

# Woodville Halls

March 2005

A review by the Overview Scrutiny Committee



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| <p><b>1. Executive Summary</b></p> <p>1.1. The Overview Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of the Woodville Halls. A Task Group consisting of five members of the Scrutiny Committee carried out the review.</p> <p>1.2 The terms of reference for the review were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the light of the proposed rationalisation of the entertainments programme at the Woodville Halls for budgetary purposes and the reported longer term 'considerable investment' required in the complex, to examine:</li> <li>• The impact on the current entertainments programme and the options available within the budget now set</li> <li>• The nature, scope and possible cost of the capital investment required in the buildings (and their fabric/equipment) and how this might be financed</li> <li>• The rationale for, and possible nature of, alternative uses for the complex</li> <li>• User and public views on the above (but excluding costing/finance)</li> <li>• The review to be informed by the experiences of other civic entertainment complexes in Kent/Medway districts/ boroughs</li> </ul> <p>1.3 The context in which this review was undertaken was the considerable investment in the Woodville Halls and the venue in the longer term.</p> <p>1.4 Two evidence gathering sessions were held with witnesses from Gravesham council's leisure department and Kent Thameside. Visits to the Winter Gardens – Margate, Princes Hall – Aldershot,</p> | <p>The Orchard Theatre – Dartford and a tour of the Woodville Halls were also included. All these visits included discussions with the venue's managers as part of the evidence gathering process. (Notes on these evidence gathering sessions are reproduced in Appendix 3)</p> <p>1.5 Recommendations to Cabinet are:-</p> <p>In the short term (to cover a five year period)</p> <p>1.5.1 The committee supports the move towards events that maximise income from the bar and catering such as the dinner/cabarets that were being trialled this Christmas and proved to be financially successful. This will entail a move away from theatre style events and it will be necessary to research the local market and competition for these types of events</p> <p>1.5.2 Exploratory talks should be held with Thanet Leisure Force to examine what advantages they could offer in running the Woodville Halls.</p> <p>1.5.3 In the light of the positive feedback from the Theatre manager of Princes Hall Aldershot investigate the practicability of establishing a venue managers' forum, in the surrounding area, to exchange information and best practice.</p> <p>1.5.4 No significant capital expenditure should be undertaken (other than that needed to comply with Health &amp; Safety and Disabled Access legislation), including that involved with the 'immediately suitable options for alternative uses' identified in the recent feasibility report, until the long term future of both the Woodville Halls and the Civic Centre have been determined.</p> <p>1.5.5 A separate costing exercise into the provision of up graded seating and air conditioning be undertaken to allow a judgement to be made as to whether</p> |
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such short term investment could be justified.

For the long term (five years plus)

- 1.5.6 Consideration should be given to a 'whole site solution' involving the Centre/Woodville Halls/Cygnets House and potentially the current Police Headquarters whereby commercial redevelopment of such (primarily residential housing) could release funds to enable the provision of a purpose-designed/built Performing Arts Centre elsewhere in Gravesend/Northfleet and a new Civic Centre Building.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Woodville Halls

The Woodville Halls forms part of the Civic Centre complex and was opened in 1968. It is a multi purpose venue capable of hosting a wide range of functions including dinners, dances, banquets, luncheons, exhibitions, conferences and concerts.

The venue has a capacity of 810 seats with 50 standing, a 1,000 standing or 450 dining and can be configured with rake or flat floor levels to suit programme requirements.

A more comprehensive description of its facilities can be found in the Woodville Halls business plan 2001/05.

The business plan sees the Woodville Halls providing;

- a popular programme of events bringing household names to the town and elements of a more specialised product to service the needs of the community;
- a focal point for live activities in Gravesham, attracting visitors from the rest of Kent and from other parts of the United Kingdom;

- putting Gravesham on the map with nationally advertised tour dates and high profile marketing, giving the town coverage in both local and national media;
- a meeting place for the public, offering a pleasant location where people can put their cares to one side for an hour or two;
- offering the community a space for producing and performing work that is of relevance to Gravesham today;
- keeping the arts live in Gravesham for the borough of Gravesham and the surrounding areas

The staffing structure for the Woodville Halls is reproduced in Appendix 1

A budget spreadsheet for the venue covering the financial years 01/02, 02/03, 03/04 and 04/05 is reproduced at Appendix 2. This shows the true level of subsidy.

## 3 Outcome of Review

### 3.1 Woodville Halls

Savings of £50k had been budgeted for in 2004/05. The review committee were advised that such "savings" were to be largely achieved through an increase in private hire income.

A menu of charges for private hires had been introduced to replace the original flat fee. This enabled private hirers to purchase only the services they needed.

Some programme rationalisation had been undertaken so that council sponsored shows are arranged for Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays with the remaining days for private hire and dark days (i.e. when nothing is on).

In 2002/03, following a review by the Cabinet, the operation of the bar had been brought back in house having been previously run by a contractor. This move not only helped increase income but was considered essential should there be any future deal with a private sector operator to run the Woodville Halls.

The question was asked concerning the price of drinks and could more of it be sold at a reduced price. Unfortunately the bar does not have a regular clientele and during the evening when a show is on there are limited opportunities for sales. Typically the bar opens 45 minutes before the start of the show. Most people arrive 10 minutes before the show starts at 7.30. The 15 minute interval limits drinks sales and most patrons go straight home after the show has finished at 10.15 – 10.30. Any proposal to run the bar, independently of shows or during the day as a wine bar, would need investment and a marketing identity to separate it from the public perception of it being part of the Civic Centre.

The members of the review task group had a tour of the Woodville Halls led by Brian Tourle, Arts and Heritage Manager. (Cllrs. Newell and Jean Christie were unable to make this visit but Brian showed them round a few days later)

The tour highlighted the following;

- there is e-government funding for a 24hr on line booking service;
- the booking office can be very noisy during the day due to its proximity to the council's front desk. There have been incidents of anti social behaviour by individuals at the front desk which has led to people giving up on booking or collecting tickets to shows;

- the foyer has the overall impression of a 60's building, clean but dull, like it has stood still for a long time;
- there are problems with sound transfer in the Council Chamber and committee rooms due to the open plan nature of this area;
- the Kent Room, which has a bar, has not been decorated for about 15 years;
- The removable seating looked a little tired and the most regular criticism from users was that they were uncomfortable;

The catering facilities were under utilised. Many years ago there would have been 2 major catering functions a week nowadays they average 6 per year. A typical Asian wedding, of which there are about 25 a year, would bring in their own caterers and drink. These events are charged an overall fee of £850 plus £600 for the use of the kitchens and £600 for corkage on wines, spirits and soft drinks.

As the tour progressed possible changes to the existing configuration of the venue were discussed. Such as;

- establishing the Kent Room as a stand alone bar with a separate entrance. This was thought to be a good idea but it would not be available when a show was on. It was also felt that there would be competition from bars and private hire venues within the town and the usage of the Kent Room as a stand alone bar would have to be clearly defined;
- another possibility would be to move the bar downstairs and turn the Kent Room into something like a fitness centre. This would need substantial investment;

- Mr Tourle thought that the Woodville Halls would not attract many bookings as a conference centre. There was too much local competition and larger conferences would be held in London where there would be better local accommodation and transport.

Mr Tourle was asked whether the outsourcing of the running of the Woodville Halls had been considered. He replied that it had but the companies who looked into had concluded that they could not run it any cheaper or better than the council.

Finally Mr Tourle was asked whether he would build a theatre in Gravesend. He felt that currently the Woodville Halls was neither one thing nor the other and in an ideal world he would build a facility like the Fairfield Halls in Croydon. The Fairfield Halls had a concert hall seating 1800 and a theatre with a seating capacity of 760. Any such building would have a separate location and identity from that of the council.

### Recommendation

**The committee supports the move towards events that maximise income from the bar and catering such as the dinner/cabarets that were trialled this Christmas and proved to be financially successful. This will entail a move away from theatre style events and it will be necessary to research the local market and competition for these types of events.**

### 3.2 The Winter Gardens – Margate.

The Winter Gardens in Margate is run by Thanet Leisure Force, an Industrial Provident Society (IPS). The IPS is a non-profit making organisation with charitable status. This has some advantages such as being able to draw in outside funding and borrowing on it. It

is also exempt from business rates and corporation tax. The IPS was set up in 1999 and has a 25 year lease on the Winter Gardens paying Thanet council a peppercorn rent.

**Thanet Council grants the IPS £440k per annum** (in lieu of the budget subsidy that would apply if the complex was council run) for the Winter Gardens and Northdown House (another conference and entertainment type facility). Initially the Council grant made up 40% of the Winter Gardens income, expansion has reduced this to 20%.

The Winter Gardens has a turnover of £2m of which catering accounts for £1m.

There has been a £1m capital investment in the venue some of which has come from grants. Due to a lack of investment by the council over a number of years there is a need to spend huge sums on the fabric of the building.

The Winter Gardens can accommodate up to 1500 for conferences and theatre shows. There are banqueting facilities for up to 750, dinner dances for a maximum of 600 and buffet dances for up to 1000.

Alternatively the hall can offer up to 12,000sq.ft. of exhibition space.

The Winter Gardens complex is fully licensed and houses four bars and there are additional rooms available for smaller private dinners, wedding receptions etc.

### Recommendation

**Exploratory talks should be held with Thanet Leisure Force to examine what advantages they could offer in running the Woodville Halls.**

### 3.3 Princes Hall – Aldershot.

The Princes Hall is a multi purpose entertainment centre built in 1973. It is owned, managed and subsidised by Rushmoor Borough Council. **The subsidy is about £300k per year.**

The venue consists of a main hall and 3 function suites. The main hall has a tiered seating capacity of 595 and a standing capacity of 900. The 3 function suites are the Princes Suite (capacity 200), the Tichbourne Suite (100) and the Edinburgh Suite (50).

The catering is contracted out, the contract is for 5 years at a cost of £10,000 pa. The contract allows the council a share of the income above a threshold of £150,000. Mr. Phillips, the theatre manager, said that if there was a desire to increase this income stream it may be appropriate to take it back in-house.

In 2003/04 the venue held 48-50 professional shows plus a 3 week pantomime season. Additionally there were some 600 private hires. A comparison of private hire rates with other local venues showed the hall to be underselling its facilities by a considerable margin. This resulted in an increase in rates from £250 to £800 for a wedding reception with, interestingly, no reduction in demand.

Mr Phillips said that there was a very active network of some 20 entertainment venue managers covering the surrounding area which meets regularly and exchanges information and best practice on all aspects of running such venues. The network generally meets twice a year.

#### **Recommendation**

**In the light of the positive feedback received from the Theatre Manager of Princes Hall, Aldershot investigate**

**the practicability of establishing a venue managers' forum, in the surrounding area, to exchange information and best practice.**

### 3.4 Orchard Theatre – Dartford.

The Orchard theatre was opened in 1983 and is wholly owned, subsidised and managed by Dartford Borough Council. We understand that there is a subsidy but the figure was not revealed to the review committee. The theatre manager is Vanessa Hart. The theatre has a seating capacity of 957 but no separate function rooms. The catering is carried out in-house.

In the structure of the authority the theatre comes under Regeneration rather than Culture and Leisure.

The theatre has undergone some major refurbishment during the last few years including auditorium seating and a new sound system.

The theatre is run very much like a business with its external hire rates based on the running costs of the theatre and as such does not offer discounts to local groups. The authority has established an 'access grant' system to allow local minority groups and charities, which might otherwise be unable to afford these rates, to hire the facilities.

The Orchard was designed to be multi purpose with some removable seating however this facility is rarely used and its main strength is as a theatre putting on musicals, ballet, live music and drama.

The theatre operates a 'premier club' scheme where on payment of a subscription members of the club are offered certain discounts. The maximum ticket price is £32.



The theatre management sees the Woodville Halls as competition with both theatres drawing their patrons from the same catchment area. The Woodville Halls management operates a policy whereby it will not put on shows within 4 weeks of that show having been on at Dartford. There would appear to be little or no sharing of information on programming.

Ms Hart said that the council considered the theatre to be a major part of any regeneration project either by the council or in the wider context of Kent Thameside.

It was apparent to the review group that the size and nature of the Orchard Theatre (a theatre rather than a general use complex like the Woodville Halls) made it difficult for the Woodville Halls to compete in the market place for theatre type shows.

### 3.5 Financial Issues

In order to understand the true annual subsidy made to the Woodville Halls complex as part of the council budget evidence was taken from Phil Wilson – Accounting manager. A spreadsheet breaking down income and expenditure is reproduced at Appendix 2.

After stripping out the notional figure for capital financing costs and central support services (the latter on the basis that the closure of Woodville Halls would not necessarily reduce such costs) the review group were encouraged by a level of subsidy that had reduced from £263k in 01/02 to a budgeted figure of £207k in 04/05. This compared

favourably with the subsidies quoted by other authorities entertainment complexes visited as part of this review. This subsidy was seen to represent the cross subsidy of community/ minority activities which form an essential part of local authority theatre and entertainment provision.

Concurrent with this review the council commissioned consultant engineers Penoyre and Prasad to carry out an examination of the fabric of the building and to explore options for the long term future of the Woodville Halls. Their report was published during this review and was studied by the task group.

The report considered three possible options - a refurbishment option, a theatre option and a conference option.

On the assumption that the costs of these proposals would need to be funded from the council tax under the terms of the recently introduced prudential borrowing code the review group obtained the following details from the finance department.

Period of Loan (Years)	Option	Capital Cost of Option (Not Inc. Vat) £	Increase in Council Tax for a Band D Property for Period of Loan £
20	Refurbish	2,128,000.00	5.53
25	Refurbish	2,128,000.00	5.47
20	Theatre	4,271,000.00	11.09
25	Theatre	4,271,000.00	10.97
20	Conference	4,676,000.00	12.15
25	Conference	4,676,000.00	12.01

The above table shows the increase in the Council Tax for a Band D property for the period of the loan. It has been assumed that each option would be funded by unsupported borrowing (i.e. new borrowing not supported through either the RSG or HRA subsidy system).

The review group was not convinced that a commitment to expenditure of this magnitude, on any of the options detailed above, with the accompanying long term borrowing commitment and impact on Council tax could be justified until the issues concerning the long term usage of the Woodville Halls had been determined.

**Recommendation**

**No significant capital expenditure should be undertaken (other than that needed to comply with Health & safety and Disabled Access legislation), including that involved with the ‘immediately suitable options for alternative uses’ identified in the recent feasibility report, until the future of both the Woodville halls and the Civic Centre have been determined.**

3.6 Consultation.

A questionnaire was sent to 1,000 addresses selected at random from the Woodville Hall’s database of patrons who had used the venue in the past twelve months.

A slightly modified questionnaire was sent to 17 user groups.

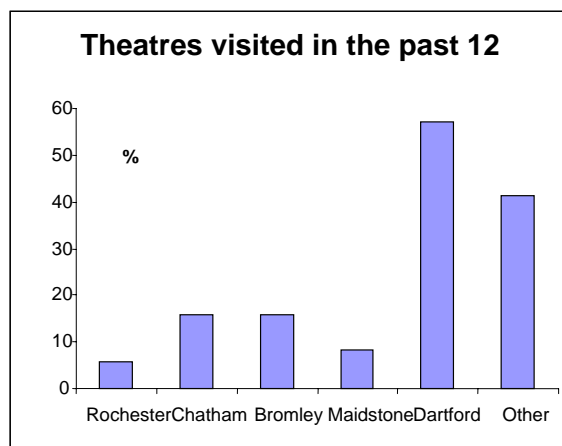
A brief analysis of the results of these surveys is shown below. The full results of these survey’s and responses to open ended questions are reproduced at Appendix 4

3.6.1 Patron’s survey.

For the patron’s survey one hundred and twenty four completed questionnaires were returned. (12.4%)

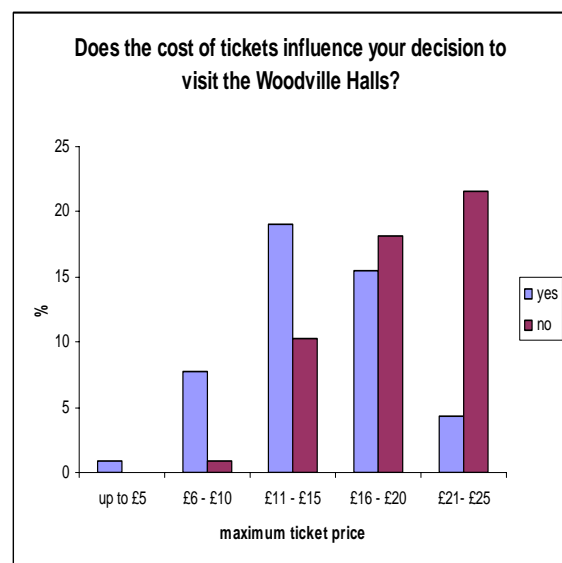
- There were nearly 3 times as many female respondents as male.

- Over 85% of those who replied were aged 35 or over.
- There was a ratio of 2 to 1 in favour of the installation of air conditioning.



The question was asked – “whether the cost of a ticket influenced their decision to visit the Woodville Halls and if so what was the maximum ticket price that they would be prepared to pay”.

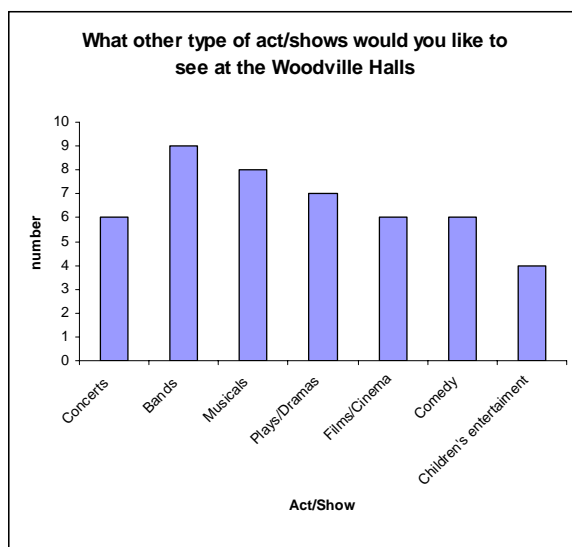
The answers to these questions are detailed in the chart below.



Two open ended questions were asked

Firstly – “What other acts/shows would you like to see at the Woodville Halls?”

Of the 124 completed questionnaires 55 responded to this question. Of those the most frequently occurring are shown below.



Other less popular suggestions included - discos, indoor sports event and opera

The second open ended question asked – “Do you have any suggestions for improving the facilities at the Woodville Halls?”

- The highest number of responses was for more comfortable seating.
- Other suggestions included improved décor and a café/restaurant

### 3.6.2 Survey of User groups.

The following responses to the question “How do you rate the pricing policy for the hire of the Woodville Halls?” were received.

Excellent value	1
Good value	2
Average value	2
Poor value	0

- 4 out of 5 respondents thought the seating ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’
- All respondents thought that the Halls would benefit from the installation of air conditioning.

When asked – “Do you have any suggestions for improving the service and facilities at the Woodville Halls?”

The following responses were received:

“Bar shuts at 11pm – not a lot of time for people to meet after a performance, particularly with amateur shows etc. seating remains diabolical – puts many people off”

“Please get a good piano and a piano stool that is not broken”

“Air conditioning would be nice but only if it didn’t cost anymore to the public and people hiring the theatre. More bar staff and flexibility of hours”

“Whilst air conditioning would benefit the Halls it is by no means a priority. They must be seating, most uncomfortable and sound, very amateurish”

The other question seeking user group’s comments on the service provided by the Woodville Halls received the following replies:

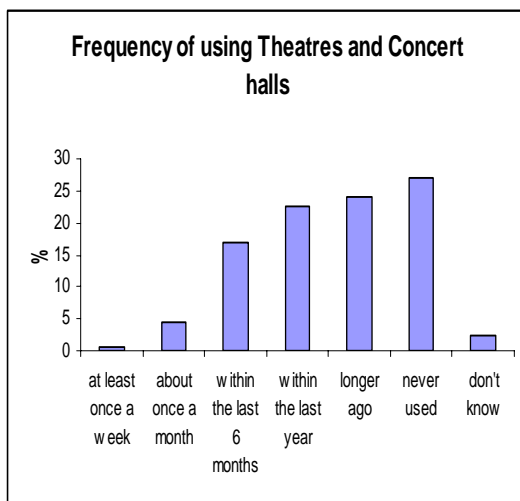
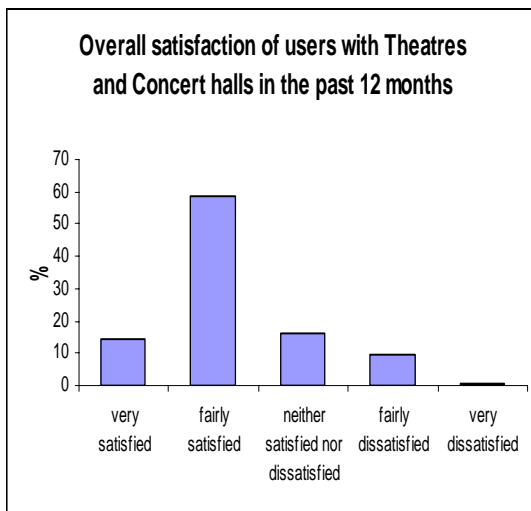
“Staff always appear friendly and helpful”

“We would like to thank the box office and backstage staff who gave us so much support during the week of our show”

“The problem seems to be that the Halls are meant to be all things for all people for all events. It simply doesn’t work. The council seems to have a will to improve the facilities but spend their money in ways that defy understanding,

like traffic calming in areas where the traffic crawls along already.”

The general public’s view on the Woodville Halls is drawn from a general user satisfaction survey that was carried out, as part of Best Value, in 2003/04.



3.6.3 Conclusions drawn from consultation

Although always dangerous to make assumptions or take action based on relatively modest statistical evidence it does appear that existing patrons would like more comfortable seating and air conditioning. However, potentially they would not be prepared to meet the cost of this investment if it meant higher ticket prices. It is a matter of conjecture, without further survey work,

whether these improvements would attract more patrons. The local competition for stage shows, particularly from Dartford’s Orchard Theatre, may militate against any increase in attendance brought about by these improvements.

**Recommendation.**

**A separate costing exercise into the provision of up graded seating and air conditioning be undertaken to allow a judgement to be made as to whether such short term investment could be justified.**

3.7 Possible whole site solution/ option.

The members of the review task group sought evidence on the wider and longer term implications for culture, leisure and the arts in the area. The task group asked Jackie Sadek the chief executive of the Kent Thameside Delivery Group for her thoughts on this issue.

Gravesham is part of Kent Thameside which itself is part of the larger Thames Gateway regeneration project.

Ms Sadek was of the opinion that the regeneration potential for all areas within the Thames Gateway was enormous. She considered that Gravesham with its heritage and transport connections was ideally placed and developers were always looking for new sites and opportunities for redevelopment.

Any long term option for the Woodville Halls would have to consider the potential redevelopment of the whole Civic Centre, Cygnet House and Police Station site (subject to any land ownership issues being resolved).

In Ms Sadek’s opinion any such redevelopment offered the opportunity for a visionary project that included an

iconic building as its centrepiece. In replying to a question about where the money for such an iconic building might come from Ms Sadek said that “Developers do not include facilities for arts and culture in their proposals because they are not economically viable. Funding has to come from sources such as the Department of Culture, Music and Arts or the Arts Council.”

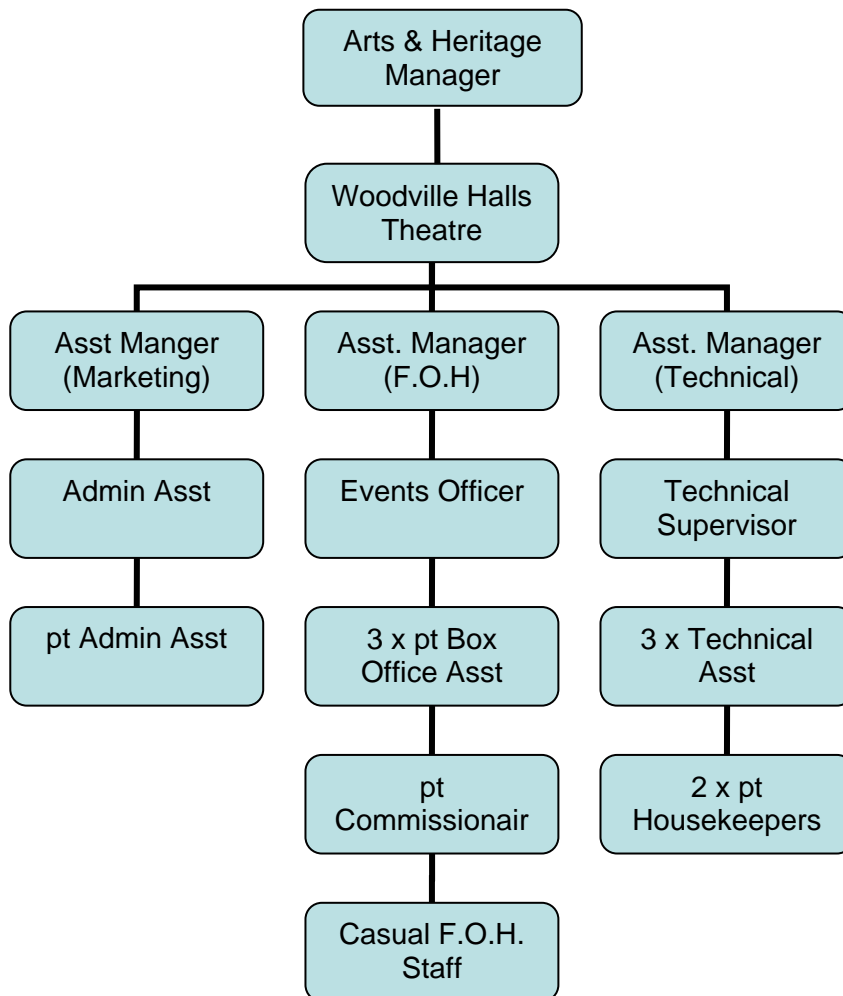
The redevelopment of the whole site could consider the possible relocation of the Civic Centre to another part of the borough and the building of a stand alone theatre/entertainment venue in a more people friendly location within the borough. A council facility for bill payments and general enquiries could be maintained in the town centre.

Ms Sadek went on to say that culture, leisure and the arts are fundamental for a sustainable community but Kent Thameside was struggling with the development of an art’s and culture strategy and as a result has a very attenuated approach to such leisure provision.

### **Recommendation**

**Consideration should be given to a ‘whole site solution’ involving the Civic centre/ Woodville Halls/Cygnet House and potentially the current Police Headquarters whereby commercial redevelopment (primarily residential housing) of such could release funds to enable the provision of a purpose- designed/built Performing Arts Centre elsewhere in Gravesend /Northfleet and a new Civic Centre Building.**

## Staff Structure Woodville Halls





**WOODVILLE HALLS**

DETAILS	2001-02 ORIGINAL BUD	2001-02 ACTUAL	2001-02 VAR	2002-03 ORIGINAL BUD	2002-03 ACTUAL	2002-03 VAR	2003-04 ORIGINAL BUD	2003-04 ACTUAL	2003-04 VAR	2004-05 ORIGINAL BUD
<b>EMPLOYEES</b>										
Salaries & Wages	250,270	216,837.25	-33,432.75	246,090	220,828.99	-25,261.01	250,000	256,418.63	6,418.63	263,000
Allowances	90	90.00	0.00	100	145.00	45.00	150	45.00	-105.00	150
Indirect Expenses	710	725.77	15.77	740	711.24	-28.76	770	780.20	10.20	790
<b>TOTAL EMPLOYEES COSTS</b>	<b>251,070</b>	<b>217,653.02</b>	<b>-33,416.98</b>	<b>246,930</b>	<b>221,685.23</b>	<b>-25,244.77</b>	<b>250,920</b>	<b>257,243.83</b>	<b>6,323.83</b>	<b>263,940</b>
<b>RUNNING EXPENSES</b>										
Repairs & Maintenance	30,850	34,557.55	3,707.55	35,900	34,203.68	-1,696.32	35,900	34,621.78	-1,278.22	35,900
Energy Costs	33,550	25,615.09	-7,934.91	27,000	26,443.65	-556.35	27,500	25,280.49	-2,219.51	27,500
Fixture & Fittings	2,500	3,387.73	887.73	2,500	4,257.50	1,757.50	2,750	2,888.17	138.17	3,750
Rents, Rates, Water	36,010	34,714.45	-1,295.55	34,720	28,775.46	-5,944.54	29,860	30,752.19	892.19	26,810
Cleaning & Domestic Supplies	2,750	2,163.67	-586.33	2,750	1,448.17	-1,301.83	2,750	2,511.98	-238.02	2,750
Office Expenses	2,350	1,320.87	-1,029.13	2,100	1,421.94	-678.06	2,100	1,321.35	-778.65	2,100
Equip, Furniture & Materials	10,050	6,861.19	-3,188.81	7,510	11,165.09	3,655.09	7,560	5,691.90	-1,868.10	7,530
Clothing, Uniforms & Laundry	1,850	1,742.79	-107.21	1,850	2,958.07	1,108.07	2,000	1,994.75	-5.25	2,000
Other Services	16,030	18,852.20	2,822.20	17,940	18,620.63	680.63	19,210	18,738.45	-471.55	19,250
Communications & Computing	25,460	28,360.61	2,900.61	27,940	26,349.27	-1,590.73	29,670	25,501.88	-4,168.12	28,650
Conference Expenses	300	262.00	-38.00	300	65.00	-235.00	2,500	2,190.36	-309.64	2,500
Miscellaneous Expenses	3,460	4,021.10	561.10	4,340	5,562.69	1,222.69	6,000	4,689.14	-1,310.86	4,900
Transport & Moveable Plant - Pooled Costs	980	927.10	-52.90	1,000	1,406.90	406.90	1,200	160.40	-1,039.60	250
Transport & Moveable Plant - Direct Costs	200	64.40	-135.60	120	28.00	-92.00	120	204.00	84.00	150
Agency & Contracted Services	450	429.67	-20.33	480	293.96	-186.04	320	352.00	32.00	320
<b>TOTAL RUNNING EXPENSES</b>	<b>166,790</b>	<b>163,280.42</b>	<b>-3,509.58</b>	<b>166,450</b>	<b>163,000.01</b>	<b>-3,449.99</b>	<b>169,440</b>	<b>156,898.84</b>	<b>-12,541.16</b>	<b>164,360</b>
<b>EVENT EXPENDITURE</b>										
Programme Costs	311,000	390,072.50	79,072.50	373,500	406,292.50	32,792.50	375,400	356,155.18	-19,244.82	344,050
<b>EVENT INCOME</b>										
Reimbursements & Contributions Other	0	0.00	0.00	-1,300	0.00	1,300.00	0	0.00	0.00	0
Licences	0	-500.00	-500.00	0	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0
Private Hire	-87,570	-103,393.34	-15,823.34	-109,100	-116,544.26	-7,444.26	-110,150	-135,993.97	-25,843.97	-160,950
Council Events	-324,000	-386,679.57	-62,679.57	-354,300	-386,647.24	-32,347.24	-369,350	-351,138.06	18,211.94	-347,850
Other Fees & Charges	-11,150	-5,972.65	5,177.35	-10,750	-5,008.30	5,741.70	0	-20.41	-20.41	-50
Recharges to Other Revenue Account Servs	-7,190	-3,364.00	3,826.00	-3,150	-2,411.00	739.00	-17,680	-4,766.00	12,914.00	-19,000
<b>TOTAL EVENT INCOME</b>	<b>-429,910</b>	<b>-499,909.56</b>	<b>-69,999.56</b>	<b>-478,600</b>	<b>-510,610.80</b>	<b>-32,010.80</b>	<b>-497,180</b>	<b>-491,918.44</b>	<b>5,261.56</b>	<b>-527,850</b>
<b>EVENT CONTRIBUTION</b>	<b>-118,910</b>	<b>-109,837.06</b>	<b>9,072.94</b>	<b>-105,100</b>	<b>-104,318.30</b>	<b>781.70</b>	<b>-121,780</b>	<b>-135,763.26</b>	<b>-13,983.26</b>	<b>-183,800</b>
<b>BAR AND CATERING - EXPENDITURE</b>										
Bar Trade	0	0.00	0.00	0	21,989.34	21,989.34	29,400	31,135.67	1,735.67	35,000
Catering Trade/Kitchen Hire	0	6,260.96	6,260.96	0	6,260.96	6,260.96	3,000	8,529.02	5,529.02	10,000
Kiosk Trade	0	3,741.19	3,741.19	0	3,741.19	3,741.19	16,300	5,341.97	-10,958.03	6,000
Ice Cream Trade	0	5,569.71	5,569.71	0	5,569.71	5,569.71	5,400	4,119.77	-1,280.23	5,500
Staff Costs	0	35,235.16	35,235.16	0	35,235.16	35,235.16	41,550	46,494.75	4,944.75	46,000
Running Expenses	0	10,235.41	10,235.41	0	10,235.41	10,235.41	11,550	6,492.56	-5,057.44	12,000
<b>TOTAL BAR AND CATERING EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>83,031.77</b>	<b>83,031.77</b>	<b>107,200</b>	<b>102,113.74</b>	<b>-5,086.26</b>	<b>114,500</b>
<b>BAR AND CATERING - INCOME</b>										
Bar Trade	0	-67,882.30	-67,882.30	0	-67,882.30	-67,882.30	-100,200	-99,776.20	423.80	-110,000
Catering Trade/Kitchen Hire	0	-15,113.35	-15,113.35	0	-15,113.35	-15,113.35	-14,920	-23,646.17	-8,726.17	-20,000
Kiosk Trade	0	-7,769.01	-7,769.01	0	-7,769.01	-7,769.01	-21,850	-11,886.33	9,963.67	-11,000
Ice Cream Trade	0	-11,340.32	-11,340.32	0	-11,340.32	-11,340.32	-7,250	-12,730.85	-5,480.85	-17,000
<b>TOTAL BAR AND CATERING INCOME</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-102,104.98</b>	<b>-102,104.98</b>	<b>144,220</b>	<b>-148,039.55</b>	<b>-3,819.55</b>	<b>-158,000</b>
<b>BAR AND CATERING - CONTRIBUTION</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-19,073.21</b>	<b>-19,073.21</b>	<b>-37,020</b>	<b>-45,925.81</b>	<b>-8,905.81</b>	<b>-43,500</b>



**WOODVILLE HALLS**

DETAILS	2001-02 ORIGINAL BUD	2001-02 ACTUAL	2001-02 VAR	2002-03 ORIGINAL BUD	2002-03 ACTUAL	2002-03 VAR	2003-04 ORIGINAL BUD	2003-04 ACTUAL	2003-04 VAR	2004-05 ORIGINAL BUD
<b>TOTAL COST OF THE WOODVILLE HALLS NOT INCLUDING SUPPORT SERVICES OR CAPITAL FINANCING COSTS</b>	298,950	271,096.38	-27,853.62	308,280	261,293.73	-46,986.27	261,560	232,453.60	-29,106.40	201,000
<b>SUPPORT SERVICES</b>										
Corporate Services	0	5.00	5.00	40	0.00	-40.00	0	0.00	0.00	0
Central Services	26,400	0.00	-26,400.00	0	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0
Personnel Services	0	2,241.00	2,241.00	3,380	1,487.00	-1,893.00	1,460	1,553.00	93.00	1,720
Regeneration Services	0	0.00	0.00	30	0.00	-30.00	0	0.00	0.00	0
Property Services	0	18.00	18.00	0	0.00	0.00	0	3,732.00	3,732.00	2,310
Civic Buildings Administration	0	801.00	801.00	660	1,490.00	830.00	1,730	0.00	-1,730.00	0
Public Relations	5,640	615.00	-5,025.00	2,360	407.00	-1,953.00	310	625.00	315.00	560
Financial Services	0	16,084.00	16,084.00	13,410	11,509.00	-1,901.00	10,610	8,618.00	-1,992.00	11,250
Finance (Revenues)	0	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0	3,451.00	3,451.00	2,220
Internal Audit	0	0.00	0.00	0	5,257.00	5,257.00	0	2,847.00	2,847.00	0
Legal Services	0	1,593.00	1,593.00	2,000	1,201.00	-799.00	1,060	1,243.00	183.00	1,020
Leisure Services Admin	43,750	17,838.00	-25,912.00	17,610	16,998.00	-612.00	16,800	23,872.00	7,072.00	23,380
Arts Development & Cultural Support	330	25,053.00	24,723.00	25,110	47,098.00	21,988.00	26,360	31,643.00	5,283.00	31,970
Parks, Recreation Grounds, etc - Management	0	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0	206.00	206.00	0
Direct Services Organisation	5,760	5,605.17	-154.83	5,220	5,485.94	265.94	8,220	7,358.77	-861.23	9,720
Director of Environmental Services	1,470	0.00	-1,470.00	0	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00	0
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT SERVICES</b>	<b>83,350</b>	<b>69,853.17</b>	<b>-13,496.83</b>	<b>69,820</b>	<b>90,932.94</b>	<b>21,112.94</b>	<b>66,550</b>	<b>85,148.77</b>	<b>18,598.77</b>	<b>84,150</b>
<b>CAPITAL FINANCING COSTS</b>										
Asset Charge	196,250	196,076.36	-173.64	193,010	193,011.39	1.39	189,950	102,833.33	-87,116.67	130,300
<b>NET TOTAL IN BUDGET BOOK</b>	<b>578,550</b>	<b>537,025.91</b>	<b>-41,524.09</b>	<b>571,110</b>	<b>545,238.06</b>	<b>-25,871.94</b>	<b>518,060</b>	<b>420,435.70</b>	<b>-97,624.30</b>	<b>415,450</b>
<b>Please note the amendments below when considering costs if the Woodville Halls were to be closed</b>										
<b>TOTAL COST OF THE WOODVILLE HALLS NOT INCLUDING SUPPORT SERVICES OR CAPITAL FINANCING COSTS (AS ABOVE)</b>	298,950	271,096.38	-27,853.62	308,280	261,293.73	-46,986.27	261,560	232,453.60	-29,106.40	201,000
Add salaries costs relating to pension backfunding which are currently charged to Corporate Management	0	0.00	0.00	10,220	10,072.00	-148.00	14,570	15,485.00	915.00	15,300
"Running Expenses" currently include the Support Services recharge from the IT Department. Therefore this is another Support Services figure to be excluded.	-5,210	-7,960.00	-2,750.00	-6,980	-6,960.00	20.00	-8,610	-9,370.00	-760.00	-9,130
<b>AMENDED TOTAL COST OF THE WOODVILLE HALLS NOT INCLUDING SUPPORT SERVICES (INC IT) OR CAPITAL FINANCING COSTS</b>	<b>293,740</b>	<b>263,136.38</b>	<b>-30,603.62</b>	<b>311,520</b>	<b>264,405.73</b>	<b>-47,114.27</b>	<b>267,520</b>	<b>238,568.60</b>	<b>-28,951.40</b>	<b>207,170</b>

Please note that if the Woodville Halls were to be closed, then there would be potential one off costs which would vary depending on the time taken to effect the closure.

## Appendix 3

### Overview Scrutiny

**Review:** Woodville Halls

**Venue:** Civic Centre, Gravesend  
- 19 July 2004

**Present:** Councillors: M Snelling Chair  
J Christie  
B Newell  
M Burgoyne  
N Thandi

### In Attendance:

Mr P Wilson, Accounting Manager  
Mr L Beven, Head of Leisure Services  
Mr G. Long, Assistant Manager –  
Programming  
Mr D Finch, Corporate Policy Officer

### Summary of Evidence

#### Introduction

Mr Wilson summarised the budget and the accounts of the current and the previous three financial years which had been circulated to the members of the task group. The members initially queried **some of** the figures on the spreadsheet as they were based on the probable budget rather than the original budget. There was a debate about the true subsidy for the Woodville Halls that comes from the general fund and consequently impacts on the amount of Council Tax levied. It was accepted that the capital financing costs should be discounted from this cost. Further discussion centred on the support service costs which are the charges made by other departments for their time spent on the running of the Woodville Halls facility. It was argued that if the Woodville Halls did not exist then this would not necessarily result in savings on any or all of the support costs. Mr. Wilson offered to provide a revised spreadsheet analysis in the light of the discussion, which would also show the Original rather than the Probable Budget.

### Summary for the 2004/05 Original Budget

Net Total		
(as per Budget Book)	£415,450	£415,450
Capital Financing Costs	£130,300	£130,300
Support Services	£ 84,150	
Total	£201,000	£285,150

A £50k saving in 2004/05 had been identified by the Cabinet after a review of the Woodville Halls by the Sustainable Budget Working Group through programme rationalisation in the preparation of the 2004/05 Original Budget. The members were interested to know whether this saving had been realised. Mr Beven said that this saving had been largely achieved through an increase in private hire income which was reflected in the budget for the current financial year.

Mr Long described the recent changes in the private hire charges.

Prior to last year there was a one price fits all set fee of approximately £2,500.

Many hirers had wanted to know the details of what they were being charged for and as a consequence of these requests a menu of charges had been prepared. This meant that people hiring the hall could purchase only the services they needed. The minimum hire charge for the main hall is £850 for 5hrs and £170 for each additional hour. This charge was £750 in 2003/04 and £500 in 2002/03.

For public holidays this rate is doubled. For rehearsals the fee is halved (£425)

There are separate charges for the Performing Rights Society (PRS) and the public Performance Licence (PPL). These costs are charged to the venue for **most** performances and the costs have to be passed on to the hirer. Each additional member of staff is charged separately and is used as needed.

There are also separate charges and forms available for hiring other areas of the venue such as the Kent Room, the Thames Suite (Lower Hall) and the West End Suite. For

catering functions the kitchen is also hired out at a fixed fee of £600 per event.

### **How do fees and charges compare with other facilities?**

Comparisons are difficult as there are not very many multi purpose venues like the Woodville Halls. The Orchard Theatre in Dartford charges over £3,000 and the Black Lion Leisure Centre in Gillingham charges £900-£1,000 but this is only a sports centre and has no theatre or kitchen facilities. They also charge extra for different table layouts.

### **Has the change in the pricing structure brought in new business?**

Yes, some new dance schools have come to us from the Dartford and Bexley areas. Woodville Halls lost just one provisional booker when the charges were increased.

### **Has the net subsidy reduced over the years?**

Yes as shown in the financial review circulated.

### **What programme rationalisation has been done?**

Council sponsored shows are now predominately arranged on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Private hire and dark days, i.e. days when nothing is on, are mainly on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Sundays are also available for private hire.

### **Who sets the prices for council shows?**

This is usually by negotiation with the artists agents and is dependent on the type of contract. Most shown agents do use our local knowledge when agreeing ticket prices but it would be unlikely that there would be a ticket price of more than £20 at the venue currently unless a big name star could be attracted. The average achievable ticket price for the venue is currently about £14.

Mr Beven said that the operation of the bar had been taken back into council control in 2002/03

(having been previously run by a contractor) following a fundamental review of the Woodville Halls by the Executive Cabinet. Bringing this operation back in-house helped the net return from the Woodville Halls and in the event of any proposal to offer the running of the Woodville Halls to a private sector operator a major factor in any deal would be the secondary spend i.e. bar and catering.

### **There has been criticism of the price of drinks, can it be sold cheaper and consequently more of it?**

Unfortunately the bar does not have a regular clientele. The stocking of the bar is related to the type of show. The bar opens 45 minutes before the start of the show typically 6.45. Most people arrive 10 minutes before the show starts at 7.30. Most shows have a 15 minute interval so the opportunity for sales is limited. The shows usually finish at 10.15 -10.30 and people tend to go home or elsewhere so the bar is not usually opened for after show sales. The bar and catering staff go home, after cleaning up, during the second half of the show.

### **Have you considered running the bar along the lines of a wine bar during the day with lunches?**

Yes this is a possibility. However, it needs investment and a marketing identity to separate it from the public perception of the Civic Centre as somewhere they go to pay bills.

### **Is it possible to run the bar and the Kent Room at the same time as the theatre?**

Depending on what is on in the hall. It is sometimes difficult to get two things running at once as most theatre events utilise the bar. It is an attractive option as it should help reduce net costs and also encourage non theatre patrons into the venue and thus seeing other publicity material. The option of using the lower hall is also difficult when an event is on above it as there is an overlap of sound.

### **What effect will the Disability Discrimination Act have?**

The surveyors who have recently carried out an investigation into the fabric of the building have suggested the installation of a lift. Though there is some debate as to whether this would be solely for the use of Woodville Halls' patrons or joint use with the Civic Centre. Initial findings by the Property Services Manager show that £100,000 would need to be spent to enable the Woodville Halls to comply with the legislation.

#### **Programming**

Mr Long said that it could be possible to have something on the stage every day of the week. Realistically though the strategy is to put on what works. The emphasis is on quality not quantity. We want to get the big names on the stage because it aids the promotion of the theatre and the borough. For some time now the venue has been known for tribute acts – it is Graham's aim to bring well known names to the venue as well as better quality theatre shows.

Many acts put on at the Woodville Halls are on tour and whilst these acts can get higher revenues at Dartford and Chatham due to their bigger capacities many come to Gravesham on the way to continuing their tour westwards or up north. This does not mean that Gravesham gets second best but what it does mean is that good financial deals can be negotiated with artists' agents. For example, recently an artist was offered for an up front fee of a few thousand pounds and a 70/30 split of the box office, this was unrealistic to achieve.

The agent came back with an improved offer of no up front fee and an 80/20 split. This made much more economic sense and was accepted. This negotiation works 60% of the time, the other 40% means the loss of a show but that is the way of business.

Graham also commented that he aims not to take any show or performer within four weeks either side of them playing a date at either The Orchard, Dartford or Central Theatre, Chatham as well as other local venues as this would only

serve to dilute the appeal to patrons as people do travel some distance to see a show of their choice.

This years pantomime dates have been moved to later in December with 31 performances in total.

The catering facilities are not used as much as they could be. The venue needs to compete with other establishments at Christmas time for the party market, so three Christmas Party Nights are to be held on 9, 10, 11 December. These will be Woodville Halls run events comprising three course dinner, cabaret and disco until 1am for 300 people. The discos have different cabaret themes to appeal to a wider range of people.

If these prove successful it may be possible to have similar events on Valentines Day, at Easter and mid summer.

One other option being investigated is tea dances in the afternoons mainly aimed at the elderly of the Borough.

This increased use of the hall for party nights and such like will increase the catering and bar income. Those events held around Christmas, if successful and expanded, may mean losing the pantomime.

Currently local groups get varying discounts on the cost of hiring the hall. There have been petitions from local groups for a reduction in hiring costs. Many of these local productions would be at risk without being subsidised.

The discounts provided to local groups and users of the Woodville Halls will be circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Committee for background information.

Mr Beven went on to say that another option that might be viable would be the showing of films as there was no cinema in Gravesend. Alternatively the future might be that the purpose built Orchard Theatre in Dartford, being so close (and the Churchill being a more modern facility) becomes the main theatre for the area. The Woodville Halls rather than trying

to be both a theatre and a flat floor venue concentrated on flat floor events with a smaller theatre for local groups probably in partnership with Gravesend and District Theatre Guild (and Gravesham Arts Council).

Mr Long was asked - Given a free hand what would you do?

More functions that include catering (to make use of the banqueting kitchen), attract more big name stars and develop the Woodville Halls into a more pleasant environment for people to enjoy.

## Overview Scrutiny

**Review:** Woodville Halls

**Venue:** Winter Gardens Margate  
13 August 2004

**Present:** Councillors: M V Snelling  
M D Burgoyne  
B P Newell

### In Attendance:

Mr D Finch, Corporate Policy Officer

### Interviewees:

Mr Steve Davis - Operations Manager  
Mr Peter Hooker - Managing Director

## Summary of Evidence

### Introduction:

The Winter Gardens complex is run by Thanet Leisure Force, an Industrial Provident Society (IPS) established in 1999. Thanet Leisure Force also runs Thanet's outdoor and indoor leisure facilities. Thanet District Council grants the IPS £840k pa to run all these facilities, £440k of this grant is for the Winter Gardens and Northdown House. This grant has not been increased over the last 5 years.

Thanet Leisure Force leases the Winter Gardens from the Council for a peppercorn rent. The lease is for 25 years.

The IPS is a non-profit making organisation with charitable status. The establishment of an IPS has some advantages such as being able to draw in outside funding and borrowing on it. It is also exempt from business rates and corporation tax.

The IPS is run by a board consisting of users, members of staff and two members from Council  
Initially the Council grant made up 40% of the Winter Gardens income, expansion has reduced this to 20%.

The Winter Gardens has a turnover of £2m of which catering accounts for £1m.

When the IPS was established 75 staff transferred over from Thanet District Council. In the intervening 5 years staffing levels have increased to 140 with an additional 200 casual workers.

When the staff transferred over under TUPE their pension rights were protected. The pension fund was then closed to new employees and a stakeholder pension scheme set up. Due to increased income and productivity Thanet Leisure Force has just started making an employer's contribution to the stakeholder scheme.

There is a low staff turnover.

There has been a £1m capital investment in the venue some of which has come from grants. The council had not been in the position to invest in the building for some years and as a consequence there is a need to spend huge sums on the fabric of the building. Thanet Leisure Force has taken over the management of repairs and as a result is able to carry out repairs quickly and cost effectively.

Thanet is part of a large regeneration area and with the expansion of the airport at Manston there will be many opportunities to improve the income from the Winter Gardens. Thanet Leisure Force has expanded into the management of children's nurseries and is looking all the time for sources of investment into the business.

### Programming:

Mr Hooker said that any review of the Woodville Halls needed to consider the programming and type of events to be put on there. It was his considered opinion that more emphasis should be put on catering, seminars and business functions. There are larger profit margins to be had in catering. It is vitally important to identify the competition and develop your position in the market place. The management of the Winter Gardens have done this and their programme is designed to

have the correct balance between catering functions and shows to maximise their income and avoid unnecessary competition with other theatres and venues in the immediate vicinity.

Community usage of the facility is encouraged and local theatre groups are well catered for.

Mr Hooker said that had the Winter Gardens not become a very flexible facility it would have closed.

The main banqueting season is from October to May.

The shows are mainly light entertainment, comedy and concerts. There is a Christmas show and a children's show.

Tour of Winter Gardens:

The Winter Gardens can accommodate up to 1500 persons for conferences and theatre shows, banqueting facilities for up to 750 persons, dinner dancing for a maximum of 600 and buffet dances for up to 1000 persons. Alternatively the hall can offer up to 12000sq.ft. of exhibition space.

The Winter Gardens complex is fully licensed and houses four bars and there are additional rooms available for smaller private dinners, wedding receptions etc.

The main hall has a large stage with some tiered seating towards the rear of the hall. All the seating is moved manually and a lot of the seating plan changes are carried out overnight. The tiered seating is due to be renewed and increased in number. The replacement seating will be able to be moved electronically. There are some very large doors that enable large objects to be moved in and out with relative ease e.g. for an exhibition or motor show. The hall has 9 dressing rooms.

Adjacent to the main hall is the Queens Hall. This hall has a much smaller stage and can seat a maximum of 600 persons for banquets or theatre shows or 500 for dancing. The hall has 6 dressing rooms.

## Overview Scrutiny

**Review:** Woodville Halls

**Venue:** 31 August 2004

**Present:** Councillors: M V Snelling  
B P Newell  
Jean Christie  
R J R Target  
M D Burgoyne

### In Attendance:

Mr D Finch, Corporate Policy Officer

### Interviewees:

Jackie Sadek – Chief Executive of Kent  
Thameside  
Delivery Group

## Summary of Evidence

### Introduction

Kent Thameside is part of the Thames Gateway regeneration project and covers an area of 22 sq. miles north of the A2. Kent Thameside makes up about one third of the Thames Gateway the other two thirds being split between Medway & Swale to the east, East London to the west and Thurrock to the north.

Kent Thameside is a public sector/private sector partnership organised to work through existing democratic structures. It is chaired by the leader of Kent County Council and has two representatives from Gravesham, the Leader John Burden and Executive Director of community services Glyn Thomson.

The organisation is charged by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to deliver 30,000 new homes and 50,000 new jobs. The Eastern quarry part of the site alone will have 10,000 new homes.

The regeneration potential is enormous for all areas within the Thames Gateway project.

One of the 12 tenets for sustainable communities is culture, leisure and the arts.

Kent Thameside is struggling with the development of an arts and culture strategy and currently has a very attenuated approach to such leisure provision.

Ms Sadek held the view that the Civic Centre, The Woodville Halls, Cygnet House and the Police Station would make a very attractive site for redevelopment. She felt that it would be possible for Kent Thameside to set up a competition for developers to put forward their ideas with no obligation to the council. Before any such competition an in depth survey into what the Gravesham residents actually want by way of arts and cultural facilities would need to be carried out.

Many local authorities have done or are doing similar reconfigurations to get a more efficient and effective use of available space, examples being the Elephant & Castle and the London Borough of Southwark.

### **When you are looking to draw up an arts strategy, would that be for Thames Gateway as a whole?**

Kent Thameside has been up and running for some time and is ahead of comparable ODPM growth zones in the Gateway in terms of gearing up for delivery. For example, Thurrock have only just appointed a Chief Executive and the East London UDC has still to appoint a CE or the rest of their board.

### **Given a blank sheet of paper, what would you put into Kent Thameside for arts and culture?**

I would go for broke, for a visionary project that included an iconic building as its centrepiece.

### **Would that building be in the centre of the Kent Thameside development?**

Not necessarily, we would be very open minded about its location.



**Where would the money for such an iconic building come from?**

Sources of funding would be the Department of Culture, Music and Arts or the Arts Council. Developers do not include facilities for arts and culture in their proposals because they are not economically viable, these facilities have to be subsidised.

**What is so special about the Civic Centre site?**

The development industry is watching areas such as Gravesham where a lot of regeneration is taking place and developers are always looking for new sites and opportunities. There are three things going for Gravesham.

Heritage feel to Gravesham  
Amount of PR support  
Transport connections

Another possibility would be a conference centre facility. Gravesham is sufficiently far outside London. Such a facility would bring increased income to the town.

**Do you have any proposals for any athletic facilities. If the Olympic bid takes off would you be able to respond?**

Yes, we have some preliminary plans centred around training facilities for upcoming athletes and for those attending the games. The athlete's village is also a possibility as this has a legacy for use as low cost homes after the games have finished.

**Do you think that the development of 30,000 new homes and the creation of 50,000 new jobs will bring a change to the socio economic groups in the area?**

No, if we attract only certain groups we will have failed. The new jobs will not all be highly skilled. We must reach all groups and ensure that they are economically active. The right mix of social groups will direct the focus of a leisure strategy. It is essential to understand what the community wants and how that might be achieved.

**If we were to do something with the Woodville Halls would you see Dartford as competition?**

No.

## Overview Scrutiny

**Review:** Woodville Halls

**Venue:** Princes Hall, Aldershot -  
8 September 2004

**Present:** Councillors: M V Snelling  
M D Burgoyne

### In Attendance

Mr D Finch, Corporate Policy Officer

### Interviewee:

David Phillips, Theatre Manager

## Summary of Evidence

The Princes Hall is a multi purpose centre built in 1973. It is owned, managed and subsidised by Rushmoor Borough Council.

The venue consists of a main hall and 3 function suites.

The main hall has a capacity of 595 with tiered seating and 635 with seating on the flat. The hall has a standing capacity of 900.

The 3 function suites are the Princes suite (capacity 200), Tichbourne suite (100) and Edinburgh suite (50).

The council subsidy is around £300k pa.

The Princes Hall is very pleasantly situated with an open area of grass, shrubs and flower beds at the front. The inside is very light and airy with very helpful and welcoming staff.

There is a multi storey car park very close by. The venue has 14 permanent staff with 20-25 casual staff available as required.

Over the last 12 to 18 months there has been considerable investment on the inside of the building, including £200,000 for new seating and £30,000 for technical equipment.

The catering is contracted out, the contract running for 5 years at £10,000 pa. The contract allows the council a % share of the income above a threshold of £150,000. Mr Phillips said that if there was a desire to increase this side of the business then it may be appropriate to take it back in-house.

Four years ago the venue was not running productively which resulted in the council reviewing the use of the venue and considering the possibility of closing it altogether.

As a result of this review the hall has changed completely with a new manager and motivated staff.

Four years ago there would have been 22-23 professional shows a year plus a 3 week pantomime season. In 2003/4 this had risen to 48-50, plus the panto.

The pantomime has 33 performances over the 3 week season and is seen as a considerable source of revenue with the venue making £20,000 – £35,000 profit (not including staff costs).

There was a corresponding rise in the number of hires of the function rooms, currently running at some 600 different hires per year.

Research carried out to compare the cost of hiring function rooms in the Princes Hall with other local venues showed the hall to be underselling its facilities by a considerable margin. This has resulted in a considerable increase in commercial hire charges e.g. from £250 to £800 for a wedding reception, with no reduction in demand.

Income from ticket sales has increased over the last 5 years from £50,000 to £250,000.

### Have you considered offering banqueting type events over Christmas?

This is something we are considering.

The area adjacent to the hall is due for redevelopment over the next 21/2 years. The multi storey car park is due to be demolished

and replaced with a bigger one. It is hoped that this redevelopment will lead to some refurbishment of the outside of the Princes Hall. Internally, the installation of air conditioning is being considered. A preliminary costing of £400,000 seems high.

The hall is part of a 5 year rolling arts plan which is reviewed every 6 months by the scrutiny committee.

There is a very active network of some 20 entertainment venue managers covering the south of England which meets regularly and exchanges information and best practice on all aspects of running these entertainment centres e.g. which shows are selling well, which aren't, pantomime, etc. The forum generally meets twice a year.

There is competition from other theatres in the surrounding area such as Camberley, Basingstoke, Bracknell and Reading. A similar venue in nearby Guildford which closed at the end of last year is due to re-open in 3 years time.

## Overview Scrutiny

<b>Review</b>	Woodville Halls
<b>Venue</b>	Tour of Woodville Halls - Friday 15 October 2004
<b>Present</b>	Councillors M. V. Snelling M. D. Burgoyne

### Interviewee

Mr Brian Tourle - Arts and Heritage Manager

### In Attendance

Mr. D. Finch - Corporate Policy Officer

## Summary of Evidence

### Box Office & Foyer

The tour started in the box office. There are usually two box office clerks on duty from Monday through Saturday. There is e-government funding for the establishment of an on-line booking service which will give the potential for 24hours booking. The current out of hours service consists of an answer phone with messages picked up regularly.

The box office currently is open 9am – 5pm Monday through Saturday. On performance days it is open 9am to curtain up and on Sundays 2 hours prior to curtain up.

There is a CCTV system consisting of 6 cameras. There are some dark areas where more cameras could be deployed if funds were made available.

The booking office is to the right of the front desk of the Civic Centre. This means that it can be very noisy during the day due to raised voices and other incidents of anti social behaviour by individuals at the front desk. This has resulted in people giving up on waiting to book or collect tickets to shows. During the evening however the area is very pleasant and inviting.

In the foyer there are sweet and souvenir kiosks. The overall impression of the foyer is that of a 1960's building, clean but dull, like it

has stood still for a long time. Some painting of the exposed concrete has been carried out to try and lift the gloom.

Problems of sound transfer are often experienced in the Council Chamber and committee rooms due to the open plan of this area.

Off the foyer is the Kent Room which has a bar. When there are events in the Hall the bar cannot be used separately. It was last decorated about 15 years ago. It can be used by up to 100 people.

### Would you like to use the bar separately?

Yes, but it would need a separate entrance and it could not be used by the general public if an event was being presented as it is needed to support the programme.

In the light of competition within the town from its many public bars and private hire venues, the establishment of the Kent Room as a stand alone bar and private hire facility would have to have clear definitions of its usage. The question to ask would be 'would our income cover our costs?' Establishments like Weatherspoons, with high turnover, can offer drinks and food at lesser costs than at the Woodville Halls. Further market research would be needed to judge if patrons would be attracted.

It was suggested that perhaps the Kent Room is not the best place for the bar. Perhaps it would be better down stairs. Disabled access to a down stairs bar would need investment in a lift, etc (poss £100k). The Kent Room could then become something like a fitness centre.

### Consideration of current and alternative usage

Mr Tourle thought that the Woodville Halls would not currently attract many bookings as a conference centre. There is local competition from other venues for smaller conferences e.g. Manor Hotel, Inn on the Lake, Bluewater, etc. Larger conferences seem to be presented in London with opportunities for venues with accommodation available on site and better located for transport. Investment in

conference equipment and marketing would have to be considered e.g. video screens, conference tables/seating, etc.

This year the Woodville Halls is experimenting with 3 themed dinner dances and a reduced panto season. Two of the dinner dances are sold out and the third has 50% of its tickets sold.

It was suggested that support for pantomime could be increased if major stars were included. Mr Tourle said that this would mean an increase in ticket prices (to possibly £18-19) which in his view was not sustainable. His experience of pantos was that having stars in the cast was not a guarantee of increased ticket sales.

At the time of the visit the hall was being prepared for an under 18s disco. This event was a private hire charging £7.50 a ticket with 800 – 1,000 teenagers expected and would run from 7.30 – 11pm. The net direct income to the council for this type of event was on average £1,500. The hall was used 8 times per year for such events as this. Mr Tourle said that he preferred events to be private hire as the promoter took all the risks.

The removable seating looked a little tired and the most regular criticism from users was that they were uncomfortable. Much of the equipment for stage shows is quite old (some of which are original e.g. the stage dimmer system) and would benefit from a planned programme of investment and replacement. Some of the stage lighting had been upgraded about 4 years ago. There is no air conditioning. A system for pumping air in from outside is not much use on warm evenings. The effect of this on the programme would need more market research.

There is a room underneath the moveable floor of the main hall (the Thames Suite). To use this room as a separate area would require the floor to be fixed in position and sealed to prevent noise transmission. The room could then be used as a bar or fitness centre. Investment would once again be necessary e.g. separate

entrance, security, dressing rooms etc which would need a cost benefit analysis.

The current revenue budget for investment in the halls is £13,200 pa.

### **Had outsourcing the running of the Woodville Halls been considered?**

Yes, but the companies who looked into it concluded that they could not run it any cheaper (or better) than the council.

The tour also took in the catering facilities. Many years ago there would have been 2 major catering functions a week nowadays they average 6 per year.

Asian weddings, of which there are on average 25 a year, often bring in their own caterers and drink. A fee of £850 is charged for the use of the venue, a £600 fee for corkage on wines, spirits and soft drinks and a fee of £600 for the use of the kitchen.

Finally Mr Tourle was asked whether he would build a theatre in Gravesend?

He replied ' In an ideal world a bigger venue would be the best solution for the area which could compete against other local venues something like the Fairfield Halls in Croydon which has a concert hall seating some 1,800 patrons and a theatre seating some 760 patrons, as a stand alone building with a separate identity. The Woodville Halls, currently, is neither one thing nor the other which in some respects is a mixed blessing.

## Overview Scrutiny

**Review:** Woodville Halls

**Venue:** Orchard Theatre, Dartford -  
8 December 2004

**Present:** Councillors: M V Snelling  
M D Burgoyne  
Jean Christie

### In Attendance:

Mr D Finch, Corporate Policy Officer

### Interviewees:

Ms Vanessa Hart, Theatre Manager  
Mr Bob Clutterham, Business Manager

## Summary of Evidence

The Orchard Theatre was opened in 1983 and is wholly owned, subsidised and managed by Dartford Borough Council. It has a seating capacity of 957. It has no separate function rooms. The catering for its coffee shop and bars is in house. In the last few years there has been some major refurbishment including auditorium seating, new sound system and improvements to the foyer.

At the time of the task group's visit the theatres pantomime season was well under way. The pantomime season runs for 51/2 weeks with 63 performances including matinees.

The structure of the authority places the theatre in Regeneration rather than Culture and Leisure and Vanessa Hart, the theatre manager, reports directly to the cabinet through the Director of Regeneration Mr. Rob Scott.

Ms Hart has overall responsibility for the management of the theatre including all artistic programming.

The theatre is run very much like a business with its successful promotions effectively reducing the amount the theatre draws from its subsidy. Unfortunately the balance of the subsidy cannot be carried forward to subsequent years.

The theatre operates on a going rate for external hires. This includes local minority groups. Because these local groups could not afford to hire the theatre the council offers an 'access grant' to enable these groups to use the facility. The hire rates are based on the running costs of the theatre.

There is a rolling programme of maintenance with an annual budget of around £120,000. Refurbishment is usually carried out in August. Changes to legislation such as DDA need constant monitoring to ensure the theatre is compliant with all necessary standards.

The Orchard was designed to be multi purpose with some removable seating. This capability is not used a great deal, mainly for elections.

The Orchard's main strength is as a theatre showing musicals, ballet, live music and drama.

### How do you judge what to put on?

By knowing your audience and community. Use historic information and knowing which people to contact. We also carry out an annual survey which seeks patrons views on value and programming.

### Do you see the Woodville Halls as competition?

Yes you are the nearest and we both operate in the same catchment area.

The Orchard operates a 'Premier Club' which, on payment of a subscription, offers certain discounts. The theatre has a top price ticket of £32. These are invariably the tickets that go first.

Ms Hart took over the running of the theatre about 5 years ago and the first year was tough changing long running historical regimes. It has taken all this time to establish the theatre on the sound business footing it is today.

**Have you considered setting up the theatre as a charitable trust?**

Yes but the balance has to come from business investment and at the time there was insufficient value in the theatre to attract commercial interest.

**How do you see the theatre and the Ebbsfleet development?**

The theatre is considered in all regeneration projects and would form a major part of any plans for Kent Thameside. There would be a bigger audience made up from different socio economic groups. We could probably do with 400 more seats.

**Do you get any complaints about your bar prices?**

Not necessarily. The bar makes a significant contribution to the theatres income. We charge premium prices for drinks and confectionary but offer a high standard of service.

# Woodville Halls Survey

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews issues and services affecting residents of the borough. Reviews are carried out through a series of evidence gathering sessions with relevant groups, agencies and individuals whose knowledge and experience can inform the review.

Currently the committee is undertaking a review of the Woodville Halls and would like to include the views of a random sample of its patrons.

The committee would be very grateful if you could spend a few minutes completing this questionnaire.

<b>Q1</b>	<b>What type of events have you attended at the Woodville Halls in the last 12 months?</b>					
	<i>Amateur productions</i> .....				21	
	<i>Comedy shows</i> .....				24	
	<i>Dinner Dances</i> .....				6	
	<i>Musicals</i> .....				30	
	<i>Pantomime</i> .....				34	
	<i>Concerts</i> .....				32	
	<i>Cabaret</i> .....				9	
	<i>Other</i> .....				40	
	<i>Please specify</i>	41				
<b>Q2</b>	<b>What other type of act/shows would you like to see at the Woodville Halls?</b>				55	
<b>Q3</b>	<b>When attending events at the Woodville Halls how would you rate the following?</b>					
		<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>
	Decor	5	31	65	13	0
	Comfort of seats	5	24	53	19	13
	Atmosphere	9	51	42	8	2
	Quality of sound	9	68	33	6	0
	Publicity	15	51	39	8	2
	Car parking	13	36	31	24	7
	Public transport	5	13	35	15	7
<b>Q4</b>	<b>Would the Woodville Halls benefit from the installation of air conditioning?</b>					
	<i>Yes</i> .....					78
	<i>No</i> .....					32
<b>Q5</b>	<b>Do you have any suggestions for improving the facilities at the Woodville Halls?</b>					60
<b>Q6</b>	<b>Have you visited any other theatres in the past 12 months?</b>					
		<i>Yes</i>				<i>No</i>
	Medway Little Theatre - Rochester	8				51
	Central Theatre - Chatham	20				41
	Churchill Theatre - Bromley	19				47
	Hazlitt Theatre - Maidstone	10				50
	Orchard Theatre - Dartford	70				29
	Other	50				23



**Q7 Have you visited any cinemas in the past 12 months?**

	Yes	No
Bexley	10	63
Bluewater	64	43
Strood	38	46
Other	18	55

**Q8 Does the cost of tickets influence your decision to visit the Woodville Halls?**

Yes ..... 57 No ..... 59

**Q9 What is the maximum ticket price you would be prepared to pay to see an event at the Woodville Halls?**

Up to £5..... 1 £11.00 - £15.00..... 36 £21.00 - £25.00..... 31  
£6 - £10.00..... 11 £16.00 - £20.00..... 39

**Tell us a little about yourself**

**Q10 Are you?**

Male..... 31 Female..... 90

**Q11 Are you?**

Under 18..... 1 35 - 44 ..... 21 65 and over ..... 29  
19 - 24..... 0 45 - 54 ..... 32  
25 - 34..... 13 55 - 64 ..... 25

**Q12 What is your postcode?**

116

**What other type of Acts/Shows would you like to see at the Woodville Halls?**

"Plays, London shows."

"London musicals."

"More adult shows."

"I think we are well served (maybe films)."

"films."

"After seeing Chas & Dave we will check who else is on the bill, their show was ruined by the comedian during first half. People were walking out - it was disgusting."

"Anything to do with music."

"Plays by touring theatre companies."

"Theatre shows travelling from London ie Mama Mia, Elvis, We will rock you etc."

"More comedy shows and bands."

"Comedy, musicals, opera."

"Good solo singers and male choirs and bands."

"Maybe the occasional cinema show as we do not get to the larger cinemas."

"Rock concerts."

"Good plays."

"Plays - thrillers/murder mystery."

"family shows."

"Would love to see Gilbert and Sullivan productions (professional or amateur)."

"straight plays."

"concerts."

"more of the same. Over 30's discos."

"none"

"Indoor sporting events."

"Variety shows ie singer, comedian, tap dancing, trapeze act, small part from a show, a mixed talent show like old days at the palladium."

"children's theatre."

"childrens workshops."

"As above"

"better quality shows/arists"

"Anything but the 'C' list comedy acts, wrestling & tribute bands that the theatre is currently putting on - how about a few dramas?"

"More barn dances, adult discos. more of the larger shows."

"More acts for older children/teenagers. eg Jaqueline Wilson - double act."

"Quite pleased with the acts you engage."

"Films"

"More west wnd musicals and childrens pop type acts/take offs especially during school holidays."

"West end type shows"

"For myself, I enjoy Latin American dancing but never learned enough steps. LA dancing with some instruction would be good."

"Musicals - Oliver, Annie etc."

"More comedy"

"More folk concerts and musicals."

"Organ concerts, classical music."

"Big Band shows"

"Ballet, classical music, comedy."

"80's Disco/concerts."

"West End shows - musicals – concerts"

"Comedy shows"

"More folk music. There's more about than Ralph & Fairport. Maybe the odd 'cult' movie."

"More variety of pop/rock folk groups - Caravan, Strawbs, Fairport Convention, all about Eve etc."

"Paul James + talent shows over 60"

"More tribute bands."

"Old fashioned musicals."

"I would like to see David Essex."

"Theatre productions - plays etc"

"Some of the West End musicals"

"Agatha Christie thrillers"

"School AS/A" set plays or films of set books ie Shakespeare to help students with studies and encourage young theatre goers - advertised at schools & colleges - teachers etc as well as press."

**Do you have any suggestions for improving the facilities at the Woodville Halls?**

"More up to date singers and groups"

"Lower the bar prices"

"Needs brightening up but generally ok"

"Seating could be made more comfortable"

"Improve access to auditorium. The seats are worse than very poor they are appalling."

"Better cushioned seating - introduce cinema - larger stage + arena - bar is hot, lighting too bright + smoky. Atmosphere feels like old church hall, no depth of sound. Your prices are very high for tired + elderly acts/shows. Ticket offers - 1/2 price tickets on set days. Please move theatre to separate venue with cinema + restaurants included. To liven Gravesend + bring more people here by choice. Move council offices away or move theatre somewhere else. Council queries, housing problems bring unwanted atmosphere to theatre/leisure. Decor is dark, outdated, staff staid, too mature and unwelcoming at reception."

"General up date of décor"

"The seats are really bad, should be glad to leave because of this reason. Would be great if you played classic good films as we haven't a local cinema. Also can be very draughty in the theatre."

"No"

"More comfortable seating"

"Comfortable seating would induce one to go more. A bigger stage would increase the variety of shows you would attract."

"Isolate draughts"

"Make a decision on what it is supposed to be

- a) set set up for local talent shows as it appears at present.
- b) quality venue for top acts.

Then develop the theatre accordingly. Have a 'stalls bar' cafe open to patrons and non-patrons at lunchtimes. Dartford's Orchard Theatre has an excellent one and is apparently well used by patrons prior to matinees and by the general public at other times for light meals/

refreshments. Gravesend is generally poorly served by restaurants apart from the pizza/burger type and this could generate extra revenue."

"Upgrade or hire in sound and lighting2"

"Not really"

"Better seating would improve ones comfort with more slope giving better viewing."

"No"

"No"

"No"

"Better heating"

"Two tickets for the price of one"

"Could look a little more brighter in décor"

"When hosting productions for children is there any way to ensure safety on stairs during the interval? The crush for the toilet added to a queue on the stairs for the shop led to a dangerous situation"

"New seating"

"In need of general modernisation."

"Restaurant/coffee shop"

"Decor needs looking at, always strikes me as the 'poor man's theatre'. Costumes etc are tatty. People are willing to pay more if theatre was given a good overhaul."

"The venue is looking very tired - very 70's and could do with a complete refurb. Maybe this would attract more customers and better acts."

"Q/sound - round sound. Seat very poor to sit on. Price of ticket to dear for the place"

"The drinks always taste funny - you have to buy bottles because the beer has a funny tang and the wine is only dry and not very nice! They are more expensive than most places and don't even taste nice! Taste like they have been sitting in the pipes for months."

"I personally find the sound in the pantomime too loud but that is probably personal!!"

"Perhaps more flexible sound."

"Yes I do. More hostesses, better seating, better lighting and you will go far. Thank you"

"The seats must be altered. I am now wheelchair bound but my family and parents say they are still uncomfortable and back aching. Some of my friends have stopped going because of this."

"Better catering"

"I think that the ice creams etc sold in the interval are too pricy."

"There is nothing really wrong with facilities but the Woodville lacks community feeling."

"The pond in front of the building is not attractive. Not much advertisement to be seen around the town. I notice ads in Thamesgate car park if I use the stairs. There's none to be seen in St George's Centre or New Road."

"More toilets for ladies"

"No"

"Upstairs installation of loop system for hard of hearing."

"Better seating"

"Excessive charge for using credit card"

"You should get better staff or train them better, more staff when hall is fully booked."

"Management better when having to deal with complaints. Drinks prices too high, or maybe staff that can add up."

"No smoking, more toilets"

"Bar should be more 'cafe' style. It should be open and advertised to public as a venue in its own right."

"When seating immediately in line with previous row poor vision if large person - better to stagger seats."

"Stop smoking in bar. Stop people going back and forth to bar during productions."

"More comfortable seating, better visibility. Some concerts too loud for size of hall (Genesis for instance)"

"More comfortable seats"

"More police on duty outside Woodville Halls and on patrol in surrounding streets. It would have helped when we were attacked on our way to Woodville Halls by a gang of large

group of girls. Also if Gravesend police station was open. We no longer visit Woodville Halls."

"Stage not clean before a show. Drinks should not be allowed to be taken from the bar into the seating areas. ie glasses of beer"

"Extra bar staff"

"Brought up to date"

"Dressing rooms need air conditioning. More seats needed in box office area."

"Why do you spend so much money on this place and there are so many other places that need this money. Places for children to play in. We have a park which is a dog's toilet to dangerous to let them play in."

"No smoking in the bar"

"Maybe comfortable seats."

"Put more comfortable seats in"

"I personally have no problem with the facilities"

"Not really"

# Woodville Halls Survey

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews issues and services affecting residents of the borough. Reviews are carried out through a series of evidence gathering sessions with relevant groups, agencies and individuals whose knowledge can inform the review. Currently the committee is undertaking a review of the Woodville Halls and would like to include the views of a sample of private hire user groups.

The committee would be most grateful if you could spend a few minutes completing this questionnaire

**Q1 How do you rate the pricing policy for the hire of the Woodville Halls?**

Excellent value	1
Good value	2
Average value	2
Poor value	0

**Q2 How would you rate the following when using the Woodville Halls?**

	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very poor</i>
Decor	0	2	3	0	0
Comfort of seats	0	0	1	2	2
Atmosphere	0	1	2	1	1
Quality of sound	0	0	2	1	1
Public toilets	1	4	0	0	0
Disabled toilet	0	3	0	0	0
Wheelchair access	0	4	1	0	0
Publicity	0	2	3	0	0
Car parking	0	1	2	2	0
Public transport	0	0	1	3	1

**Q5 Would the Woodville Halls benefit from the installation of air conditioning?**

Yes .....	5
No .....	0

**Q3 Do you have any suggestions for improving the service and facilities at the Woodville Halls? 4**

Questionnaire continues overleaf

**Q4 Are there any other comments regarding the service provided by the Woodville Halls that you would like to make. (please use additional paper if necessary) 3**

**Are there any comments regarding the services provided by the Woodville Halls that you would like to make?**

“Staff always appear friendly and helpful”.

“We would like to thank the box office and backstage staff who gave so much support during the week of our show”.

“The problem seems to be that the halls are meant to be all things for all people for all events. It simply doesn't work , the council seems to have a will to improve their facilities but spend their money in ways that defy understanding, like traffic calming areas where traffic crawls along already”.

**Do you have any suggestions for improving the facilities at the Woodville Halls?**

“Bar shuts at 11pm - not a lot of time for people to meet after a performance particularly with amateur shows etc. Seating remains diabolical - puts many people off”.

“Please get a good piano and a piano stool that is not broken”.

“Air conditioning would be nice but only if it didn't cost any more to the public and people hiring the theatre. More bar staff and flexibility of hours”.

“Whilst air con would benefit the halls it is by no means a priority. They must be: seating, most uncomfortable and sound, very amateurish”.

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