

The Highland Council

Education, Children and Adult Services Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the **Culture and Leisure Contracts Scrutiny Sub-Committee** held in Committee Room 1, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday 1 May 2014 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

Mr A Christie (Chair)	Mr M Rattray
Mr B Fernie (Video Conferencing)	Mr G Ross
Mr W MacKay (Substitute) (Video Conferencing)	Ms J Slater
Mr G MacKenzie	

In attendance:

Mr J Macdonald, Learning and Leisure Client Manager, Care and Learning Service
Mrs J Graham, External Funding Manager, Care and Learning Service
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Corporate Development Service

Also in attendance:

Ms A McMenemy, Highland Print Studio
Ms A Muir, Strathpeffer Pavilion
Ms S Eccles, The Touring Network

Mr A Christie in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs I Campbell, Mr B Gormley, Mr M Green, Mrs B McAllister and Mrs M Paterson.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the following Declarations of Interest:

Item 3: Mr G MacKenzie and Mrs J Slater (both non-financial)

3. Arts Organisations supported by the Council

Declarations of Interest

Mr G Mackenzie declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds of being a Director of Strathpeffer Spa Pavilion and **Mrs J Slater** declared a non-financial interest in this item on the grounds of being a Director of Eden Court Theatre, but having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interest did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No CLCS/02/14 dated 23 April 2014 by the Director of Education, Culture and Sport which outlined the role of the Sub-Committee in scrutinising the use of Council assistance by organisations and listed the number and range of arts organisations in receipt of funding from the Council.

In amplification of the report, three arts organisations – Highland Print Studio; Strathpeffer Pavilion; and the Touring Network – undertook presentations describing the work they did and the challenges they faced.

Highland Print Studio

Ms A McMenemy undertook a presentation which detailed the range of projects and services offered by the Highland Print Studio. It was explained that the Studio was an open access facility which provided classes for both complete beginners and professional artists in both traditional and digital printing techniques. An annual programme of classes was available which also included outdoor activities. Because of the unique environment of the Highland Print Studio, users were attracted from other parts of Scotland and it was now gaining international interest from professional artists. The facility had also assisted individuals seeking to change careers and launch new businesses.

Ms McMenemy described the work undertaken with both primary and secondary school-aged children and cited in particular the Junior Ardersier and Petty Environmental Society who had produced interpretive panels for their local area. Many projects for children also involved cross-curricular input e.g. a regional project on the history of mapmaking involved geographical and historical input. An arts and science project had been developed focussing on the chemical reactions involved in photo-polymer printing. Scientists from Lifescan had delivered both the artistic and scientific elements of this course which had been very popular and was piloted in Portree High School. The work with schools and community groups formed an opportunity for outreach and funding had been secured to carry this out.

Work with older people had also been very successful, in particular the Strathpeffer lunch club had undertaken an “Unsung Hero” arts project, the results of which had been displayed outside the debating chamber in the Scottish Parliament building. Funding had also been received from High Life Highland and Age Scotland for a project specifically for older men entitled “Wise Guys” which had attracted so much interest it had been oversubscribed. This had been a highly successful project not only in terms of the art work produced but one which had significant social benefits for those taking part.

An example of a project involving a professional photographer entitled “Sexy Peat” was explained. This project aimed to draw attention to the ecological fragility of peat bog in the Flow Country and Lewis and involved aerial photography which was printed through the Studio using traditional techniques.

During discussion Members welcomed the range and diversity of activities the Print Studio provided. In particular, the projects which linked educational areas and work feeding back into schools were excellent. Work undertaken with older people, especially older men, was also unique. The range of beneficiaries of resources provided by the Print Studio which also attracted internationally renowned artists and photographers was particularly impressive.

Responding to questions, Ms McMenemy confirmed that users enjoyed learning about and using traditional printing techniques. In this connection there had been no health and safety concerns for young people engaging with the facility and it had been a priority for the Highland Print Studio that users should come from all sectors of society. The mix of individuals and age groups made the facility special and attractive to users. The Wise Guys project had been a way of reaching out to groups who traditionally tended not to take up new hobbies and the demand for the project had been overwhelming. It had been a highly successful project with very diverse benefits.

In terms of plans for the future, it was confirmed that applications for foundation funding through Creative Scotland would be made in July. The facility's success now meant that it needed to address requirements for additional staff to help the facility continue to develop in the future.

Strathpeffer Pavilion

Ms A Muir, Strathpeffer Pavilion undertook a presentation during which she referred to the history of the Pavilion. The building had, for many years, lain empty and had deteriorated until a local community group had raised funds to repair it. The renovated Pavilion had re-opened in 2004 and, since then, 130,000 had attended over 1,100 events. In addition, 200 weddings had now taken place there, all illustrating the importance of the building for the Highlands. The Pavilion offered a diverse and high quality arts programme ranging from Indie Rock bands to the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and theatre. The Friends of the Pavilion provided considerable support through a range of fund raising activities, the annual Art Fair being cited as a particular example. This Art Fair showcased paintings from Highlands and Islands artists and, over the years, 10,000 people had attended. The Pavilion also provided 35 regular jobs, with the age range of the workforce ranging from 15 to 66, and the numbers employed increased during the peak season.

Ms Muir also referred to various Scottish Government National Outcomes and highlighted how the Strathpeffer Pavilion fitted in with them. For example, the Pavilion gave young people a reason to stay in the area offering not just an entertainment venue and the potential of employment but somewhere where a variety of skills could be developed. The Pavilion also catered for all age ranges, including the Early Years and reference was made to performances by Sticky Kids which performed to over 1,000 children over a number of performances.

It was acknowledged that the Strathpeffer Pavilion was a building to be proud of. Recent developments had included the opening of the ticket office and the café bar but, looking to the future, it was hoped to take advantage of the Pavilion's history and to fully develop it as an arts centre with a heritage aspect. Highland Council provided some financial assistance but it was recognised that there was a need to develop more income streams, especially catering, if these future aims and objectives were to be achieved. Funding was also being sought from various organisations including the Heritage Lottery Fund and Creative Scotland.

During discussion Members commented on the wide ranging and comprehensive entertainment programme offered at the Strathpeffer Pavilion. Reference too was made to the considerable work undertaken to restore the building and tribute paid to the social enterprise which had not only achieved this but had also developed the skills and talents of individuals. The 130,000 people who had attended events at the Pavilion had also had a positive impact on the local economy.

Responding to questions, Ms Muir confirmed that the challenges facing the Pavilion was ensuring there was enough money in place to keep the momentum going and the need to recognise the benefit of the Pavilion to the community as a whole. The Pavilion had developed organically as a result of what had happened in Highland and many of the individuals who had campaigned for the Pavilion to be renovated were still involved with the Pavilion through the Friends Group. In relation to connections with other arts organisations, such as Eden Court, Ms Muir pointed out the need to achieve a balance between being complementary and being in completion.

The Touring Network

Ms S Eccles, The Touring Network undertook a presentation during which it was explained that her organisation had been set up to support promoters to bring professional live performing arts events to some of the most remote places in Scotland. The Touring Network, formally known as the Promoters Art Network, had over 100 members with 70 in the Highland Council region alone. Ms Eccles explained that 80% of promoters were volunteers and their work went towards ensuring that there was cultural equality in rural areas as well as bringing economic benefit to communities. It was hoped that rural touring would become a central part of cultural life in Scotland allowing everyone to share in remarkable performances of the highest level and transforming promoters, performers and audiences alike. She referred to 2012 Theatre Review for Creative Scotland, and associated research, which found that promoters in rural areas were cited as one of the six best things about theatre in Scotland. Touring had also been reported as the number one priority for the theatre community and Creative Scotland.

Continuing, she was pleased to report that 28% of visiting theatre came to the Highland Council area. The Touring Network was there to support its members in whatever way it could, whether it be funding, Health and Safety, licence issues etc. Many promoters needed to access information outwith normal office hours so, as a result, the Touring Network had developed Tourbook to allow digital access to such information 24 hours a day. The Touring Network also had membership officers and their objective was to help promoters to become more confident and to build their capacity to deliver. In addition, the Network supported other communities and individuals to become promoters and to help sustain community assets. In bringing live performances to remote communities, the Touring Network recognised that promoters often had to “play safe”. However this could mean that contemporary and children’s theatre and dance performances were less likely to appear so, to address these gaps in provision, the Touring Network would underwrite some of the risks for such performances allowing audiences to diversify. Another key project underway was an audience facing campaign as, collectively, it was more effective to promote events and issues and would allow individuals to see in advance what performances were on in various other parts of the country.

Work was also taking place to develop a Young Promoters Programme and details of this were provided. This was specifically targeted at 16-26 year olds as this was the best age group to attract other young people to live performances in local village halls. The Touring Network operated as a Social Enterprise and there were significant economic impacts as a result of their work in terms of empowering more communities to attract additional income. They would continue to strive to bring stronger, broader programming to wider audiences and to provide on-going consultancy and support for rural touring. However, the future for individual promoters was less clear and, as a result, the Touring Network were in discussions with Creative Scotland as to how best to move forward. It was felt that there was an administrative burden on Creative

Scotland to provide funding and it was suggested that a model, similar to that adopted by Fèisean nan Gàidheal, where the Touring Network would receive the funding would be more practical as the Touring Network were in a better position to know what specific needs were and to allocate funding accordingly.

During discussion, Members commented at the amount of work which was required to bring a live performance to a local venue. However, as a result of the work undertaken by the Touring Network and promoters, communities were able to access a wide range of performances. Appreciation was also expressed at the work undertaken in relation to generating new younger promoters which highlighted the need for succession planning. Particular interest was expressed about the Tourbook and Ms Eccles explained that a second version was now being developed and that discussions were taking place with Highlands and Islands Enterprise with a view to making it available to the international market. Live performances had a huge economic benefit to local communities and were something local people wanted to see provided. Promoters were best placed to know what local communities wanted and to widen and diversify as appropriate.

Thereafter, the Chairman having thanked the representatives of all the arts organisations for attending, the Sub-Committee **NOTED** the information provided in the report and presentations.

The meeting concluded at 3.20 pm.