central Scotland are Lanternhouse in Cumbernauld and the Macrobert Arts Centre in Stirling. As a result, it was always anticipated that some lessees would have to compromise on both the scale and complexity of the technical aspects of their shows.

5.2 Issues

Technical: the alternative venues have basic lighting and sound, but do not have facilities to fly stage cloths or scenery. They have limited wing space which is required to accommodate larger ensemble performances - with the exception of St Mungo's High School which does have wings and the capability to hang cloths. In mitigation, all the groups that we have spoken to recognise that they will have to tailor their future shows to the facilities available. Work is ongoing to identify equipment that can be added to the kit in GTH and BTH.

Upgrades: Significant faults in the rigging for lighting and sound at GTH and BTH were identified earlier in the year and the necessary improvement work is in the process of being commissioned from an industry-approved rigging

company. In addition, it is envisaged that much of the FTH technical equipment can be utilised across both GTH and BTH.

Capacity: Although both GTH and BTH are relatively busy venues with bookings, to date, this has had no impact on our ability to relocate FTH lessees. It is noted that schools are only available in the school holidays.

Third party suppliers: Larbert High School is owned and managed by Class 98; hire costs are £6,410 excluding stewarding and technical costs. The equivalent charge for the hire of FTH in April 2022 was £3,675 including stewarding and technical costs. CATS schools' costs are broadly comparable with Class 98. The increased costs are manageable within the funding available as recommended in 2.1 of this report.

- 5.3 The following table shows major lets at FTH and where they have been relocated to. We have engaged with twelve groups, and we have relocated nine to date. For those that remain outstanding, work is ongoing work to try to find alternatives.

Lessee	Voluntary Council Public Commercial	Relocated to or No alternative location found	Detail / Issues (technical, stewarding)	Financial Implications
January-March 2023				
Found Church	Voluntary	GTH	None	None
Transition Dance	Council (Children's)	Larbert High School	Technical and stewarding services are required to be outsourced	Class 98, tech and stewarding costs are expected to be manageable.
Blood Donations	Public	GTH	None	None
Pretty in Pink	Commercial	GTH	Aerial show to be rescheduled to September 2023. Company to hire external technical support	None
Schools' Concerts	Council (Children's)	Larbert High School	Technical and stewarding services are required to be outsourced	Class 98, tech and stewarding costs are expected to be manageable.

April – June 2023				
Falkirk Operatic Society	Voluntary	Larbert High School or St Mungo's High	Additional light, sound and video wall required	Class 98 venue hire £6,410; CATS costs/availability tbc but expected to be broadly similar Tech costs tbc
Tryst Festival	Voluntary	GTH, BTH and community venues	Falkirk Arts Network are reshaping the event to take place across a number of venues	Work ongoing to compare costs of using FTH with plans for 2023
Red Book Awards	Council (Children's)	GTH	Large space required with break-out rooms, lighting and sound support required	Technical and stewarding costs tbc
Dancedreams	Commercial	No alternative confirmed yet	Technical and stewarding services are required to be outsourced	
Colette Bone Dance	Commercial	Dobbie Hall	Technical and stewarding services are required to be outsourced	
Jenny Dougan Dance	Commercial	No alternative confirmed yet	Technical and stewarding services are required to be outsourced	
Stenhouse School of Dance	Commercial	No alternative confirmed yet	Technical and stewarding services are required to be outsourced	

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

A budget of £10k was proposed to be allocated to assist Voluntary Sector companies with unanticipated costs due to the relocation. As we continue to gather financial information relating to each relocation, it is recommended that this allocation is increased in line with reasonable demand (with a consequent reduction from the allocation for external match funding bids). It is recommended that discretion on the use of these funds would be passed to the Council's Culture and Helix Manager. There should be no additional financial impacts on the Council.

6.2 Resources

The alternative bookings should be deliverable within existing staffing resources.

6.3 HR

There are no HR implications linked to this report.

6.4 Legal

There are no legal implications linked to this report.

6.5 Equalities

There is no change to the equalities impact as set out in the report to Council of 28 September 2022. There are no groups that are being relocated that specifically represent any of the protected characteristics, and it is not anticipated that there will be equality issues flowing from the relocation to GTH and BTH.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Good progress has been made in a matter of seven weeks to relocate a number of former FTH lets which had bookings in the first six months of 2023. Work will continue on this front for lets in the latter half of the year and funding will also be used to support groups with alternatives.

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Director of Place Services

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Appendices:

None

List of Background Papers:

None