

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 APRIL 2016  
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (FINANCE AND OPERATIONS)

**CW ENTERTAINMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16**

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide this committee with an overview and annual summary of CW Entertainment (CWE), which is located within the Campus West complex in Welwyn Garden City.
- 1.2 Following a major refurbishment programme which was completed over 2013-14, and the addition of new facilities and services alongside existing ones, CWE has undergone a step change in its operations. It now comprises five different service brands which are distinct in their offering to customers, but also complementary to each other. They are the Garden City Cinema, Hawthorne Theatre, RollerCity, SoftPlayCity and Humphrey's Cafe and Bar. The dedicated website – [www.cwentertainment.info](http://www.cwentertainment.info) – sets out each of these brands and what they offer in much greater detail.
- 1.3 Since the new services became operational from the end of September 2014 they have grown and started to mature to extend the overall leisure and entertainment provision on site. First year feedback from new and existing customers has been very positive. This has helped in creating CWE as an entertainment centre of choice for all the family both within the borough and beyond.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That this committee notes the content of this annual report for CW Entertainment and provides any comments or other feedback to the General Manager and Head of Service.

**3. Explanation**

- 3.1 A summary of the progress and development of the five distinct service brands over 2015-16 is provided here for information.

Key to each brand is the sales system, known as SRO4, which is the initial point of contact for all customers using the telephone, internet or face to face within the box office. SR04 is also used across the cafe and bar services within CWE, making it a fully integrated business system which collects valuable sales and marketing data, as well as selling tickets for all activities and events.

It also links to the Zebra discount card scheme which enables customers to purchase certain tickets and services at a reduced price. This is free to join and has proved to be very popular with the public with 22,700 cards currently issued.

**3.2 Garden City Cinema (GCC)**

- 3.2.1 GCC comprises three separate cinema screens, two of which are permanent and were purpose-built as part of the recent refurbishment. Screen One has a capacity of 41 seats and Screen Two has 114 seats. Screen Three also doubles as the Hawthorne Theatre and has a seating capacity of 320. So there are a maximum of 475 cinema seats available at any one time within CWE.

- 3.2.2 GCC screens films across all genres including first run blockbusters, family films, art house and world cinema and certain documentaries which attract a cinema release. Some screenings are themed to meet demand for Saturday morning family films; mother and toddler only movies; hard of hearing screenings with the use of subtitles; and autism friendly showings.
- 3.2.3 In school term time weekday films will usually be shown from 1.00pm with the last one starting at around 8.00pm. At weekends and during school holidays films will start at around 9.30am and have their last screening from around 8.00pm. This table below sets out the total number of screenings and the seats sold for them over the past three financial years.

Year	Film Screenings	Tickets Sold
2013-14	895	52,000
2014-15	2,850	98,500
2015-16	4,200	135,000

This table illustrates how CWE’s capacity to show films has increased considerably following the refurbishment and addition of two new screens from September 2014 onwards. GCC has benefited from the release two large franchise blockbusters – ‘Spectre’ and ‘Star Wars: The Force Awakens’ – which have both attracted large audiences in recent months. The six most successful films shown over 2015-16, three of which are family oriented animated films, are listed here for information:

1. Star Wars: The Force Awakens
2. Spectre
3. Minions
4. Inside Out
5. Paddington
6. Lady in a Van

- 3.2.4 GCC also offers what is known as Event Cinema. This is a programme of live streamed or encore broadcasts of theatre, opera, ballet and concerts, to local audiences. Some of these have sold out completely in the largest screen and have also been shown simultaneously in the two other screens as demand dictates. Our six most successful live streamed events over 2015-16, five of which are theatre productions, are listed here for information:

1. NT Live: Hamlet
2. RSC Live: The Winter's Tale
3. Take That: Live at the O2
4. NT Live: Les Liaisons Dangereuses
5. NT Live: Hangmen
6. RSC Live: Othello

**3.3 SoftPlayCity (SPC)**

- 3.3.1 SPC has grown considerably over 2015-16 after a slower than forecast start as a new service at CWE. This is primarily because it operates in a locally competitive market place with many other soft play providers within a 15 mile radius of Welwyn Garden City. The focus has been on building local brand awareness with the public and seeking to differentiate the offer from the competition both in terms of price and facilities. It is open to the public from 9.30am to 3.30pm daily, and separately private hire parties from 4.00pm to 6.00pm daily.

- 3.3.2 As a service which is expected to mature over a three year period it is proving to be popular with young families. There are three separate activity zones for toddlers aged 0-2, younger children aged 2-5 and older children aged 5-8. It has a safe operating capacity of 80 children at any one time.
- 3.3.3 SPC will sell out regularly at weekends. There have been just over 60,000 recorded admissions over 2015-16. Approximately 65 per cent of all available private hire parties are selling at this time, and this is expected to grow over 2016-17. The Christmas Party in December 2015 sold all available tickets within a few days of them going on sale.
- 3.3.4 Locating SPC next to the downstairs Humphrey's Cafe, which serves both food and beverages, has increased the dwell time for parents, grandparents and childminders who will make secondary purchases as well as paying the entry price. A number of local toddler groups also meet regularly in SPC. Discounts are offered to childminders when they bring in groups of children to use SPC.

#### 3.4 RollerCity (RC)

- 3.4.1 RC has been a successful service within CWE for many years, with many people who skated there now bringing their own children along. It is considered to be a unique selling point at CWE because it has no local competition within a 15 mile radius.
- 3.4.2 RC is open for skating sessions on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings and generally all day on Saturdays and Sundays. It will also be open on every weekday during school holidays. Over 2015-16 there have been over 40,000 recorded admissions to holiday and family sessions out of a total of 67,000 customers overall. Sessions are generally themed by age or by ability so there is something for everyone.
- 3.4.3 Up to ten private hire skate parties are available every week and approximately 79 per cent of these are selling at this time. They are particularly popular for children's birthday parties and they now come with a food option which can be prepared on site at CWE.
- 3.4.4 RC is also home to the Hell's Belles Roller Derby team who are part of the Hertfordshire Roller Derby league. They won Team of the Year at the 2016 Welwyn Hatfield Sports Awards which were held in the Hawthorne Theatre in March.
- 3.4.5 RC also hosts a very popular keep fit programme with a team of dedicated 'fit in body and mind' teachers offering classes from Pilates to Zumba and Tap to Line Dancing. The programme has attracted over 9,000 customers over 2015-16, with many older people coming along to both exercise and to socialise with their friends. Often they will stay for refreshments and something to eat at Humphrey's Cafe and Bar.
- 3.4.6 RC is also a designated reception centre for the borough in the event of a major civil emergency, and can be brought into use for this purpose at short notice. It also hosts official counts for local and national elections.

#### 3.5 Hawthorne Theatre (HC)

- 3.5.1 HC continues to be a popular venue to hire for local dance schools, a fine and decorative arts group, an annual jazz festival and for touring productions visiting this borough. It also hosts the borough council's Annual Council meeting and Sports Awards and has been used by private sector companies for their corporate events p. It is also Screen 3 for the Garden City Cinema.
- 3.5.2 HC is also the venue for the borough council's annual pantomime which, for the past three years, has been produced in-house at CWE. In 2015-16 the production was 'Cinderella' which sold over 10,000 tickets for shows running between 14 December and 3 January. This was an improvement on the 8,200 tickets sold for 'Sleeping Beauty' in the previous year. Tickets are already on sale for the 2016-17 production of 'Dick

Whittington'. A summary of the social media feedback received on the recent production of 'Cinderella' is appended to this report for information.

### 3.6 Humphrey's Cafe and Bar (HCB)

3.6.1 HCB upstairs within CWE has, over many years, been a popular meeting place for families, friends, and for local groups. The addition of a downstairs HCB located between RollerCity and SoftPlayCity, and the opening up of the former Terrace Suite upstairs to create a larger public lounge area, has increased the overall footfall. The addition of hot and cold food options from early 2015 onwards has also contributed towards this.

3.6.2 HCB supports all services within CWE in the form of secondary sales of food and beverages to customers. Over 2015-16 it has specifically supported large events such as: the Herts Jazz Festival in September where food was provided to over 500 festival goers; three times more sales to pantomime goers in comparison to the previous year; and buffets for around 300 people attending the Sports Awards and over 100 people attending the Civic Awards.

3.6.3 HCB's top selling hot food items over 2015-16 were chips, chicken and bacon sandwiches and chicken nuggets. For confectionary it was candy king, popcorn and malteser grab bags, which are particularly popular with film audiences. HCB prepares and exclusively serves Starbuck coffee products under an agreement it has with this company.

### 3.7 Technical and Production Team

3.7.1 This team is responsible for all the technical and production work associated with the business from film projection to staged theatrical events; building management for CWE and for the two off-site community halls at Vineyard Barn and Hazel Grove; and for health, safety and risk management across the building. This includes liaison with the adjacent Public Library which is operated by the County Council and the tenants who rent office space in the Campus West tower including Finesse Leisure and the Welwyn Hatfield Times.

3.7.2 The team's major undertaking over 2015-16 was the pantomime production of 'Cinderella' as well as events such as the Sports Awards and Civic Awards. Event Cinema is also provided through this team by utilising new technology to stream satellite signals to the three screens within the building. All projections to the three screens are controlled through the one projection room located at the back of the Hawthorne Theatre.

### 3.8 Sales and Marketing Team

3.8.1 This team is responsible for all sales and marketing activity for all services delivered through CWE. It also manages the main website and services all social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter.

3.8.2 The team attended a variety of community events over 2015-16 including fetes, festivals, street markets, country shows and Christmas light switch ons. They oversee a regular email distribution to around 30,000 subscribers featuring selected services and performances at CWE. They were also successful in the Garden City Cinema winning the best leisure and travel category at the 2015 WGC Town Centre Awards. A small montage of their marketing activities over the year is appended to this report for illustrative purposes.

## Implications

### 4. Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### 5. Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### 6. Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### 7. Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no direct security and terrorism implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### 8. Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### 9. Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### 10. Link to Corporate Priorities

- 10.1 The subject of this report is linked to the council's Corporate Priority to '*maintain a safe and healthy community*' and specifically '*to provide for a wide range of leisure covering arts, leisure, culture, fitness and sport*'.

### 11. Equality and Diversity

- 11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been carried out in connection with this annual report, as it is for information only.

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**Date** March 2016

Appendix One 'Cinderella' Customer Feedback on Social Media.

Appendix Two Sales and Marketing Montage 2015-16.

**'CINDERELLA' CUSTOMER FEEDBACK ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

- Brilliant! My 4 year old would usually want to leave a show 30 minutes in but loved it all. We all did. Thank you for a fantastic afternoon.
- I went to see Cinderella with my mum, dad and sister. I liked Cinderella because she danced and sang really good. The sisters were really funny and made me laugh lots. I thought the pantomime was really good and funny. From Rosie aged six.
- Took our two grandchildren aged 2 and 3 they loved it and so did we, brilliant and very funny! Great cast!
- Fabulous pantomime today, brilliant for adults and children, thank you so much for a very entertaining couple of hours on this very rainy day.
- Our third year at the Pantomime, and for us the best. Massive WELL DONE to all the cast you are amazing Xxxx.
- The best and funniest I have seen. Much better then St Albans. Had a lovely afternoon. Well done to all the cast.
- Not going to lie, I was dreading having to sit through over 2 hours of panto but I was so impressed I had to write a review!
- Myself and my children have just seen our first ever panto, Cinderella. It was fab! Well done to all the cast and crew, we really enjoyed ourselves, we might even come again! Merry Christmas to all X.
- Just been to see Panto, Cinderella. Have not laughed and smiled so much for ages. Side splitting fun. Face is still aching.
- Went to see this today, it was our 1st ever panto and thoroughly enjoyed it. Will def be back next year. I think a new christmas tradition has started.
- Just got back from Cinderella. Can only say WOW!! Amazing singing, dancing and acting! So funny too I have never laughed so much in ages. Thanks! Venue is ace too and I will be back for next year and for other events during the coming months! Absolutely brilliant!
- Saw Cinderella tonight. Amazing production. The ugly sisters stole the show. We sat in the front row and they really made us feel part of the show. Well written, great ad libs and funnies for the grown ups as well as the kids. One of the best pantos I have seen in years.
- Engaging, exciting, enjoyable a traditional pantomime! Our junior pupils filled the theatre with laughter, song and actions. We came back to school having watched a very professional show and not just the actors and dancers but the management were ready to greet and escort our group to and from the coaches and accommodated all our requests. 10 out of 10. Swallow Dell Primary School.
- Took my little boy to see his first pantomime today, we both had a fantastic time. The production was excellent, very funny and enjoyable. Will be coming back next year for Dick Whittington.
- Absolutely brilliant panto! Better than some west end productions I've been to! Energetic from start to finish and the 12 days of Christmas at the end was a great way to get you in the Christmas spirit!! Well done.

**SALES AND MARKETING MONTAGE 2015-16**



Use of A-Frame vehicles around the borough to publicise the pantomime production 'Cinderella' and the 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' film release.



Promotional presence at local community events in the borough including the annual Play Day in Stanborough Park.



Large advertising banner in the main atrium at the Howard Centre in Welwyn Garden City and CWE's brand awareness information.