

Scrutiny committee



Report of head of waste, leisure, parks and environmental health

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Performance review of The Beacon, Wantage

Recommendation

Scrutiny committee is asked to review The Beacon's performance against targets (2016-2017)

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to update scrutiny committee on the actions taken in response to its recommendations from September 2016, to consider progress made towards The Beacon's 2017/18 targets and for the committee to make further performance improvement suggestions to the cabinet member for leisure.

Strategic objectives

2. The provision of The Beacon contributes towards achieving the Vale Council's strategic objective "sustainable communities and well-being" and the corporate priority of "expanding the range and quality of activities at The Beacon, Wantage". It also contributes towards achieving the strategic objective of "running an efficient council".

Background

3. The vision for The Beacon is that it will be seen as the heart of the community. It is a facility offering opportunities for residents to enjoy celebrations, performances, business use and a thriving coffee shop.

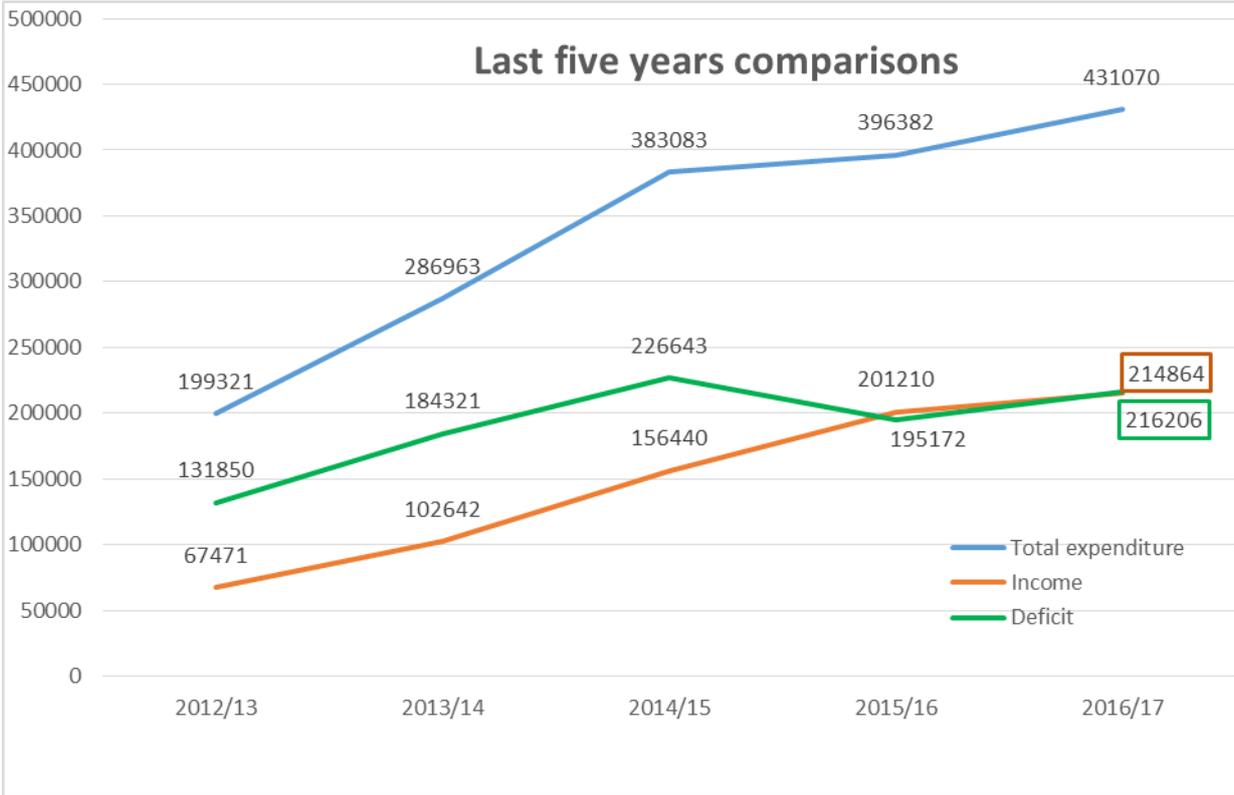
4. The Beacon business case sets out the key objectives for the facility which we are reporting against as they make up our key performance indicators.

The key performance indicators for 2016/17 are:

- increase in revenue and a reduction in the overall operating deficit
- increase in occupancy with more people using the venue more often
- attract new audiences and users
- improve the customer experience to ensure repeat business
- raise awareness of the facility and improve communication

Increase in revenue and in the overall operating deficit.

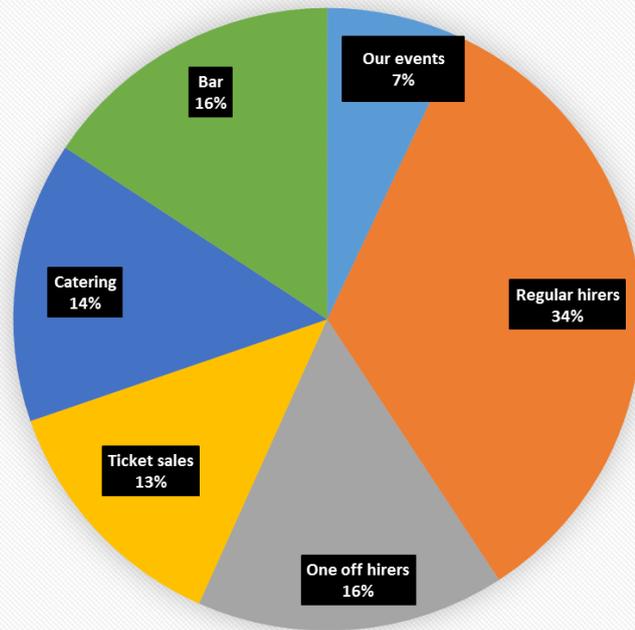
5. The income increased from £201,210 in 2015/16 to £214,864 in 2016/17. There was also an increase in expenditure. This was primarily as a result of booking higher profile performers which in turn created the increase in income. Overall there was a slight increase in the operating deficit.



In 2016/17 The Beacon exceeded its income target for the fourth successive year. Whilst the expenditure is higher than initially predicted the team are continually looking at ways to reduce expenditure and confident that the measures implemented will help to reduce the operational deficit going forward.

This graph shows how the income is broken down and demonstrates that our regular hirers are still our main source of income

Where our income comes from



■ Our events ■ Regular hirers ■ One off hirers ■ Ticket sales ■ Catering ■ Bar

Increase in occupancy

- The total average occupancy for Saturday and Sunday is 336 hours per week. To calculate the total occupancy for the year, multiply 336 by 52 weeks, which is 16,464.
- The industry standard for this type of facility is around 40 per cent occupancy, which equates to 6585 hours per year, or just under 550 hours a month. Our occupancy has more than doubled in the last five years and is now at 38 per cent. Our aim is to reach the industry standard of 40 per cent by 2020.
- When considering the number of hours that the facility is occupied progress is being made towards reducing the operational deficit. In 2012/13 it cost the council £50.86 for every hour the building was occupied and by 2016/17 this cost had fallen to £34.38 representing a significant improvement in value for money.

Year	Net financial position £	Total hours of occupancy	Percentage of bookable hours	Average cost per occupied hour £
2012/13	-131,850	2589	16	50.86
2013/14	-184,317	4064	25	45.30
2014/15	-226,644	5070	31	44.65
2015/16	-195,172	6060	35	32.21
2016/17	-216,205	6270	38	34.38

Attract new audiences and users

9. During the year 2016/17 The Beacon has gained four new regular hirers and attracted new audiences by introducing a more varied programme.
10. We have introduced National Theatre live, which has had some very successful events, including Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead and Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf.
11. The audience with Paul Merson event was a sell-out and 95 per cent of attendees were new to the Beacon.
12. We have attracted acts, such as Larry Lamb, Ian Siegal and Cara Dillon and as the reputation continues to grow the plan is to continue to secure acts that help to attract new audiences. Over the next few months we have live shows from comedians Rich Hall and Phill Jupitus, and we have an audience with footballing legend Ray Parlour next spring.

Improve the customer experience to ensure repeat business

13. Customer service remains a top priority for The Beacon and the staff are regularly complimented for their excellent friendly and efficient service.
14. We have also upgraded the building with improvements to the bar area. This included a new wooden floor, new furniture, improvements to the lighting and an audio loop installed throughout the building.
15. In the coffee shop a display screen has been installed, the glass cabinet removed to the foyer and a range of sandwiches and salads introduced to complement the cakes and snacks previously available.
16. We have also introduced an online booking system which has made purchasing tickets much easier and more accessible. This has modernised the business with advanced ticket sales increasing there is a greater certainty for the business. The system allows us to capture more information on our customer that has helped to tailor marketing activities to encourage repeat business.

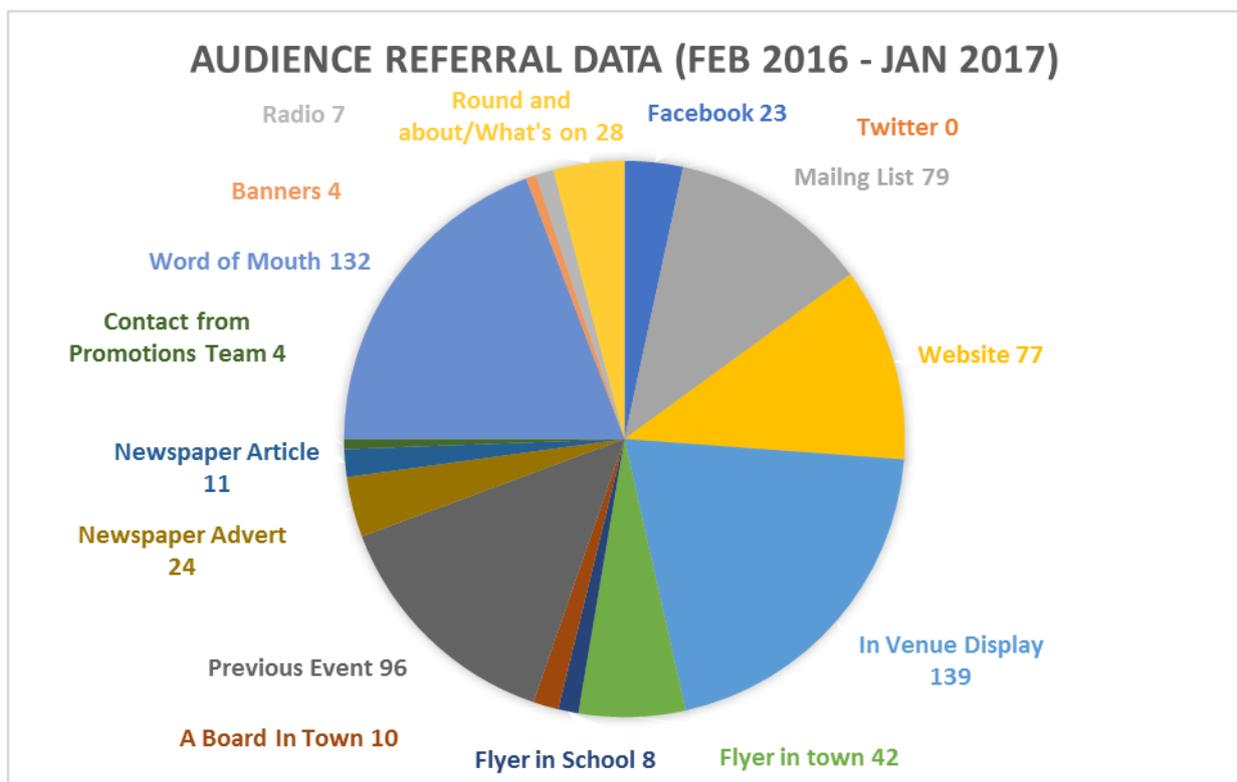
Raise awareness of the facility and improve communication

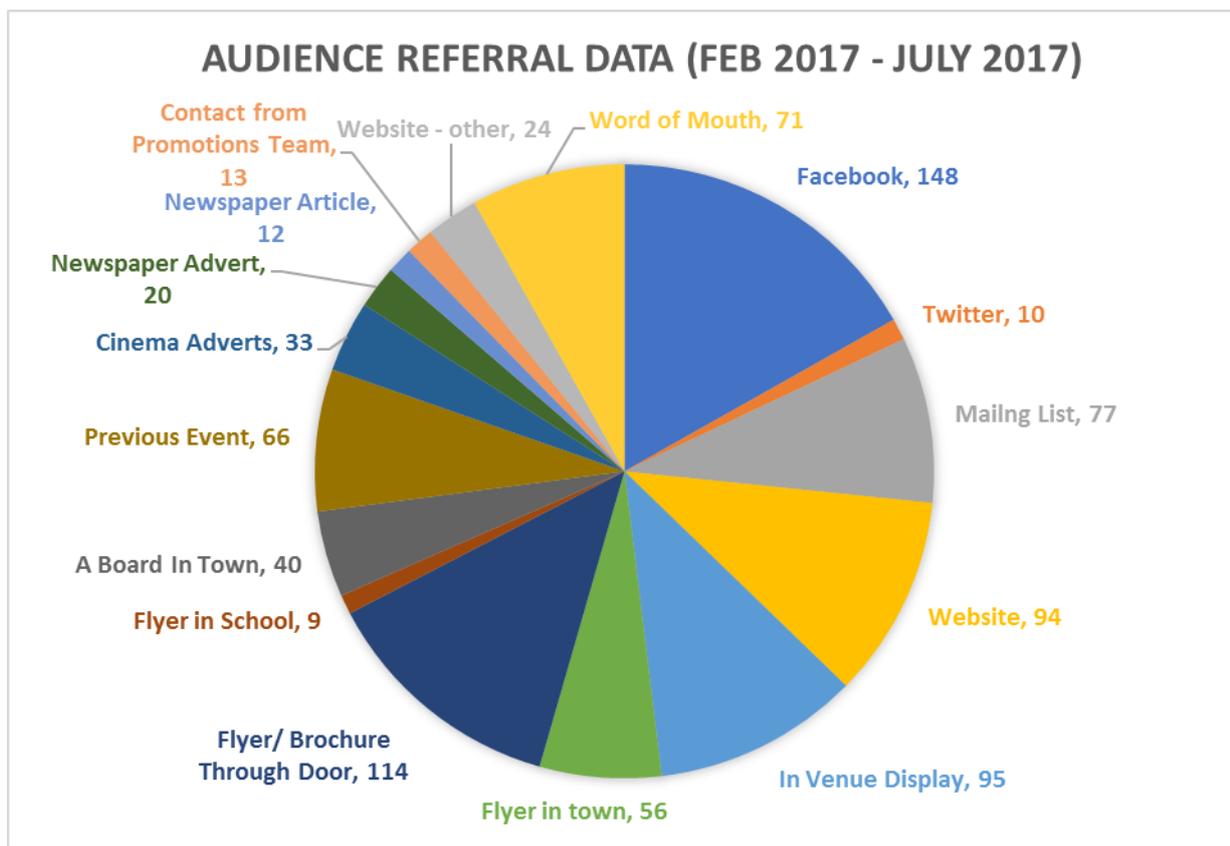
17. We have continued to raise our profile through social media and our online presence and this has had a positive impact on ticket sales

Online Audience growth (April 2016 – March 2017):

- Mailing list: 644 up to 904 (up 40 per cent)
- Facebook: 814 up to 1195 (up 47 per cent)
- Twitter 468 up to 683 (up 46 per cent)

The graphs below show a changing pattern to how customers learn of the activities and events taking place at The Beacon with more referrals from social media platforms.





18. In September 2016, the Committee recommended the Cabinet member for leisure

- To implement a detailed performance plan for The Beacon and, if possible, include this, or reference to it, in the forthcoming leisure provision strategy.
- That future key performance indicators should not be based solely on reducing the operational deficit but should also measure customer and staff satisfaction
- That next year's performance review should include not only positive comments received from new and returning customers but also negative comments, complaints and lessons learned.

Beacon performance plan

19. The Beacon now has a business performance plan which sets out the future direction of the facility and gives the team focus. This document has been developed with input from the Beacon board which includes the head of corporate strategy, head of finance and cabinet member for leisure.
20. The Beacon performance plan includes an action plan with individual targets for each of the KPIs. A progress report on these targets can be seen in appendix A
21. These targets include not only attendance figures and income targets but also look at customer and staff satisfaction, targeting new audiences, increasing the secondary spend and a greater involvement in the community and local events

Customer satisfaction survey

22. We have a target that states that compliments will make up at least 80 per cent of the comments received.

97 comments have been received on comments cards, via Facebook and in person since September 2016

- 87 compliments - 89.6 per cent
- 5 complaints - 5.2 per cent
- 5 suggestions - 5.2 per cent

23. We are setting up a new system through our online booking system, Ticketsource. This will generate emails to all attendees after a performance so that data is gathered whilst the experience is still fresh in people's memories rather than waiting and doing one annual survey.

24. We also have cards on reception and in the coffee shop where customers can leave their comments and suggestions.

Below are some of the comments, suggestions and complaints we have received since September 2016

- Venue and staff rated as excellent - Amazing friendly highly recommended
- Some low carb and sugar snacks would be nice
- Issue around parking for NT Live due to KA parent evening
- Fantastic venue, friendly staff and a fabulous place to go
- Staff and venue both rated excellent, but commented on Monkey Mayhem session being quite expensive
- Needed more bar staff for the amount of people at the venue. Bigger selection of drinks needed too"
- What an amazing night we all totally enjoyed it. The guests were blown away by the set up and layout, food, drink, disco and of course the waiters. I have to say your team were fantastic from start to finish, nothing was a problem
- It is unnecessarily warm in the coffee shop
- The most friendly staff I have ever experienced
- Fantastic evening just a shame on arrival at 8:00pm ... there were no cold beers left in the fridges!
- Thank you so much for a fab facility with fab staff.
- Posted on Twitter during the Ian Siegal event – "... they're ain't no better show anywhere on the globe tonight - bring on the 2nd half"

Lessons learned

25. The team are constantly looking to improve the service offered to customers and streamline the way they work on a daily basis. From comments we have received, and as a result of situations that have arisen, the following areas have been included in the lessons learned log.

- be aware of other events locally that may impact on the car park, for example King Alfred's School parent's evenings. Advise our customers that the car park will be busy and recommend alternative places to park
- have an additional fridge in the bar for ice creams during children's events to support the target of increased secondary spend

- the importance of the marketing post and the need for staff to communicate when they are covering other work areas to avoid duplication or omission
- outreach community events need a hook to get people to sign up to the mailing list, such as free tickets or a prize draw
- consider keeping the bar open after events as well as before and during, where appropriate
- healthy food options and savoury food to be available in the coffee shop
- explore different suppliers and do more research on what will sell well for lunches, reduce the choice and quantity ordered to get a better return
- more bar staff and a wider selection of drinks was requested but this is not practical because of limited space and the bar is not open every day so more stock may lead to wastage. Pre-ordering of interval drinks is a way of reducing queues at busy times
- increasing the number of beers in the fridge by removing some soft drinks for certain types of events, eg Paul Merson, and utilising the food fridge in the kitchen to stock additional cold beers
- consider opening the coffee shop when events are on upstairs, if appropriate

Conclusion

26. The committee is asked to note the update on performance at The Beacon since 2016, and make any further suggestions to the cabinet member for leisure