

## **URGENT DECISION**

of Councillor Fox and Councillor Taylor, Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Personnel Committee, in consultation with the Town Clerk.

### **Blakehay Second Technician**

Currently we have no resilience in our theatre team to be able to provide Technical provision for performances expected at the theatre to be able to hit the set income targets. The council has set the new financial income targets (with tech provision needed) for the theatre of 50 x Main House performance Hires, 24 x Live Show performances and 5 x Bar Events = 79 Performances over the year. Unfortunately these targets were adopted by council without the extra tech provision asked for in order to be able to hit these targets.

The Blakehay used to have two reliable casual technicians but they have both recently left for permanent positions.

The theatre tech industry has been decimated over the past couple of years as theatre technicians were forced to leave the industry to survive during the pandemic, unfortunately this has meant that a large amount of these have not returned as they have found better, alternative employment. However, there has been a skills shortage in the industry for close to twenty years, and that's why the vast majority of techs' have gone freelance, because there is just so much work out there for them. To employ reliable, constantly available casual technicians in the current climate (which has been going on for the past two decades) is virtually impossible and is a nationwide issue within the industry.

The shows we have in now are of a bigger production value, mainly because the technical resources of the venue have drastically improved over the years through kind donations. Shows will regularly have sound, AV and lighting requirements. A build up to a show includes multiple emails, site visits, at least a four hour rigging, focusing and plotting schedule on the day they arrive. For smaller productions, that's close to ten hours before an audience member walks into the building. Then you have the lighting, sound and AV operation, that is a 'two man' job.

Then they get out, which involves derigging sound and lighting. Once they are out the next day or a couple of days after, we reset. This can take (depending on the show) an entire day. Sally has known a reset of the venue to take 3 days in the past on the bigger shows. Then we start again. It's constant.

Currently we have a technician on a 30 hour per week contract and 12 hours per week provision for tech casuals = 42 hours per week, however you take out meetings, annual leave etc = a total tech provision of 1,346 hours per year – at an average of 21 hours tech provision per performance = 64 performances in total for the year

At present we have 64 performances this year either booked or provisional at the moment. If we close the books now on this year we will have a shortfall in income of approx.. £7,281.25. So we could currently only take bookings this year if the current provisional bookings cancel, and we replace like for like bookings.

Currently if anything happens and more tech time is needed (maintenance throughout the year, re-setting the theatre after a show, someone asks for an operating tech, hires pay for a set up or take down day) we do not have technician capacity to be able to deal with this. Casual techs are okay and we have been working on this basis over the last year, however the issue is availability, as techs are in short supply in the industry they will go where the money is, which may mean cancelling shows if we cannot find tech provision needed. We have been fortunate over the last year, that we have had a reliable casual technician that has been able to deliver the performances, however he is now a full time contracted technician at the Playhouse (who are also seeking technicians).

Contracted tech is great as we would know the reliability, however at 12 hours contract, we lose a lot of practical time to annual leave and meetings etc which would mean that the true 12 hours per week (624 per year) would practically fall to 534 hours, leaving a bigger shortfall and not being able to provide provision for the current 64 performances.

This matter is urgent because the new financial year has started. To have the resources and staff capacity to be able to hit our current income targets and to guarantee that we can deliver this, a second tech at 25 hours contracted per week would be the only way to do this + a backup of casual techs to be able to have the provision of a lighting, sound and AV tech (as paid for by the hirer) as needed. This post is graded at JG4 scp7 £22,369 pro rata. The total cost including oncosts for pension, NI and provision for a 2023-24 pay award is £20,736.67. Due to the departure of two casual technicians there is budget available to cover this cost in full.

Even with this, it will be very tight to be able to deliver the service that people pay for, but will hopefully mean that the theatre will be able to hit its income targets this year and not have to turn away bookings due to staff capacity.

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## DECISION

Under the Town Council's Scheme of Delegation paragraph 2 "Chairman's Action" we as Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Personnel Committee in consultation with the Town Clerk **AGREE** to the appointment of a second Blakehay Technician, initially on a fixed term 12 month contract. The post to be graded JG4 scp7 (£22,369 pro rata)

Signed .....**P Fox**..... (Chairman)

Signed .....**T Taylor**.....(Vice-Chairman)

Signed .....**M L Nicholson**.....(Town Clerk)

Date.....11 April 2023.....