


Report of	Chief Operating Officer	Author	Ann Hedges
Title	Mercury Theatre Redevelopment		 282202
Wards affected	Castle		

This report requests delegated authority of funding from the Arts Council to enable the development of the bid for Stage Two money from the Arts Council for the redevelopment of the Mercury

1. Decision(s) Required

- 1.1 To delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Regeneration to spend the Stage One funding to enable the Stage Two bid to be submitted in the appropriate time scale.

2. Reasons for Decision(s)

- 2.1 We have been successful in obtaining Stage One funding of £478,730 from the Arts Council to enable us to make a detailed bid for additional funding of £3.5m from the Arts Council for a redevelopment of the Mercury.
- 2.2 The total cost of the redevelopment is £9m and is also supported by a direct contribution of £1m by Colchester Council and £1m from Essex County Council. The Mercury has a fund raising target of £1.8m.
- 2.3 At this point Arts Council have awarded £478,730k of funding to enable a detailed bid for the next stage of funding.
- 2.4 Colchester Council is the project owner as the building is owned by the Council and the Stage One funding will be given to us.
- 2.5 Delegating the spend of the Stage One money will allow the project to move forward to the required time scales

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 Not to delegate the authority to spend which could put a higher risk around time scales as the stage two bid has to be submitted within eighteen months of notification of Stage One money

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 The Mercury Theatre has an excellent reputation and is an important organisation for Colchester providing a diverse programme including drama, dance, music, and family theatre.

- 4.2 The Mercury has occupied its current site since 1972 during which time it has developed a loyal core audience. The Theatre offers a thriving programme of professional and community productions plus an extensive range of learning and participation activities. While there have been some minor improvements to the building and essential repairs, there has been no significant investment in the infrastructure for over 40 years. Activities have now outgrown the physical environment.
- 4.3 The Mercury is part of our diverse cultural offer in Colchester, supporting tourism. It is an important regional venue for performing arts, drawing audiences from across the region. The Theatre's turnover in 2014/15 was in excess of £3.5m with audiences of over 100,000 a year. Data indicates that the Mercury generates almost £3m of additional spend from visitors to the locality, making it an important player in the local economy.
- 4.4 The Mercury is more than a theatre with a major learning and participation programme. This includes youth theatre groups, after school workshops, performance and technical summer schools and tours into schools across the County. A thriving work placement and work experience programme engages students from a range of educational organisations.
- 4.5 The development of the Mercury will enable all its activities to be expanded and improved. It will also allow further development of income opportunities.

5. Proposals

- 5.1 This paper requests the delegation to spend the Stage One money from the Arts Council to enable a full bid to be produced for an ambitious and much needed redevelopment of the theatre.

6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 The redevelopment of the Mercury Theatre supports a number of areas in the Strategic Plan:
- Enhance the diverse retail and leisure mix
 - Make more of Colchester's great heritage and culture
 - Promote Colchester to attract further inward investment
 - Promote Colchester's heritage and wide ranging tourism attractions to enhance our reputation as a destination

7. Consultation

- 7.1 There will be significant public consultation as part of the development of the Stage Two bid

8. Publicity Considerations

- 8.1 Some publicity has already been received for the agreement to the funding from the Arts Council. A communications plan will be developed as part of the work in Stage One
- 8.2 When Stage Two funding is received then further publicity around the scheme will be appropriate.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 The Arts Council Stage One finding will be given to Colchester Council. This is a sum of £478,730 and will be ring-fenced for the development of the Stage Two bid.

10. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

10.1 The Stage Two bid will have an Equality Impact Assessment as part of the submission

11. Community Safety Implications

11.1 N/A

12. Health and Safety Implications

12.1 N/A

13. Risk Management Implications

13.1 The Stage One funding needs to be used appropriately to ensure the Stage Two bid is made in the available time scale.