



Wyre Council

Length of assignment: 8 months

Service Area: Arts and Leisure

APSE Associate: Julia Robinson

Post: Venue Manager

Wyre Council approached APSE when they required an interim. The role was to act as Venue Manager to oversee the day to day management of the Marine Hall and Thornton Little Theatre during an organisational review and work on their key strategic objective to improve financial performance. They needed a skilled manager who has in-depth operational knowledge but could also work on the strategic development of the venues and make recommendations about future programming.

Objectives

- Responsible for the day to day management of the Marine Hall and Thornton Little Theatre during an organisational review, and ensure resources are allocated efficiently and effectively.
- To assist with the key strategic objective to improve financial performance in order to reduce subsidy for the council tax payer.
- Implementation of recommendations made in a recent audit report and review day to day operational processes and procedures to identify efficient practices of working and income generation opportunities.

Outputs

- Financial performance improved due to hire charges being streamlined, moving from hourly rates charged for various event services, to package/session rates, thus making the process easier for customers and more cost effective for the Council.
- A major review of the bars and catering operations, involving a complete reorganisation of the bar service and the introduction of an independent stock-taker to ensure financial management.
- A more robust cleaning schedule that improving the standard of housekeeping and created a cleaner and more attractive venue.

Benefits

- Reviewing security and cash handling reduced risk to council and the service became more customer focussed, cost efficient and streamlined resulting in improved customer satisfaction and enhanced financial management and performance.
- Informed decisions could be made about hire charges and programming as budgets with clear and realistic income and expenditure targets were set up and accurate costing for events identified.
- Increased staff participation within the decision making process boosted staff morale who were keen to move forward and be part of the new improved and developing service.

Business as Usual

- The newly appointed General Manager acquired a more efficient and successful service and the capacity of the team increased due to training initiated by the APSE Interim.
- Changes and improvements to the operational process recommended by the interim manager taken forward by the new team.
- Communication improved through the introduction of team meetings and one to one discussions with employees, as well as improved documentation for events.

Project Summary

Julia was responsible for managing staffing issues and assisting with the recruitment and team restructure as part of that review. She was required to assist with the implementation of recommendations made in a recent audit report and review day to day operational processes and procedures to identify more efficient practices of working and methods of income generation.

Julia was able to allocate resources to events efficiently and effectively, and worked on the introduction of pre and post event budget processes as well as advise on the strategic development of the venues. Recommendations about future programming were made and a base budget line for future years was agreed. New hire charges and other income/ expenditure were also approved.

During the three month period that the APSE Interim was at Wyre, the Theatre was able to maintain and improve its service to the public, despite reducing the numbers of staff and despite the team going through a major

organisational restructure, involving several redundancies. Communication was improved through the introduction of team meetings and one to one discussions with employees, as well as improved documentation for events. Accurate costs of events were identified so that decisions could be made about hire charges and programming. Staff was involved in this process so they understood the reasons behind decisions and changes made.

A more robust cleaning schedule was introduced, improving the standard of housekeeping at the venue. A major review of the bars and catering operation was carried out and security and cash handling was also revised and improved to minimise risks to the authority. This involved a complete reorganisation of the bar service and the introduction of an independent stock-taker, thus resulting in a more streamlined and cost effective service. Hire charges were also streamlined, moving from hourly rates charged for various event services, to package/session rates, thus making the process easier for customers and more cost effective for the Council.

A new management team was put in place whom Julia supported by assisting with the strategic development of the venues, making recommendations about future programming and assisting with the budget setting process for future years including a review of hire charges and other income/ expenditure.

Before the Interim left in January, she assisted with induction and handover to the new General Manager who gained an improved service and a more motivated, skilled and enthusiastic Operational Team. All new posts had been filled, budgets had been agreed for the following financial year allowing the new General Manager time to focus on developing a new identity and vision for the venues including a new programme.

Management at Wyre Council were extremely pleased with the work that Julia had carried out and subsequently asked her to return in June 2012 to provide some additional temporary support during the further organisational change as an APSE interim manager.