



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Belfast Waterfront/Ulster Hall Performance Report Quarter 3 2013/2014
<b>Date:</b>	18 February 2014
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John McGrillen, Director of Development, Ext 3470
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Jennifer Patterson, Revenue and Business Generation Manager Ext 1335 David Orr, Business Support Manager, Ext 3502

### Relevant Background Information

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a progress report on Belfast Waterfront/Ulster Hall's (BW/UH) performance during the nine month period, 1 April to 31 December, financial year 2013/2014.

Venue performance is reported to Committee on a quarterly basis. The third quarter report includes a review of entertainment and business hire performance at BW/UH and an analysis of actual performance against budget estimates for the relevant financial period.

A detailed account of BW/UH performance trends and a comparison with 2012/2013 is available in Appendix 1.

### Key Issues

#### Performance trends

Quarter 3 is traditionally the busiest time of year for entertainment bookings and occupancy levels at the Waterfront and Ulster Halls. During October – December alone a total of 177 entertainment performance and 60 business conferences and events took place at the venues.

#### Entertainment Hire and Programming

As in previous years the season programme was varied and included a number of well-

known acts ranging from Jools Holland, Russell Brand to Jose Carreras, not forgetting our annual pantomime (Little Red Riding Hood), the All Ireland Irish Dance Championships or indeed the Van Morrison's Freedom of the City concert in November which attracted a lot of publicity in the media.

Financially entertainment concerts and events continues to perform well with income secured from externally hired events during the first nine months of the year (1 April – 31 December 2013) exceeding target by 9.4% achieving a total income of £727k against budget at £664k.

Whilst the total number of Auditorium 'own shows' and occupancy at the Waterfront during April – December 2013/2014 decreased on results achieved for the same period last year (-1 events and -5 days), the number of Studio owns shows contracted during this period increased on 2012/2013 performance with nine events compared to six last year. Studio occupancy levels also increased with 63 days usage compared to 58 in 2012/2013.

The number of Auditorium commercial hires during April – December 2013/2014 reflects a decrease of 11% achieving 40 versus 45 bookings for the same period last year. This in turn had a consequential effect on occupancy levels for entertainment hire occupancy however, on a positive note there has been a marked increase on 2012/2013 performance levels for the number of conference business bookings and occupancy days in the Auditorium during this period and this in turn has resulted in an annual increase in Auditorium occupancy of 2%.

In terms of the Ulster Hall, the total number of owns shows programmed out to the 31. December 2013 increased by 57% (+4) on last year's performance as did occupancy, whereas as the number of commercial hires was similar to 2012/2013's performance with 74 bookings contracted for the period and 133 days occupancy.

The current economic climate continues to influence client booking trends across the board plus tickets sales/ visitor numbers at shows.

### Conference Business Sales

Overall Business Hire performance for the first nine months, 1 April – 31 December 2013/2014 was extremely pleasing achieving an income of £597k which was £128k (27%) more than the budgeted figure of £469k.

The number of Auditorium bookings achieved during the first nine months of this year increased by 36% on the same period last year (14 bookings contracted in 2013/2014 compared to 10 in 2012/2013) and is due to the team's success in attracting a number of new large-scale conference bookings including the World Police and Fire Games (WPFG) and International Neonatal Nurses conference. The growth in the number of bookings positively impacted on occupancy levels resulting in a growth of 30% with 36 days secured in 2013/2014 versus 20 days in 2012/2013 and, increased room hire income for the period.

Although the number of Studio bookings decreased (-6 bookings) on 2012/2013 performance, occupancy levels exceeded target achieving a total of 48 days which was a growth of 30% on the previous year. Once again this can be attributed to WPFG.

During the first nine months of 2013/2014 the Ulster Hall saw an increase in the number of conference bookings (+1) with eight bookings contracted in the Grand Hall at the end of December 2013. Occupancy levels also increased resulting in a growth of 57% with a total of 22 days usage.

#### Box Office

Ticket sales at period nine of the financial year 2013/2014 were £488k which was £60k less than budget. The overall economic downward trend evident in other business sectors continues to influence performance in this area.

#### Overall performance

Visitor figures for the first nine months of the 2013 saw 253,890 people attending events at the Waterfront and Ulster Halls against a target of 267,024. A total of 181,385 visitors were recorded for Belfast Waterfront (4 % within range of target at 187,734) and 72,505 people at the Ulster Hall which was 8% short of target at 79,290. The quarter 3 outturn for the Halls is considered reasonable given the current economic climate which continues to influence ticket sales/ attendance figures. Venue management will continue to monitor and review the situation and work on identifying opportunities to increase venue hires and own shows in order to bolster visitor numbers.

Gross turnover for the at the end of period nine was £121k (5%) higher than target at £2,130k while expenditure was £183k above budget estimate due to additional employee costs, premises costs and hired and contracted services in relation to performer fees to support the Waterfront and Ulster Hall's events programme.. This has resulted in an actual operating cost at the end of period nine of £1,954k which is £63k above the budgeted operating cost for the period.

#### **Equality and Good Relations Implications**

There are no equality implications in this report.

#### **Resource Implications**

None

#### **Recommendations**

That Members note the contents of the report

#### **Decision Tracking**

Officer Responsible: Revenue and Business Generation Manager / Business Support Manager

<b>Guide to abbreviations</b>
-------------------------------

BW/UH    Belfast Waterfront/Ulster Hall WPFG    World Police and Fire Games
--

<b>Documents attached</b>
---------------------------

Appendix 1 – Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Performance Trends
--