

Culture and Sport Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 23 August 2016

Assembly Rooms Annual Report 2015/16

Item number	8.4
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	

Executive summary

This report provides a performance update on the Assembly Rooms for 2015/16 and notes the venue has achieved its income and business development targets.

Links

Coalition pledges	P24 , P31
Council outcomes	CP6
Single Outcome Agreement	SO4

Assembly Rooms Annual Report 2015/16

Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee note the contents of the report and the Assembly Rooms' continuing success.

Background

- 2.1 The Assembly Rooms reopened as a fully refurbished events venue in July 2012. Since that time, the venue has consistently delivered successfully on business plan and development targets.

Main report

- 3.1 The Assembly Rooms has met its income and business development targets in 2015/16. Overall footfall for 2015/16 footfall shows a growth of 2% on 2014/15.
- 3.2 Advance event bookings for 2016/17 (as at the end of June 2016) are at a similar level to 2015/16. Overall income at the end 2015/16 was 7% up on 2014/15 levels. Repeat business has grown from 37% in 2014/15 to 47% in 2015/16.
- 3.3 In 2015/16 the Assembly Rooms hosted 132 events broken down as follows:

Conferences	29%
Dinners (including awards)	22%
Public events (including awards, fairs, exhibitions and concerts)	35%
Private events (including weddings)	5%
Receptions	10%
Edinburgh Festival Fringe	1%

- 3.4 Just over half of these were national events (45%) while the remainder were local (42%) and international (13%). The venue continues to work closely with partners including other venues, Panel of Caterers, Marketing Edinburgh, Visit

Scotland and Unique Venues of Edinburgh, to achieve this mix of events and maximise business coming into the city, which in turn contribute to the local economy.

3.5 Event highlights in 2015 included:

STV Pre Scottish 2015 Election Debate	This debate included all Party leaders and an invited audience.
EIE (Engage: Invest: Exploit) 2015	EIE showcases the best companies coming out of Scotland's universities and innovative new ventures from the country's wider entrepreneurial eco-system, to local, national and international investors.
Scottish Land and Estates Conference and Exhibition	This annual conference attracted members from land based businesses from all over rural Scotland.
EURAPS (European Association of Plastic Surgeons) Research Council Meeting and Exhibition	This international 4 day meeting attracted specialists from all over Europe
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations - Scottish Charity Awards 2015	This awards dinner attracted organisations from all over Scotland and featured Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland as guest speaker.
Etihad Airways Reception	This event was to launch Etihad working with Edinburgh Airport.
International Society of Reform of Criminal Law Conference	This conference attracted international delegates from all over the world
Blackwell's an evening with Mary Beard	Professor Mary Beard discussed and read from her new book "SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome".
Scottish Qualifications Authority – SQA Star Awards	This event brings together pupils, teachers, students, lecturers, employers and training providers from across Scotland to celebrate and award individuals and teams.

3.6 Event highlights in 2016 included:

Consulate General of The People's Republic of China	Chinese New Year Performance for an invited audience from the local Chinese community and other stakeholders.
Scottish Chamber Orchestra Family Concert	Jonathan Dove composed The Crocodiamond from a story by Anthony Horowitz.
Scottish PA Network Spring Showcase	Annual event for PA's to meet suppliers, venues and service providers from the local area who are members of the Scottish PA Network.
Scottish Military Charity Ball	This year's ball celebrated the 60 th Anniversary of this event.
Yoga in the City	This event was saw over 200 people take part in a yoga class led by Tribe yoga in the Ballroom.
Edinburgh Glee 2016 – schools choir competition	The Frisson Foundation staged choir competition heats with local schools followed by the final event.
Local Heroes Awards 2016 – Evening News	This annual awards dinner celebrates local people who have been nominated and voted for by Evening News readers.
13 th World Congress of Bioethics Conference Dinner	This international association conference brought the main event of its social programme to the Assembly Rooms.

3.7 The ongoing programme of marketing, media relations and communications is delivered in line with the venue's Marketing and Sales plan. The main focus is to develop the venue's profile through media relations, social media and direct engagement. The venue's followers on Twitter have grown from 5,100 in July 2015 to 6,030 at July 2016. This compares well to other cultural and event venues in the city, whose Twitter accounts have been active for longer periods.

3.8 The Assembly Rooms is leading on an interactive feedback pilot project, this has been in place since July 2015 operating in three City of Edinburgh Council

venues: The Assembly Rooms, Church Hill Theatre and the City Art Centre. The trial involves interactive kiosks in each venue which has offered customers the opportunity to respond to a short survey on their experiences in the venues. There is also the opportunity to leave comments and suggestions as well as provide contact details to allow management to follow up on comments and suggestions. From July 2015 to May 2016, 5,585 responses were received gaining an 87% average satisfaction rate against the three venues. This is 17% up on the 70% minimum threshold which was set by Culture for the pilot. Customer comments and suggestions has provided a greater insight into the customers journey and offered staff the opportunity to make key service improvements within the venues, ultimately contributing towards a greater customer experience

Heritage

3.9 The Activity Plan to promote the heritage of the venue continued to be delivered by a part time Heritage Outreach Assistant until November 2015. This was a condition of the Heritage Lottery funding for the Assembly Rooms capital project, and had funding in place until the end of 2015 to continue this activity. It has been a very successful initiative with the public. The key elements which were achieved to date include:

3.9.1 Outreach work and public engagement – promoting the social history of the Assembly Rooms. The Heritage Outreach Assistant did work with colleagues to provide reminiscence sessions for local groups and free public tours of the Assembly Rooms. The free public tours continue to be delivered by the Front of House Manager supported by volunteers.

3.9.2 Doors Open Day – this year the public were offered hourly guided tours of the Assembly Rooms, workshops on Georgian society and the opportunity to share their memories with volunteers at heritage stalls. The day attracted over 700 visitors, and one of the 6 tours had up to 50 people in attendance.

3.9.3 Heritage Exhibition – as part of the Heritage Outreach Assistant's ongoing engagement with the community they were asked to assist in marking the 50th Anniversary of the Church Hill Theatre. The celebration included the creation of a short film about the Church Hill Theatre and it's users plus the curation of a small exhibition displaying memorabilia from a range of companies who have performed in the theatre. The feedback from the public was very positive.

Measures of success

- 4.1 Success is measured through positive feedback from hirers, visitors, participants and audiences, amongst others, and against a variety of other factors, some of which are listed below:
 - 4.1.1 maintain and grow event numbers;
 - 4.1.2 maintain quality of services;
 - 4.1.3 continue to develop and evaluate community engagement projects;
 - 4.1.4 adhere to marketing plan, evaluate and review as required; and
 - 4.1.5 meet income targets.
- 4.2 Success is also measured against the following objectives within the Culture Plan;
 - 4.2.1 ensure that everyone has access to world class cultural provision; and
 - 4.2.2 encourage the highest standards of creativity and excellence in all aspects of cultural activity.

Financial impact

- 5.1 There are no financial impacts arising from this report.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 There are no risk, policy, compliance or governance impacts arising from this report.

Equalities impact

- 7.1 The Assembly Rooms refurbishment improved access to and ease of movement around the building, as well as the facilities on offer. The venue offers reduced rental rates to charities.

Sustainability impact

- 8.1 The impacts of this report in relation to the three elements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 Public Bodies Duties have been considered. The Assembly Rooms management incorporates consideration of sustainability in its fullest sense in all of its planning. Further to the recommendations made by Resource Efficient Scotland surveys of the Assembly Rooms and Church Hill Theatre, the Management Team have continued to review waste management arrangements through Changeworks; continued to work with sustainable

suppliers to develop its own range of fully degradable disposable cups, branded as 'we ARE not plastic' (ARE -Assembly Rooms Edinburgh); continue to develop the Green Team and work to the Green Pledges made with Resource Efficient Scotland.

- 8.2 The incorporation of green building initiatives and advanced building management systems to monitor heating and lighting have also been successful in terms of decreasing energy use, despite the fact that use of the building has increased through securing more events. For other resources, water is saved through tap sensors and eco flush systems in the toilets, with plans to extend this further through rainwater harvesting.
- 8.3 Staff continue to review how they communicate their sustainability objectives with their varied audiences. As far as possible they limit the production of printed materials, but where these are required, the use of recycled paper is specified wherever practical. In communicating with stakeholders, clients and the many visitors who come through the Assembly Rooms doors, the use of digital, online and social media are inherent in their culture. Assembly Rooms website includes a full section on Sustainability – Green Business at the Assembly Room <http://www.assemblyroomsedinburgh.co.uk/about-us/green>
- 8.4 The Assembly Rooms achieved a Silver award in the Green Tourism Business for their focus on Sustainability in 2015 and are striving for a Gold award in 2016.

Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Further to the 2013/14 review of the Assembly Rooms operation involving all of the Assembly Rooms team, local competitors, a small selection of clients and service providers who work with the venue. Procedures and processes continue to be regularly reviewed as a result, which has had a beneficial effect on new and repeat business, and feedback continues to be positive.

Background reading/external references

[Assembly Rooms](#) website

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

Contact: Shona Clelland, Cultural Venues Development Manager- Culture Venues

E-mail: shona.clelland@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 220 4348

Links

Coalition pledges	P24 – Maintain and embrace support for world-famous festivals and events P31 – Maintain our city’s reputation as the cultural capital of the world by continuing to support and invest in our cultural infrastructure
Council outcomes	CP6 – A creative, cultural capital
Single Outcome Agreement	SO4 – Edinburgh’s communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric
Appendices	N/A