

## **WORK OF THE NEW VIC THEATRE**

**Submitted by:** Robin Wiles, Community Regeneration Officer

**Portfolio:** Culture & Active Communities

**Ward(s) affected:** All

### **Purpose of the Report**

To provide Members with a preliminary report on the funding of the New Vic Theatre.

### **Recommendation**

**Members note the initial steps to developing a Partnership Agreement with the North Staffs Theatre Trust in respect of funding for the New Vic Theatre from the Borough Council.**

### **Reasons**

In response to the preliminary report on the Grants Review, a further report in relation to the funding of the New Vic Theatre has been requested.

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Grants Review looked at the processes of managing grants to the voluntary and community sector (VCS) that the Council provides from its own budgets.
- 1.2 The Council currently grant funds the North Staffs Theatre Trust for the running of the New Vic Theatre. The level of grant is determined by Full Council on a year by year basis, and for 2011/12 was £97,620.00.
- 1.3 An Elected Member representative attends the North Staffs Theatre Trust's Board Meetings, and Board Papers are received by the Council.
- 1.4 The Grant Review (Cabinet Report, "Grants Review and Third Sector Commissioning, 7 September 2011) outlined various options as to how this grant could be managed, and in response this further Report has been requested.

#### **2. Issues**

- 2.1 The funding for the New Vic, at the 2011/12 level, constitutes 22% of the total that the Council made available for grant funding, and through commissioning, to the voluntary and community sector in that year, and was the highest single payment issued.
- 2.2 The level of funding for the New Vic is considerably higher than the maximum level of £5,000.00, which can be approved by the Grants Assessment Panel. This is a lot higher than the level at which the Third Sector Commissioning process would operate. It is, therefore, an anomaly to refer to this funding as a "grant".
- 2.3 Given the nature and scale of the New Vic's provision, a commissioning process would be inappropriate since there are no other voluntary or community organisations in the arts sector that could reasonably compete for this as a package. It is also worth noting that the Council has no wider experience of commissioning performing arts.

- 2.4 The current level of funding for the New Vic helps to maintain a high quality of production by the theatre that is nationally and internationally acclaimed. The positive reputation this gives for Newcastle-under-Lyme and for the Council is difficult to quantify. The Council's funding also helps the New Vic to attract other funding, most significantly from the Arts Council.
- 2.5 The work of Borderlines with communities and schools in the Borough – with an emphasis on areas that experience economic and social disadvantage – is of great importance for supporting the work of the Council and of partners in tackling issues such as antisocial behaviour, domestic violence and alcohol misuse.
- 2.6 A report produced initially in 2009 demonstrates the range of activities & projects carried out by the New Vic, including:-
- Work with schools.
  - Young Persons' Theatre Company.
  - Borderlines, the theatre's community programme, with a particular focus on working in and with disadvantaged communities in the Borough.
  - Theatre productions, with subsidised tickets for people on benefits, and free tickets for people with disabilities and, if appropriate, their carers.
  - Specific projects in partnership with a range of agencies, including the Borough Council – "All Our Daughters?" a touring play in 2010 on the subject of forced marriages, produced in partnership with the Council's Partnership Team, was nationally acclaimed by the Home Office.
- 2.7 The analysis in this report also shows the extent to which the New Vic's activities support the Council's Corporate Priorities and the priorities of the Sustainable Community Strategy. The report can act as a template for a Partnership Agreement.

### 3. **Options Considered**

3.1 The options set out in the Grants Review Preliminary Report were:-

- (i) No change - it may be appropriate that it is Full Council determine the level of financial support provided to the New Vic given the nature and sensitivities of the issues listed above.
- (ii) The funding goes through the Third Sector Commissioning Framework. Given the fairly unique nature of the New Vic, it is questionable as to whether there is any other Third Sector theatre organisation that could compete, at least for the bulk of the commission.
- (iii) The level of financial support provided to the New Vic continues to be determined by Full Council, but with the funding subject to a Service Level Agreement to be monitored by the Third Sector Commissioning Board.
- (iv) Financial support to the New Vic is taken out of the grants/commissioning equation and is considered as core funding within the main Council budget.

### 4. **Proposal**

4.1 A Partnership Agreement be drawn up, with the New Vic, with the aim of establishing formal funding arrangements that recognises the need to monitor, in line with 3.1 (iii) above.

4.2 The Partnership Agreement be set out to show the activities which the New Vic Theatre will undertake in support of the Council's objectives in line with the statements in **Appendix B**.

4.3 Through this mechanism the funding for the New Vic would continue to be determined as part of the Council's main budget setting process.

4.4 A progress Report is brought to Cabinet in 3 months detailing the Partnership Agreement.

#### 5. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

5.1 The preferred solution would provide a balance between the need to maintain the Council's support for the work of the New Vic whilst doing so in a manner that better monitors the effect of the funding, is better aligned with the other processes by which funding is provided to the voluntary and community sector in Newcastle.

#### 6. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

6.1 The proposal recognises the close link between the work of the New Vic and outcomes linked to the Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities, and will better enable the Council to monitor the impact of the funding thereof.

#### 7. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

7.1 The Council is required to take into account all relevant matters, and not take into account irrelevant matters, and to otherwise behave reasonably. Failure to do so may lead to legal challenge.

7.2 The Best Value Statutory Guidance issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government issued in June 2011 advised that Local Authorities do not, in response to public spending cuts, disproportionately cut funding to voluntary and community groups.

#### 8. **Equality Impact Assessment**

8.1 Equality Impact Assessment completed.

#### 9. **Financial and Resource Implications**

9.1 The proposal does not look at the budgets for funding of the New Vic. There are, therefore, no direct cost implications.

9.2 The proposal would enable better monitoring of how the funding is used, and therefore help to ensure Value for Money.

#### 10. **Major Risks**

10.1 Risk Assessment to follow

#### 11. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

11.1 None identified

#### 12. **Key Decision Information**

12.1 The report is not on a Key Decision as defined in the Council's Constitution.

12.2 The report is included in the Cabinet's Forward Plan.

13. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

13.1 Cabinet - 7 September 2011 Res No 294/12

14. **List of Appendices**

Appendix A - Grants Review Report to Cabinet, 7 September 2011.

Appendix B – New Vic Report on activities and projects.