

5. South Bedfordshire District Council Leisure Contracts Performance Report

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members with information on the performance of the District Council's management contracts for Dunstable, Tiddenfoot and Houghton Regis Leisure Centres and the Grove Theatre.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To consider the report and make any comments.
- 2.2 To note that the performance of the contracts is monitored on a quarterly basis, and information will be available alongside the quarterly monitoring reports of the Council Plan.

3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide a formal update following the commencement of the new leisure contracts in October 2005, and the opening of the Grove Theatre in 2007.
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4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 South Bedfordshire District Council has a portfolio of four leisure facilities: Dunstable Leisure Centre, Houghton Regis Leisure Centre, Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre in Leighton Linlade, and the Grove Theatre in Dunstable.
- 4.2 The management and operation of these facilities is contracted out by the Council. These contracts are awarded in accordance with corporate procurement policies and procedures, and the Council pays a management fee for the successful contractor to independently manage and operate each facility within defined contractual terms and specifications. This process minimises the financial cost and risk to the Council, whilst ensuring service provision.
- 4.3 The Council's present contractor is Leisure Connection, a professional leisure management company who operate in excess of 80 sports, leisure and arts amenities for local authorities, three Sport England National Sports Centres, and the centre of excellence for disability sport – Stoke Mandeville Stadium.
- 4.4 There are two separate contracts in operation: the Grove Theatre, Tiddenfoot and Dunstable Leisure Centres are managed through a single 25 year contract, which was signed in September 2005 at the start of the construction of the Grove Theatre; Houghton Regis Leisure Centre is managed through a separate contract that expires in December 2011.
- 4.5 The two contracts exist as an opportunity was identified to integrate Tiddenfoot and Dunstable Leisure Centre contracts with that of the Grove

Theatre during the contracting process for the theatre. This enabled the Council to achieve an improved financial package, value for money and economy of scale for the management and operation of these facilities. Houghton Regis Leisure Centre has been maintained as a separate contract in order to ensure that future development opportunities for the site can be pursued, if appropriate.

4.6 Tiddenfoot and Houghton Regis Leisure Centres are operated as dual use facilities with Bedfordshire County Council. This means that schools attached to the centres are able to have defined, dedicated access and usage of the amenities. To facilitate this, joint use agreements between the Council and the County Council have been negotiated, which the contractor is obliged to comply with.

4.7 The contracts also specify the responsibilities for the maintenance of the Grove Theatre and Dunstable Leisure Centre between the Council and the Contractor. As dual use facilities, the contracts and joint use agreements define the maintenance responsibilities for Tiddenfoot and Houghton Regis Leisure Centres. These responsibilities are divided between the Council, the contractor and Bedfordshire County Council

5.0 **MONITORING MECHANISM**

5.1 The leisure contracts devolve management and operational responsibility to the contractor, including financial risk. Within this, the Council has a client role, to monitor the contractual agreement, ensuring that the contractors' obligations and responsibilities are met. The Council also ensures that a proper mechanism exists for facilitating joint use, and that maintenance responsibilities are carried out with minimal disruption to customers and operation. To achieve this, the Council liaises with, and monitors the performance of, the contractor in accordance with a monitoring mechanism.

5.2 **Client Contractor Meetings**

(a) The Council has established a structured procedure for monitoring leisure contracts. Day to day liaison and monitoring of the contract is carried out by the Council's Client Officer. This is supported by scheduled monthly management meetings with the contractor who provides operational compliance reports for these meetings, and these are then sample tested by the Client Officer. Quarterly and annual reviews are also held at a corporate management level to discuss performance, including programming, maintenance and customer service

5.3 **Operational and Annual Business Plan**

(a) Monitoring is based on an overall operational plan produced by the contractor for the leisure centres and the Grove Theatre. This is supported by an annual business plan produced by the contractor for each leisure centre and the Grove Theatre, which details the contractor's aims and objectives for the coming year based on the operational plan.

5.4 Maintenance

- (a) Maintenance and lifecycle replacement schedules form part of each contract, and specify responsibilities and obligations for the Council and contractor. These schedules include Bedfordshire County Council for Tiddenfoot and Houghton Regis Leisure Centres.
- (b) Maintenance is undertaken in three ways:
- responsive, day-to-day maintenance, including domestic and pool cleaning, plant and equipment running repairs;
 - planned, preventative maintenance (PPM), which is programmed, scheduled maintenance of plant and equipment; and
 - lifecycle replacement, where agreed periodic replacement of worn out plant and equipment is carried out.
- (c) This work is discussed and progressed through day-to-day liaison, monthly meetings, quarterly and annual reviews, and incorporated into annual business plans. The Council fulfils its own maintenance obligations through the property services facilities team and Corporate Maintenance Strategy. The Council's Client Officer and Facilities Team Manager work with the contractor to co-ordinate maintenance programmes to minimise service disruption.
- (d) Dunstable Leisure Centre has had consistently high levels of customer footfall since opening in the 1970's, and benefited from several investment programmes as leisure markets evolved to date. This has included the wet change being extended, and squash courts reduced in phases from 10 to 2. This has enabled space to be utilised to create a crèche, a dedicated fitness gym, and a multi purpose dance studio. The last major programme carried out in 2005 also included the creation of improved public areas and a replacement All Weather Pitch.
- (e) Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre has also benefited from investment. Significantly a teaching pool was constructed 15 years ago which at the time was a new concept in pool design, offering a variable and tiltable base from 0 to 3 metres, which made it particularly suitable for disabled people and children. It also underwent a significant refurbishment programme during 2006. The squash courts were reduced from 4 to 2, and space utilised as a crèche and meeting space, was converted into a new dance studio and the crèche relocated. The fitness gym was then extended into the old dance studio.
- (f) The smallest of the three sites, Houghton Regis Leisure Centre is also a dual use facility, and this, along with its limited space, constrains the ability to significantly enhance its amenities. However, over time it has had its entrance area extended, squash courts have been constructed and a fitness gym installed.

5.5 Performance Measures

- (a) Should the contractor not meet its contractual obligations, the Council has a mechanism within the contracts, which enables any issues of performance to be addressed. Through this, the Council notifies the contractor when it is under performing or not meeting its contractual obligations. This mechanism allows for reasonable periods of rectification, except where it is imperative that immediate action is required for reasons of health. If the contractor fails to rectify performance issues, the Council is able to issue financial penalties as a consequence.
- (b) Performance issues are proactively monitored through the monitoring mechanism.

6.0 LEISURE CENTRES

6.1 Operational Requirements

- (a) The Council's general service aims for each leisure centre are that they provide the communities of South Bedfordshire with opportunities to participate in a varied range of leisure and fitness related activities.
- (b) The contractor is required to manage each leisure centre in accordance with good industry practice, the Council's own specifications, and provide a diverse range of sports, leisure and fitness activities. The contractor should maintain, where possible, a balance between casual, individual and group usage, including participation in courses and events. The contractor should achieve this whilst ensuring that its obligations under the Joint Use Agreements are met.
- (c) Using these aims and the contract specification, the Council measures the performance of the contractor in relation to:
 - the type and range of activity (Programme) the contractor provides;
 - the usage and customer base;
 - the level of operational service (hours open) including any closure periods;
 - the level and type of security, health and safety related incidents;
 - customer service issues including cleaning and marketing; and
 - facility maintenance.

6.2 Performance Outputs

(a) Programme

- During 2007, the following range of activity was provided by Leisure Connection across the three leisure centre sites in accordance with its contractual requirements:
 - **Harpers Gym:** Open daily, a fitness gym containing treadmills, rowing machines, exercise bikes, cross trainers, dedicated disabled exercise equipment, free and machine weights. Operated as a membership club, with casual user sessions;
 - **Dance Studios:** fitness and dance classes, and used as rehearsal space;
 - **Main Sports Halls:** badminton, indoor football, trampolining, volleyball, basketball and gymnastic sessions for clubs and casual users;
 - **Swimming Pools:** swim school, swimming galas, snorkelling, fitness classes, mother and baby sessions, 50+ sessions, casual swimming sessions for club and casual users;
 - **Bowls Hall:** carpet bowling for bowls clubs and casual users;
 - **All Weather Pitches:** football and hockey for clubs, training and league activities;
 - **Martial Arts:** including karate and judo for club and contractor operations, competitions and gradings;
 - **Squash:** league, ladder and casual users;
 - **Children's Services:** soft play, crèche, children's parties, holiday activity programmes;
 - **Beauty and Sports therapy;** and
 - **General trade fairs, concerts and meetings**
- Within this, programme provision is made for disabled activity, both as part of the main programme and as dedicated programming. Dunstable and District Disabled Society (DADDS) are notable participants in this respect.
- Leisure Connection are also members of the recently established community sports network for South Bedfordshire and are working with the Council's Sports Development Officer in developing sports projects and initiatives for club development, diversionary and health related activities.
- One aspect of programming to be progressed by Leisure Connection, in co-operation with the Council, during 2008 will be appropriate targeting and development of specific initiatives and programmes of activity for identified priority community and excluded groups.

(b) **Centre Usage**

- Leisure Connection is required to develop an inclusive service, ensuring that services are accessed and available for all sectors of the community. Customer throughput for leisure centres takes several forms, and consists of club, centre or activity membership, casual and group usage, and event participation. This can involve an individual regularly taking advantage of more than one activity each visit e.g. gym and swim, or on occasion where some membership or group activities are concerned individual attendance not being recorded, for example bowls club or trade fair.
- The dual use nature of Tiddenfoot and Houghton Regis Leisure Centres also means that areas of each centre have either restricted access or are not available to the general public at certain times. During this period the facilities are used by the schools for their own sports sessions. This activity is not taken into account or participation recorded, as it is outside of the contract. However, this is taken into consideration when assessing performance of throughput for these centres.
- Usage statistics collected by Leisure Connection are therefore based on an overall recorded throughput of 1,064,930, and can be considered as a minimum for 2007:

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| Dunstable Leisure Centre: 552,662 |
| Users are drawn from the following postcode areas |
| Dunstable, Houghton Regis 70%; |
| Other South Bedfordshire communities 23%; |
| Luton 4%; Hertfordshire 2%; Variable Other 1% |
| 7.99% of users are from minority ethnic communities |
| 62% of users are male and 38% female |
| Age profile of users |
| (50 and over; 41%) (35-50; 40%) (18-35; 14%) (Under 18; 5%) |

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| Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre: 402,892 |
| Users are drawn from the following postcode areas |
| Leighton Linlade and other South Bedfordshire communities; 93% |
| Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire communities 4% |
| Variable other 2%; Luton 1% |
| 2.58% of users are from minority ethnic communities |
| 43% of users are male and 57% female |

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| Age profile of users |
| (50 and over; 31%) (35-50; 34%) (18-35; 21%) (Under 18; 14%) |

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| Houghton Regis Leisure Centre: 109,376 |
| Users are drawn from the following postcode areas; |
| Houghton Regis and other South Bedfordshire communities 94%; |
| Luton; 4% Hertfordshire; 2% |
| Minority ethnic community participation is not formally collected at present. Operational estimates based on site team feedback indicates approximately 1.5% of users are from minority ethnic communities |
| 40% of users are male and 60% female |
| The age profile of users is; |
| (60 and over; 2%) (40 - 60; 31%) (21 – 40; 60%) (Under 21 7%) |

(c) Operational Availability

- Leisure Connection is required to open each leisure centre every day with the exception of national holidays from 06:00 to 22:00 during weekdays, and 08:00 to 22:30 at weekends. This equates to approximately 16,750 hours per annum, or 5,583 hours for each centre. During 2007 the centres were closed for a total of 19 contracted hours, or approximately 0.1 percent of available hours.
 - Dunstable 0 hours
 - Tiddenfoot 3 hours
 - Houghton Regis 16 hours
- These closures were necessitated due to pool contamination at Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre and defective boilers at Houghton Regis. Neither event was attributable to the performance of Leisure Connection.
- As important amenities, closure periods for swimming pools in the three centres were also recorded. These were closed for a total of 313 hours during 2007. This represents approximately 1.9 percent of available hours.
 - Dunstable 28 hours
 - Tiddenfoot 83 hours
 - Houghton Regis 202 hours
- Due to the age and overall condition of Houghton Regis Leisure Centre a significant pool closure occurred in 2007 through main

boiler failure, which required extensive repair. Maintenance responsibility for this rested with Bedfordshire County Council and is not attributable to the performance of Leisure Connection. Other closures were as a result of lifeguard shortages (sickness absence) or pool contamination. The issue of lifeguard shortages has been raised with Leisure Connection as an improvement measure for 2008. Issues of pool contamination are an occasional, unavoidable operational hazard for swimming pools, and are promptly addressed by Leisure Connection on each occasion.

(d) **Security, Health and Safety**

- The operation and nature of leisure centres does mean that there is a high risk of activity related accidents and injuries occurring as a consequence of participation in sports. Leisure Connection is responsible for the health and safety of customers in this respect, and is required to have policies and procedures in place that comply with all appropriate legislation in order to minimise this risk. All accidents are recorded in order to ensure that issues or trends are appropriately monitored, identified and promptly addressed. The number of accidents occurring across all three centres during 2007 was 237. These were registered as principally sports or activity related. No accidents were Health and Safety Executive reportable in nature.

- Dunstable 85 recorded
- Tiddenfoot 93 recorded
- Houghton Regis 59 recorded

- This represents a rate of approximately 0.02 percent from a total throughput of 1,064,930.

- Leisure Connection is also responsible for site security, including external areas under its control at each facility. The total number of public related security incidents recorded during 2007 was 80. These involved petty vandalism, anti social behaviour and minor theft. The peak time for this activity was during the summer holiday period.

- Dunstable 44 incidents recorded
- Tiddenfoot 6 incidents recorded
- Houghton Regis 30 incidents recorded

- These figures are also commensurate with a low level of incidents in relation to throughput. However, these can impact more widely on the perception of services, and are monitored closely for trends in order to respond positively where necessary.

(e) **Customer Service**

- Monitoring of customer service is carried out by Leisure Connection through customer comments, user surveys and meetings with user

groups. The Council's Client Officer is also engaged in this process and receives separate comments through users and members, when issues are raised directly with the Council. These are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and are incorporated into the monthly client contractor and review meetings. During 2007, Leisure Connection received 126 separately recorded issues that are of concern to users of leisure centres.

- Dunstable Leisure Centre recorded 65 comments, mainly relating to cleanliness and maintenance.
 - Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre recorded 44 comments, mainly relating to maintenance, programme and lack of café facilities.
 - Houghton Regis Leisure Centre recorded 17 comments, relating to anti social behaviour and maintenance.
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- Survey feedback from users on what improvements they would like to see related principally to changing rooms, sports hall (Dunstable), fitness gyms and staffing. Responses to these issues have been addressed through new changing room lockers being installed, a review of cleaning arrangements, and preparation for renewal of the sports hall floor as part of the Corporate Maintenance Strategy, and installation of new fitness equipment.
 - Centre users have indicated that the main programming areas they would like to see developed are fitness classes and pool activities. Customers would also like to see more information on centre activities and services being made available, and improvements to reception services. These measures are being progressed through 2008 as detailed in the service development aims in paragraph 6.4.
 - Car parking was also noted as an issue for all sites. This relates principally to the amount of car parking available, and will be pursued and considered internally by the Council in relation to future corporate policy.
 - Catering provision varies at each centre. Due to the need to accommodate a variety of sports and leisure activities, catering opportunities are relatively limited, particularly at Tiddenfoot and Houghton Regis due to their dual use nature. To maximise catering potential, at the beginning of 2007 Leisure Connection entered into a partnership with Crown Catering, a major national catering company, to develop its offered catering through a subsidiary, Leisure Xtra. Progress on this to date has yet to have an impact, and is being progressed through service development objectives for 2008.

(f) **Maintenance**

- Maintenance and refurbishment of the centres is a continuous process, and is programmed and carried out to ensure minimal disruption to service provision. This is no small task, and is achieved principally through ongoing liaison between the Client

Officer, Facilities Manager and Leisure Connection to co-ordinate work. The service availability statistics demonstrate that although maintenance issues do have an affect on service provision, this is minimal and principally due to the nature of the maintenance required.

- Historically planned, preventative maintenance required closure of either buildings or specific areas for up to eight weeks at a time. The need for this has now been mainly eliminated through recent refurbishments by installing upgrades designed to avoid the necessity to close, including the upgrading of pipework with specific valves that enable pools to continue to operate through systems maintenance. During the last two and a half years this has meant that no closures have been required for pools. This significant improvement has been achieved principally by the Council's Client Officer, who worked with the Facilities Manager and his team to implement these changes.
- Equipment maintenance also impacts on service provision. Heavy and continual usage does mean that there are inevitable breakdowns, particularly with fitness equipment. During 2007, this became an operational issue during Leisure Connections transition from one equipment supplier to another, and resulted in it being activated as a performance matter for the Council. Rectification has now been made and Leisure Connection has new equipment installed across all centres.

6.3 Maintenance Programme 2008

- (a) PPM will be undertaken during 2008 in accordance with the lifecycle and maintenance programme operated jointly by the Council and Leisure Connection.
- (b) There are also specific areas of need as part of the ongoing capital replacement and maintenance programme that will be addressed during 2008:
 - the replacement of Dunstable Leisure Centre sports hall floor; and
 - general refurbishment of Houghton Regis Leisure Centre.
- (c) General equipment maintenance is presently at acceptable standards and is continuing to be monitored as appropriate. Day to day responsive issues are anticipated to further improve through additional resources being introduced by Leisure Connection for maintenance in 2008.

6.4 Service Development Aims 2008

- (a) The leisure centres are in a process of continuous operation, and are evolving in terms of service demand and contractual requirements. As such, the Council and Leisure Connection progressively work to respond appropriately to service demands,

operational requirements and ongoing maintenance issues in order to maintain and develop the standard of service provided.

(b) During 2008, the Council and Leisure Connection will continue to progress the development of services based on improved systems of management, operational procedures, continued programme development and customer service. Key aims in relation to this are:

- the completion of operational plan documentation in accordance with contract specifications;
- the completion and implementation of a Catering Plan for leisure centres;
- the update of the 25 year Lifecycle and Maintenance Plan;
- reduced incidents of closure due to leisure team shortages;
- further development of the contractors customer consultation mechanism;
- improved standards and systems of cleanliness;
- improved standards of equipment and facility maintenance;
- an improvement in customer satisfaction with levels of cleanliness and maintenance at each centre;
- a formal programming review to include pool and sports hall programming, training and courses;
- identifying and targeting key groups not presently utilising, or able to access leisure amenities;
- integrating safeguarding children safety training into team training programmes;
- a review of swim school class timetables on a term by term basis;
- improved systems of monitoring and recording usage levels, and development of monthly summary reporting; and
- Leisure Connection undertake an external quality assessment each year (Quest). The national average assessment rating is 65 percent. During 2007 Leisure Connection achieved:

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| Dunstable | 68 percent (up 5 percent on 2006) |
| Tiddenfoot | 75 percent (up 1 percent on 2006) |
| Houghton Regis | 64 percent (up 1 percent on 2006) |

(c) Leisure Connection's target for 2008 is to maintain and achieve a minimum external quality assurance assessment rating of 65 percent at each leisure centre.

7.0 GROVE THEATRE

7.1 Operational Requirements

(a) The Council's service aims for the Grove Theatre are that it exists to provide the communities of South Bedfordshire with a varied arts and entertainment programme, to enable them to participate in or attend cultural activities. All other uses shall be in keeping with this purpose.

- (b) The Council does not have any direct control over the programme of events, bar not permitting an event on moral or reputation grounds. However, the Council does require an imaginative programming strategy to be maintained, developing over time an innovative and balanced programme without compromising financial stability. The Council has expectations that a high standard will be applied in this respect, in keeping with the quality of theatre construction the Council has achieved.
- (c) The contractor is also required to facilitate access to arts related educational and creative development opportunities for the community as a whole. As an independent, commercially managed operation, the Council has consciously integrated community use criteria within the contract for the Grove Theatre, which requires the contractor to facilitate access by community/voluntary arts groups, societies and organisations, schools, colleges and dance academies for the presentation of their creative work.
- (d) To support this, a 50 percent discounted hire scheme, targeted towards encouraging and supporting the development of creative community use and activity, is operated.

7.2 Performance Outputs

- (a) Leisure Connection was awarded the contract for management of the Grove Theatre at the start of the construction phase in September of 2005. During the following 18 months, a mobilisation plan set out by the Council, to take possession, prepare, open and establish the theatre was put into effect by Leisure Connection.
- (b) The Grove Theatre was successfully opened through this process in April 2007, to popular and positive acclaim. A high level of professional competence was required to achieve this during a period of high risk financially, and in terms of meeting deadlines. This success is a positive reflection on the considerable consistent effort, flexibility and adaptability on the part of the Council and Leisure Connection, and should not be underestimated. The process for Leisure Connection as the contractor, included recruitment, training, fit out, proving and testing of equipment, advance marketing and promotion, and preparation of the opening programme and season.
- (c) During this period, one aspect of mobilisation experienced temporary difficulty. During the transfer of the box office operation from Dunstable Leisure Centre to the Grove Theatre, I.T issues affected the box office capacity to respond appropriately to personal, online and telephone sales for three weeks prior to opening. This has not subsequently been repeated, and ticket sales have not been adversely affected. This is reflected in the number of online sales that are being achieved. Approximately 30 percent of ticket income to date has being realised online against a national average of 9 percent. This equates to 4,975 separate transactions, or 17,111 tickets, realising £330,326.50.

- (d) The Theatre has now been open for eight and a half months, and completed its designated mobilisation period, which ran to the end of the December 2007. It is now entering the next phase of its operation, which will involve continuing to build on a very positive and encouraging start, in accordance with Leisure Connections business plan, through the evolution of its marketing operation in building audiences, and the continued development of the main programme, through experimentation, qualitative standards and balanced provision.

7.3 Programme and Usage

- (a) During 2007, the Grove Theatre has presented a range of productions in accordance with the programming criteria contractually required, including:

- **Musical Theatre** – including Joseph, The Rocky Horror Show, The Rat Pack, Blood Brothers
- **Drama** – Dangerous Corner, The Secretary Bird, Cash on Delivery
- **Dance** – The Nutcracker, Copellia, Russian Cossacks, Snow White
- **Opera** – Tosca, Aida, Carmen
- **Comedy** – Ken Dodd, Vagina Monologues, Pam Ayres, Jim Davidson
- **One Person Shows** – Mickey Rooney, Ray Mears, Jimmy Greaves
- **Music** – Blues Band, The Searchers, Billy Fury story, Magic of Motown, Rick Wakeman, The Commitments, The Drifters
- **Family/Children's Productions** – The Gruffalo's Child, Danny Champion of the World, Noddy and Friends, Beauty and the Beast on Ice, Shakespeare for Kidz, Angelina Ballerina
- **Pantomime** – Peter Pan, starring Brian Blessed

- (b) Other Programming

- To support the main programme, the Grove Theatre facilitates other activities appropriate to its operation. Leisure Connection operate an education and outreach service. A major part of this is the development of a dedicated Youth Theatre operation, which successfully staged an inaugural performance of Oliver during the summer of 2007. This was well supported by the general public and received acclaim for the high standard that the young people achieved.
- Workshops were also provided in accordance with the contract specification, and young people from across the district were actively engaged to participate in several professional productions, including the pantomime Peter Pan.

(c) Community Activity

- The Council has made provision within its contract to facilitate community use of the Theatre. Community use is defined as non-commercial arts and creative activities that community groups and organisations pursue. This type of activity is expected to evolve and develop over the life of the contract period. In anticipation of this, the Council has made provision within the contract for 41 days each year to be available at a discounted hire rate of 50 percent, for community use as it evolves. The Council has established criteria and an application process to administer this discounted usage.
- Since the venue opened in April of 2007, three community presentations have been staged, all playing to full houses:
 - Dunstable Amateur Operatic Society – three performances of 42nd Street
 - The Salvation Army – one performance of a Christmas carol concert
 - Upstage Theatre Company, Barton le Clay: one performance of Bugsy Malone
- A schools choral event has also been approved for 2008, initiated by Pulford Lower School in Leighton Linlade.
- These presentations and activities are summarised as follows:

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| No of separate performances; 177 |
| Box office sales; £1,495,927.49 |
| Ticketed sales; 77,173 |
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| Other event throughput; 4,000 approx |
| 12 Theatre related workshops involving 379 participants |
| Theatre tours involving 1,420 participants |
| 4 theatre hires for other commercial promotions and conference events |
| 2 corporate events; S.B.D.C Chairman’s reception and Dunstable Town Council Mayor Making |
| 1 Orchestral project featuring the Orchestra of the Swan, co-produced by SBDC and the Eastern Orchestral Board |
| 20 Function room hires for business and presentation activities |
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| 12 Theatre and Activity related workshops involving 379 participants |
| Theatre Tours involving 1420 participants |
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- The audience profile below also demonstrates that the Grove Theatre has already established itself as a regional venue, with audiences drawn from across Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire, with others from further afield.

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| Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Luton 66% | Leighton Linlade 7% |
| Milton Keynes postcode areas; 8% | |
| St Albans, Aylesbury, Hemel Hempstead, Bedford postcode areas; 11% | |
| Other areas – regionally/nationally; 8% | |

7.4 Operational Availability

- (a) Leisure Connection is required to operate the Grove Theatre in accordance with the contract specification. This means that the main auditorium of the theatre is to be utilised for a minimum of 249 days each year (April to April) for performances and events. This includes defined dark (no audience) days including Christmas Day, rehearsal and fit up (preparation) periods, directly associated with the preparation of any show or event.
- (b) The box office and front of house are separate, and normally required to be open on show days from 10:00 to 20:00 (Monday to Saturday) and 16:00 to 20:00 on Sundays. On non-show days, the box office hours are from 10:00 to 18:00 (Monday to Saturday) and closed on Sunday. The Theatre has yet to complete a full year cycle. However, statistics to 31 December 2007 show that the Theatre's main auditorium was open for 172 days or 70.2 percent of its annual target. This is in-line with contractual requirements.
- (c) Theatres are high maintenance operations, technically and physically. As such, and in order for a high standard of operation and presentation to be maintained, the contract allows for a maximum of six weeks closure each year for essential maintenance periods, either as single days or up to a maximum of two weeks in each instance.
- (d) The Theatre has undergone essential maintenance periods for 30 days during 2007 on this basis.

7.5 Security, Health and Safety

- (a) As with the leisure centres, Leisure Connection is responsible for the health and safety of customers, and specifically technical operations and stage management, which represent the highest operational risk. Policies and procedures are required to be in place which comply with all appropriate legislation in order to minimise this risk. Monitoring procedures are as for leisure centres. No recorded, or reportable incidents in this respect have occurred since commencement of operations.

- (b) Issues of security for the Grove Theatre are similar to those for the leisure centres. One incident has been recorded since opening, relating to minor theft.

7.6 Customer Service

- (a) Since opening, the Grove Theatre has received continual positive feedback from users in relation to the quality of the venue, range of programming and customer service by the Theatre Team.
- (b) As a new operation, the Grove Theatre is working to develop comprehensive and wide reaching promotion and marketing for the venue. In its first year of operation it has developed a brand image, programme brochure, web site, customer mailing list of 4,500 and rising, a customised group, schools, coach and organisation mailing list, weekly press releases, press reviews, radio and print media advertising campaigns, poster, and a leaflet distribution network. This has been supported by dedicated promotion of key events involving screen media (Luton Mall), street liners on bus sides, displays at railway stations, banners and roadside sheets.
- (c) The success of this is reflected in the strong ticket sales achieved in the first ten months. This is an evolving process and further audience development initiatives will continue to be brought on stream during 2008, continuing to progress existing marketing and promotion in a structured, measured and financially sustainable manner.

7.7 Maintenance

- (a) The Grove Theatre as a new venue has had relatively few issues to consider during its opening phase. Leisure Connection and the Council have been able to focus on establishing its PPM programme, which deals with snagging issues relating to post construction works and operationally maintain essential sound, lighting and rigging systems between productions.
- (b) One significant incident occurred during 2007 in that a total power loss was experienced in the main sub station which provides power to the theatre. This was attributed to post construction snagging and promptly addressed. As a potential show-stopping event, this was averted due to the professional expertise of the Grove Theatre manager and her team, the Council's Client Officer and Facilities Team Manager. The issue has been successfully resolved and a further repetition of this is not anticipated. The successful handling of this is reflected in the positive feedback from the hirer, Dunstable Amateur Operatic Society and audience response.

7.8 Maintenance Programme

- (a) It is important for the Council to ensure that the Grove Theatre maintains an appropriately high standard of presentation and technical competence. To achieve this, the Council has

established a 25-year lifecycle and maintenance schedule for the Grove Theatre. Provision has also been made within the contract for Leisure Connection, to properly carry out day-to-day maintenance. As a new building, no major issue is envisaged during 2008 that may impact on operational objectives, but this will remain under active consideration as part of the Corporate Maintenance Strategy. During 2008, maintenance objectives will be the completion of post construction snagging, the implementation of the PPM programme and operational viability.

7.9 Service Development Aims 2008

- (a) During 2008, the Council and Leisure Connection will continue to progress the development of the Grove Theatres service, based on continuing to develop and implement systems of management, operational procedures, arts and entertainment programme, marketing development and customer service.
- (b) Key aims in relation to this are:
- the completion by Leisure Connection of operational plan documentation in accordance with contract specifications;
 - the completion and implementation of the 2008/2009 annual business plan for the Grove Theatre;
 - the completion and implementation of a Catering Plan for the Grove Theatre;
 - the completion of the post construction snagging programme;
 - the implementation of a Lifecycle and PPM programme for the Grove Theatre;
 - continued development of marketing and promotion for the Grove Theatre, including a 'Friends of' scheme, group bookings sales, sponsorship, advertising and information distribution; and
 - continued development of the Grove Theatre's programme, including the work to develop film and outreach opportunities.

8.0 CONCLUSION

8.1 This report provides an insight into the nature of the management contracts the Council has for its leisure facilities, the range of activities provided, level of usage and the monitoring and maintenance mechanisms in place.

8.2 These details, in conjunction with targets set, will form the basis of future reports on a quarterly basis.

9.0 CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Council Objectives & Priorities (including impact for Local Government Review process)

- (a) The three leisure centres and the Grove Theatre contribute significantly to the Council's ambition of a more active district, as demonstrated by usage figures, footfall and programming.

9.2 Environmental Implications

- (a) This report is a routine performance monitoring/information report. Therefore, in terms of South Beds District Council's Corporate Environmental Policy, the recommendations are exempt from environmental assessment.

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