



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Education Cabinet Board

14 March 2024

Report of the Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage & Culture.

Matter for Information.

Wards Affected:

All Wards

Report Title:

Comedy Festival 2024

Purpose of the Report:

To brief members on an exciting new initiative relating to the introduction of a comedy festival within Neath Port Talbot.

Executive Summary:

The Neath Port Talbot Comedy Festival (working title) is an exciting initiative aimed at spreading a 'feel good factor' throughout our communities this autumn. Scheduled to take place over 16 days from late September to early October 2024, the festival will feature performances and events at a wide range of venues and locations across the county borough. As well as three shows at each of our main theatre venues (Gwyn Hall, Princess Royal Theatre and Pontardawe Arts Centre), the festival programme will reach out to our valley communities and aims to stage 24 stand-up shows at smaller venues such as community centres, sports clubs and pubs.

The festival will focus on engaging communities and bringing people together. Through commitment to inclusivity, accessibility, and cultural enrichment, the ambition is that the festival will develop to become a highlight of the cultural calendar for both residents and visitors.

Background:

In September 2023 the Council adopted new Culture and Destination strategies. The theme of building sustainable events and festivals across the county borough came through very strongly and officers are working on a number of concepts.

During the Culture Strategy consultation, the Neath Comedy Festival came to the fore as a well organised weekend of events with a lot of potential but one that had hit a glass ceiling in terms of capacity to deliver something bigger.

A working group has been put together which includes the organiser of the previous Neath Comedy Festival and another prominent local writer and comedian.

Venues:

The Neath Port Talbot Comedy Festival will take place at a range of selected venues ensuring accessibility and quality of experience for our audiences and participants. The Gwyn Hall, Princess Royal Theatre, and Pontardawe Arts Centre have been chosen for their spacious facilities, technical capabilities, and established reputations for hosting successful events. These venues offer the perfect settings to showcase a diverse range of well known high profile acts that will attract larger audiences. The 24 performances at smaller venues will ensure the festival reaches out to as many Neath Port Talbot communities as possible. A typical evening of Comedy Festival entertainment at these venues will comprise of a compere/host and 3 stand-up acts.

Performance Schedule

The festival will span 16 days from Friday September 20th to Saturday October 5th, with performances scheduled mainly late week and weekends. As stated, our three 'main' venues will host nine headline performances featuring nationally renowned comedians such as Kiri Pritchard-McLean and Milton Jones (already booked).

Smaller venues will feature up and coming breakthrough performers from the Welsh and UK-wide comedy circuits including performers fresh from other festivals including the Edinburgh Fringe.

Community Engagement

A key objective of the Neath Port Talbot Comedy Festival is to foster community engagement and cultural enrichment for a range of audiences. Inclusivity will be key to making the festival exciting and engaging. We will reach out to and encourage local schools, colleges and drama groups to get involved by running workshops and staging their own performances. We will also look to take bespoke activity into residential and care homes.

Welsh language performances will feature in our programme too, as we explore what makes Welsh comedy (in both Welsh & English) so funny.

Additional activity proposed includes:

- Comedy script writing workshop
- Stand-up comedy workshop
- Stand up talent competition. Aimed at discovering new talent, heats will run across the festival and culminate on the last weekend.
- Classic comedy film screenings and comedy quiz nights at the Gwyn Hall.

Marketing and Promotion

To maximise the festival's reach and impact, a comprehensive marketing and promotion plan will be implemented. This will use a combination of traditional advertising, social media campaigns, and community outreach efforts to raise awareness and generate excitement among residents and visitors alike. As the festival matures collaborations with local businesses, media outlets, and influencers will further amplify the festival's visibility, attracting a diverse audience and ensuring long term success.

Future

The aim is to make the comedy festival sustainable. While the council will effectively be the organiser during the first couple of years it is hoped there will be enough interest and confidence to move this to a future Community Interest Company or some such external body to take it forward.

Financial Impacts:

Officers have secured £10,000 through the Council's Heritage, Culture, Tourism and Events (HCTE) Fund which is funded via the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund. This will be used to set up and promote the event in year one.

The main theatres will benefit from the usual ticketing arrangements and the additional performances will also help achieve their budget targets.

Taking into account the HCTE grant plus income through ticket sales and sponsorships, the project is budgeted to break even and require no additional council funding. We will however continue to look for further and future grant funding to expand the programme and marketing capacity.

Integrated Impact Assessment: (see also Impact Assessment - First Stage Appendix)

Valleys Communities Impacts:

The aim of the festival is to showcase venues in our valleys communities in addition to our main town centre venues. The festival will open up access to entertainment and cultural activity (through comedy) in our valley communities.

Workforce Impacts:

As part of the funding received via the SPF Heritage, Culture, Tourism and Events fund, an additional post has been funded up until 31st December, 2024 to assist in the organisation of this event and other related activity.

Legal Impacts:

Standard performer's contracts and terms for shows at the 3 main theatres will be put in place by managers at each venue. We will liaise with our legal team to put in place agreements with fringe artists and performers as required.

Risk Management Impacts: Key risks to this project include: poor marketing and promotion; performers cancelling and poor ticket sales. These risks will be mitigated by:

- A strong marketing plan.
- The combined experience and strength of our working group.
- The history of Neath Comedy Festival proving there is demand for this type of event.
- Keeping the festival small in Year 1 and building gradually in subsequent years.

Consultation:

In May 2023 a working group was set up to explore and develop the idea of staging a Comedy Festival for Neath Port Talbot. The objective early on was to design a festival that would take place at venues in our valleys as well as our main town venues.

The working group is comprised of:

- Cabinet Member for Nature, Tourism and Wellbeing
- The Founder of Neath Comedy Festival/Stand Up Comedian
- Port Talbot born actor/comedian/writer
- Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage & Culture, NPT Council
- Commercial Coordinator, NPT Council
- General Managers of The Gwyn Hall ,The Princess Royal Theatre, and Pontardawe Arts Centre.
- Business Development Manager, NPT Council

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