

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

29th APRIL 2021

RCT THEATRES: 2021 CHRISTMAS OFFER

REPORT OF DIRECTOR – PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH CLLR. RHYS LEWIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES, WELL-BEING & CULTURAL SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a proposal for RCT Theatres' 2021 Christmas offer, given continued uncertainty for the sector and the reopening of theatres during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Consider the content of the report.
- 2.2 Approve the proposal to produce a digital Christmas offer of Aladdin to share online during December 2021 and the additional budget of £30,000 to deliver the production and make it available to view free of charge via the Council's social media channels.
- 2.3 Agree to postpone the live pantomime production of 'Dick Whittington' until December 2022.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 A sector meeting with Welsh Government on Monday 22nd March 2021 noted that the alert plan for Wales had been updated and that theatres will remain closed until Level 2, when they will be able to reopen with extremely restricted numbers – 30 indoors and 50 outdoors. At Level 1, numbers will also be restricted – 50 indoors and 100 outdoors. The 2m rule that is law is set to remain.

- 3.2 When theatres are able to reopen, the 2m social distancing restrictions are likely to remain, impacting on the capacity permitted within theatre auditoria and other areas within the buildings; therefore, capacity for income generation from tickets and secondary spend will be significantly decreased.
- 3.3 In order for RCT Theatres' to secure cast, crew and high-quality production values, approval is being sought to, once again, produce a digital Christmas offer for 2021 and to postpone the pantomime 'Dick Whittington' to December 2022. A decision is required by the end of April 2021 for this proposal to be fully realised.
- 3.4 It is important for the Arts Service to show its funders (in particular the Arts Council of Wales) that it is doing everything it can to ensure people can still access the Arts in RCT despite the challenges experienced at the present time, and likely to continue to be experienced in the coming months.

4. CONTEXT

- 4.1 Approval for RCT Theatres to postpone its 'Dick Whittington' pantomime until December 2021 and to produce a digital Christmas performance was granted at a Cabinet meeting in September 2020.
- 4.2 RCT Theatres' annual pantomime starts its development process in the January of its delivery year. Within a 12-week timescale, 'Once Upon a Panto' - a free production of 5 original individual stories with original music - were produced for 2020's online offer.
- 4.3 The skills of the cast and crew who had been contracted in January 2020 for December 2020's RCT Theatres' pantomime were used to create the Christmas offer. Overall, twenty one freelancers were supported in the creation of the production.
- 4.4 The production was filmed and edited at Orchard Ltd's studio, with a tight schedule of three hours filming per story, introducing cast and crew to new skills required for screen as opposed to stage performances.
- 4.5 In addition, the Christmas offer was the first of RCT Theatres' productions to be made fully accessible with captions, BSL and audio description for each story.
- 4.6 The first story of the 'Once Upon a Panto' production was released via RCT Theatres' YouTube channel on Sunday 20th December 2020, with a story released each day until Thursday 24th December. The production remained available until the New Year.

- 4.7 Until 2020, RCT Theatres had not utilised its social media platforms to broadcast performances. The ‘Once Upon a Time’ production reached 10,101 views and 205 new subscribers to the newly established RCT Theatres’ YouTube channel. Each view could be seen by an individual or a family and each time the link is clicked, counts as another view. Therefore, 10,101 does not equate to 10,101 people viewing the production. It could be that in excess of 25,000 people engaged with the production with 75% of the views being watched by 3 people and the remaining 25% by individuals. With an average audience of 13,820 across the last three pantomimes, the Christmas offer has a positive reach.
- 4.8 The ‘Once Upon a Panto’ production is scheduled to be available again over the 2021 Easter period via the Coliseum and Park and Dare Theatre Facebook pages.
- 4.9 There are many positive comments received through our social media platforms in relation to the production, here is an example:
- “What a wonderful way to support the community”;
 - Our family have loved these, thank you for doing this”;
 - “This has been the first time our family have sat down together and enjoyed a show - my daughter is deaf. Just wonderful”.

5. 2021 CHRISTMAS OFFER

5.1 Production

- 5.1.1 Last year, the Cabinet resolved to postpone the Dick Whittington pantomime scheduled for December 2020 until December 2021. In view of the ongoing pandemic, RCT Theatre’s recommend that this is further postponed until December 2022.
- 5.1.2 Given the current situation, RCT Theatres proposes providing a Christmas digital offer of ‘Aladdin’ in December 2021, building on learning from 2020’s production and, with earlier approval, providing a longer timescale for development and production.
- 5.1.3 Engaging the services of a professional production company, RCT Theatres will create a bespoke digital offer for RCT residents, filmed at the Park and Dare Theatre and on location across RCT.
- 5.1.4 Filming on location across RCT as well as on the Park and Dare Theatre stage will provide an RCT community backdrop to the production. It will not be enough to film the show and present it as a ‘film’; the conventions are not authentic and the lack of an audience needs to be addressed.

5.1.5 To address the lack of an in-situ audience, an original script will be written to incorporate specific local references and, Covid restrictions allowing, we propose that segments will be filmed on location across RCT.

5.1.6 RCT Theatres' pantomime productions are around 2.5 hours in length (including a 20 minute interval). The narrative of 'Aladdin' will be condensed for a digital platform.

5.1.7 Once again, RCT Theatres will ensure that the production is fully accessible with captions, BSL and audio description.

5.2 Community Engagement

5.2.1 In order to create a bespoke production for RCT residents, additional content will be added to make the piece more relevant to this format. Additional content that could be considered include:

- Original advertisement breaks to add comedy and variety;
- Key characters filmed volunteering at local organisations;
- Short online cameos with local talent e.g. Sophie Evans, Callum Howells;
- Online cameos 'starring' local people.

5.2.2 The additional content provides RCT Theatres with an opportunity to create a production that is both bespoke and relevant to RCT residents, raises awareness of community provision and celebrates local talent.

5.2.3 Children and young people feature annually within RCT Theatres' pantomime, developing their skills and knowledge of the sector through participating in the Panto Crew. There was no involvement from children and young people during the 2020 Christmas offer due to timescale restriction. We will explore the possibility of the inclusion of children and young people within the 2020 digital offer.

5.3 Viewing

5.3.1 The production will be filmed in a digital design format that enables it to be screened as a cinema experience; therefore, if cinema screenings are permitted and viable, the production can be screened at the Coliseum and Park and Dare Theatres.

5.3.2 If cinema screenings are not permitted, the production will be released for viewing, free of charge, via our social media platforms.

5.4 Budget

- 5.4.1 This proposal is costed at £75,000. As an Arts Council of Wales Portfolio client in receipt of revenue funding, £45,000 will be allocated from this budget.
- 5.4.2 If this is to be a fully online production, and it is to remain free of charge, no income will be generated.
- 5.4.3 If the production is able to be screened at the theatres, there is a potential to generate an income through ticket sales. If this approach is to be taken then the production will not be available online.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

7. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 No consultation exercise has been required.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 With limited or no income generation opportunity through ticket sales and secondary spend, a further £30,000 commitment is required to provide our communities with a free, high-quality, festive, feel good, accessible offer in December 2021.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

10. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

- 10.1 The proposal contributes to the Council's corporate priorities:
- People – such as developing cultural experiences for positive health and wellbeing and; providing cultural experiences for our residents;
 - Places – such as providing opportunities to engage with and participate in the arts and creative industries within our communities, town centres and parks and; developing themed bespoke projects;
 - Prosperity - such as supporting and developing freelancers; being innovative in our Christmas offer and; fulfilling the sectors potential to culturally serve its community.

10.2 The proposal contributes to the seven national wellbeing goals, particularly:

- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language;
- A prosperous Wales;
- A healthier Wales;
- A Wales of cohesive communities.

10.3 The proposal is consistent with the sustainable approach promoted by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act through the five ways of working:

- Long-term – revenue investment seeks to achieve a long-term and sustainable arts and creative industries infrastructure with the Borough;
- Prevention – engagement and participation opportunities offering early intervention and prevention support;
- Integrated – contributing to a range of local, regional and national strategic priorities by adopting an integrated and coherent approach;
- Collaboration - through working across Council services and public, private and third sector agencies, locally, regionally and nationally;
- Involvement – through consultation, feedback, advisory groups and professional networks.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 This paper outlines a proposal to develop a digital production for RCT Theatres to be shared with the community in December 2021 and the financial commitment required.

11.2 With the remaining uncertainty regarding the reopening of theatres, this proposal will enable RCT Theatres to plan effectively to secure and produce a joyous digital Christmas offer, free of charge for the residents of RCT. If the situation improves and theatres are allowed to open during the festive period, this production can be screened as a cinema offer within RCT Theatres.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background Papers

None

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