

Written evidence submitted by Blackheath Halls

Blackheath Halls details of Covid-19 situation

Blackheath Halls is a thriving multi-arts venue in South East London and a wholly owned subsidiary of Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance.

Blackheath Halls reopened in November 2018 after a major £3 million refurbishment which included a £0.5million development grant from Arts Council England. Since then we have presented a wide-ranging programme at 196 events to an audience of 24,632 including a Diwali themed festival, a series of classical concerts 'Blackheath Presents' & comedians including Romesh Ranganathan.

Blackheath Halls community engagement projects in musical genres as various as gospel, classical, musical theatre & opera are successful & popular. In the past year 1123 participants have joined 223 rehearsal, taster & development sessions performing to an audience of 4185 at 18 concerts.

At the heart of this community work is the flagship project, Blackheath Halls Opera, an outstanding intergenerational community project running since 2007 with thousands of people from the local community aged from 8 to 85 participating, including teenagers with special needs. The 2019 project has been shortlisted for an International Opera Award for its education and outreach work.

Blackheath Halls runs Royal Greenwich and Blackheath Halls Youth Choir in collaboration with Royal Greenwich Music Hub, a high-level classical choir for sixty 8 -15-year olds selected by teachers as having a particular aptitude for music.

Blackheath Halls has been closed since Tuesday 17 March. As an organisation with no core funding, Blackheath Halls is financially dependent upon running events in the building. In the first month alone, 25 ticketed own promotions, community engagement, Trinity Laban and hirers performances were cancelled, plus workshops and private hires including London Philharmonic Orchestra and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra rehearsals. We have contacted ticket buyers to offer refunds and are returning hirers balances. We have lost all bar income from cancelled events, as well as seeing a decrease before closure, when many audience members took the decision not to attend performances.

In addition to ongoing core costs, we have incurred expenditure for which there is now no associated income, including a proportion of fees for artists cancelled at short notice, and the Director and Musical Director of Blackheath Halls community opera, which has now been cancelled.

Our current income is from generous individuals waiving ticket refunds or donating, hire fees that would have been payable by Trinity Laban for student use of the building (which is being honoured), and a small amount from

Lewisham Council towards our community engagement programme, which we believe is secure.

The uncertainty around the length of time social distancing will be in place means that we are also seeing many hirers and artists who were provisionally booked for later in the year understandably not want to confirm dates, and therefore not being able to put tickets on sale, or invoice hirers for hire fees, making our income look vulnerable for the immediate future.

We have been told our insurance does not cover us for business interruption due to Covid-19.

Reserves are maintained at a level that enables Blackheath Halls to manage financial risk and short-term income volatility and to ensure that financial commitments can be met as they fall due. There was a Nil balance on the Restricted Reserves at the start of our 2019-20 financial year (August 2019) as previous capital donations received had been spent on the 2018 refurbishment. The Unrestricted Reserves balance was £2,028,897, but of this only £131,788 relates to current assets, with the remainder predominantly fixed assets (principally the estate). Of the current assets £120,897 was held in cash and the remainder bar stock and debtors.

The current Covid-19 crisis is beyond the level of short-term volatility that could have reasonably been anticipated, with the unprecedented closure of the building for an extended period. We expect our unrestricted cash reserves to be spent – and exceeded – this year, should the building be unable to re-open for income generating activities.