



Report to: Portfolios for Heritage, Culture and the Arts and Strategy, Performance and Finance

Decision Date: 23 September 2024

Portfolio Holder: Councillors Rowan Cozens- Heritage, Culture and the Arts and Paul Peacock- Strategy, Performance and Finance

Director Lead: Matthew Finch, Director of Communities & Environment

Lead Officer: Carys Coulton-Jones, Business Manager – Heritage and Culture

Report Summary	
Type of Report	Open, Non-key decision
Report Title	Palace Theatre Sound Desk Replacement
Purpose of Report	To inform members of the unexpected failure of the Palace Theatre’s sound desk and propose replacement.
Recommendations	<p>It is recommended that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The Portfolio Holder note and supports the replacement of the Sound Desk; and b) The Portfolio Holder approves a capital budget of £35,000, financed by the Change Management Reserve.
Alternative Options Considered	As detailed in the report, attempts have already been made to repair the existing equipment, and the theatre cannot operate efficiently and professionally without a sound desk.
Reason for Recommendation	The Palace Theatre sits at the heart of Newark, and meets the community plan objective of celebrating and invigorating community spirit, pride of place and a sense of belonging. It is integral to key projects including the Arts Council England funded National Portfolio Organisation programme.
Decision Taken	As per the recommendations

1.0 Background

- 1.1 In order to operate as a professional venue, the Palace Theatre maintains a mid-size sound desk (MIDAS brand). There is also a secondary, small sound desk, used as a backup or for some shows which bring more of their own equipment. Most touring productions expect a specific quality and level of equipment on site, and the current MIDAS sound desk fulfils this requirement adequately.
- 1.2 In April this year, the MIDAS desk developed an issue, significantly affecting its function and taking it out of use. Since then, the technical manager has been exploring how to repair the desk. However, it appears that one of the consequences of COVID is that the MIDAS brand has been bought out, and is now being discontinued, making support and repair difficult. Service Centres are unable to source spare parts to undertake repairs.
- 1.3 During this time, the Palace Theatre has used its small sound desk. Fortunately the shows in the Summer programme were mainly able to accommodate this, however moving into our busy Autumn season, with key, large scale productions such as Blood Brothers (the first time a West End touring musical has visited Newark) and the pantomime, this will not be adequate and could lead to a breach of contract, leading to a requirement to hire in a suitable alternative as a short term measure if a new sound desk is not in place. Additionally, were the small desk to fail, there would be no other backup desk on site which would lead to cancelled shows. Clearly, this is not a tenable long-term solution.

2.0 Proposal/Details of Options Considered

- 2.1 The technical team have spent three months consulting with industry specialists to understand whether a solution can be found to bring our current sound desk back into use. The desk is of an age (approx. 10 years) that, even without the challenge in sourcing parts to support repair, consideration should be given to a newer model to ensure that the theatre can remain fit for purpose with technical capability in line with other professional venues of a similar size.
- 2.2 It was originally hoped that a repair could be identified in the short term, and a new desk considered as part of the planned capital bid process for 2025/26. However, the inability to source a repair has left the Palace Theatre exposed, therefore it is proposed that a new Sound Desk should be purchased urgently.
- 2.3 Initial enquiries suggest that the anticipated cost of a new, modern mid-size sound desk will be approximately £35,000. Subject to approval, a procurement will be undertaken to ensure value for money in this specialist area.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, I have considered the following implications: Equality and Diversity, Financial, Safeguarding and Sustainability,

and where appropriate I have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment below where appropriate.

3.1 Equalities Implications

None

4.0 Financial Implications (FIN23-24/5782)

- 4.1 The purchase of the new sound desk requires a budget of £35,000 in the Capital Programme. The budget can be financed by the Change Management Reserve, with no further implications on the revenue budget.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.