

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Theatre

**Annual General Meeting held on 20 March 2024 (2pm) in Room C, 1
Parliament Street, London, SW1A 2JR.**

Present: Giles Watling MP (Chair)
Kevin Brennan MP
Baroness Christine Blower
Barbara Keeley MP
Kerry McCarthy MP
Stephen Metcalfe MP

In Attendance: Hannah Essex (Joint CEO, Society of London Theatre (SOLT) & UK Theatre)
Jon Gilchrist (Co-President, UK Theatre)
Patrick Gracey (Chair of SOLT & UK Theatre Policy, Research & Advocacy Committee)
Lisa Cunningham (SOLT & UK Theatre, Director of Policy, Research and Advocacy)
Susan Swabey (SOLT & UK Theatre, Governance and Compliance Manager)
Colin Campbell (Parliamentary Assistant to Giles Watling MP)

1	<p>Welcome</p> <p>Giles Watling MP welcomed members of APPG for Theatre and representatives of the Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre (SOLT & UK Theatre) to the meeting.</p> <p>He declared that the requisite quorum of five members of the APPG from across both houses was present.</p>
2	<p>Election of Officers</p> <p>On a show of hands, the following appointments were made for the following year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chair: Giles Watling MP - Vice Chair: Kerry McCarthy MP - Vice-Chair: Andrew Lewer MBE MP - Vice-Chair: Barbara Keeley MP <p>It was noted that the APPG currently consisted of 36 members from across both houses.</p>
3	<p>Approval of Income and Expenditure Statement</p>

	The income and expenditure statement for the APPG for Theatre (2023-24) was approved.
4	Declaration of Benefits in Kind The declaration of benefits in kind for the APPG for Theatre 2024-25 was approved.
5	Approval of Annual Report The annual report for the APPG for Theatre 2023-24 was approved.
6	<p>The Power of Theatre: The Case for Investment</p> <p>SOLT & UK Theatre showed a short video setting out key facts around the economic, social and cultural benefits of theatre. It was noted that only 25% of young people engaged in the theatre outside school, and concerns were expressed at the decline in emphasis on performing arts within schools due to a concentration on other priorities in the national curriculum. It was suggested that engagement with the Department of Education would be useful.</p> <p>Hannah Essex, Joint CEO of SOLT & UK Theatre, addressed the APPG and made the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a strong link between education and theatre. - Theatre is a world-leading sector for the country. - Theatre benefits the individual (well-being, cultural enrichment and employment), communities (improved high streets and economic growth) and the entire country (economic growth, foreign investment). - We all felt the loss of theatre during the pandemic. - The theatre sector employs over 200k people in a wide range of jobs, not just actors and creatives, but set builders, technicians etc. - For every £1 spent on a theatre ticket, an additional £1.40 is generated in local economies. - The theatre sector is delighted by the announcement to make the higher rate of Theatre Tax Relief (TTR) permanent. This is a “game-changer” for the sector, as theatres and producers are now able to plan for the long term. - Theatres deliver a lot of social good which is often hidden. They run events for older people, young people and people with dementia. These improve access and provide opportunities to inspire the future workforce. <p>Patrick Gracey, Board Member of SOLT and Chair of the SOLT & UK Theatre Policy, Research and Advocacy Committee addressed the APPG and made the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The retention of the higher rate of TTR has unlocked future planning for the sector. - However, challenges of ongoing costs still remain. Some large shows employ 150 people a night, theatres have been impacted by high

inflation costs, energy prices and wage pressures like the rest of the economy, but average ticket prices have fallen since 2019.

- Some touring shows are now skipping the mid-scale theatres, as the figures don't add up.
- There is increasing pressure on recruiting and retaining skilled workers and filling backstage roles, as theatres compete with the wider employment market, particularly in the screen sector.
- Investment in theatre leads to greater employment.

Jon Gilchrist, Co-President of UK Theatre addressed the APPG and made the following points:

- The news on TTR is great but funding is still critical, against the backdrop of arts council and local authority cuts to arts spending. In some areas, local authority spending on culture is zero and venues are closing.
- We support calls for a sustainable and fair funding settlement to allow councils to invest in essential cultural services.
- Theatres are iconic buildings in our local environments and help to keep cities alive, but many need significant investment to bring them up to modern standards.
- Invest needs to be made in order to make our buildings greener and to address climate change challenges.
- The SOLT & UK Theatre 'Theatre for Every Child' campaign will help more children access the work of theatre. The scheme is likely to cost £43 per child, which would cover the cost of the ticket and transport to the theatre.
- This is essential to ensure we have the audiences, creative talent and theatre workforce of the future.
- Children from low income families are missing out. Access to the theatre should not just be for the well-off.
- 42% of parents report that there are fewer school trips than previously.

Giles Watling MP thanked the SOLT & UK Theatre team for their presentation, saying that the nation ignores performing art at its peril. He noted that the UK's theatre is a great export and showcases to the world 'who we are'. He invited members of the APPG to comment on what they had heard, and the following points were made:

- It was noted that in some productions live musicians have been replaced by recorded music, due to cost constraints.
- Members are aware of a number of venues that had been forced to close. In some cases, this was due to a lack of investment in the infrastructure of the building. The position had worsened during the pandemic, when reserves were depleted, leaving less capital to invest.
- Theatres are national assets, which needed to be funded.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greening initiatives, such as installing LED lighting, can be expensive with long payback periods. - Three quarters of theatres were struggling to find and retain talent. - The current structure of apprenticeship schemes is not flexible enough to suit the theatre industry, as most theatre projects are for periods shorter than the time requirement for apprentices. More flexible rules would enable theatres and producers to employ apprentices, not only in acting and creative roles, but across many disciplines from set building to marketing. - Whilst it was noted that a number of theatre groups brought performances into schools, a visit to a theatre brought the broader experience of seeing a show, navigating a theatre and learning theatre behaviour. - It was noted that Brexit had brought further challenges to the sector, particularly impacting touring companies, with new rules affecting visa requirements and the length of tours. Hannah Essex explained that SOLT/UKT had links with equivalent bodies in Europe and were working together to overcome some of these challenges. <p>Giles Watling MP thanked the members of the APPG for their participation and proposed that an event be held to present the life blood of the theatre to parliamentarians.</p> <p>Hannah Essex thanked Giles Watling MP and members of the APPG for hosting the meeting and said that SOLT & UK Theatre would be delighted to support such an event and to talk to parliamentarians about the theatre sector and the challenges it faces.</p>
7	Next Meeting – To be determined.