13th Meeting, 2006 (Session 2)

Wednesday 28 June 2006

The Committee will meet at 10.00 am in Committee Room 2.

1. **Current Petitions:** The Committee will further consider the following current petitions—

   **PE959** To ensure the continuation of Borderline Theatre Company's innovative touring and lifelong learning programme.

   **PE970** To prevent the closure of 7:84 Theatre Company.

The Committee will take evidence from Jim Tough, Deputy Chief Executive, Scottish Arts Council.

Jim Johnston
Clerk to the Committee
Tel: 0131 348 5186
James.Johnston@scottish.parliament.uk
The Committee will consider the following current petitions—

PE959 Petition by Eddie Jackson, on behalf of Borderline Theatre Company, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to act urgently to ensure the continuation of Borderline Theatre Company’s innovative touring and lifelong learning programme.

PE970 Petition by Chris Bartter, on behalf of 7:84 Theatre Company, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to act urgently to prevent the closure of 7:84 Theatre Company.
Public Petitions Committee – a template for public petitions

Should you wish to submit a public petition for consideration by the Public Petitions Committee please complete the template below. Please refer to the Guidance on submission of public petitions for advice on issues of admissibility before completing the template. You may also seek advice from the Clerk to the Committee whose contact details can be found at the end of this form.

Details of principal petitioner:
Please enter the name of person and organisation raising the petition, including a contact address where correspondence should be sent to, email address and phone number if available.

Eddie Jackson

Text of petition:
The petition should clearly state what action the petitioner wishes the Parliament to take in no more than 5 lines of text, e.g.
The petitioner requests that the Scottish Parliament considers and debates the implications of the proposed Agenda for Change legislation for Speech and Language Therapy Services and service users within the NHS.

Petition by Eddie Jackson, on behalf of Borderline Theatre Company, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to act urgently to ensure the continuation of Borderline Theatre Company’s innovative touring and lifelong learning programme.

Additional information:
Any additional information in relation to your petition, including reasons why the action requested is necessary, should not be included here. However, it may be appended to the petition and will be made available to the Public Petitions Committee prior to its consideration of your petition. Please note that you should limit the amount of any additional information which you may wish to provide in support of your petition to no more than 4 sides of A4.
Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition:
Before submitting a petition to the Parliament, petitioners are expected to have made an attempt to resolve their issues of concern by, for example, making representations to the Scottish Executive or seeking the assistance of locally elected representatives, such as councillors, MSPs and MPs. Please enter details of those approached below and append copies of relevant correspondence, which will be made available to the Public Petitions Committee prior to its consideration of your petition.

Borderline has made contact and had meetings with Scottish Arts Council representatives and has written letters to local MPs and MSPs.

Petitioners appearing before the Committee
The Convener of the Committee may invite petitioners to appear before the Public Petitions Committee to speak in support of their petition. Such an invitation will only be made if the Convener considers this would be useful in facilitating the Committee's consideration of the petition. It should be noted that due to the large volume of petitions it has to consider, the Committee is not able to invite all petitioners to appear before the Committee to speak in support of their petition.

Please indicate below whether you request to make a brief statement before the Committee when it comes to consider your petition.

I DO request to make a brief statement before the Committee  

I DO NOT request to make a brief statement before the Committee  

Signature of principal petitioner:
When satisfied that your petition meets all the criteria outlined in the Guidance on submission of public petitions, the principal petitioner should sign and date the form in the box below. Other signatures gathered should be appended to this form.

Signature 

Date  26 APRIL 2006  

Please note that any additional information, copies of relevant correspondence and additional signatures should be appended to this form and submitted to:

The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee,
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 5186  Fax: 0131 348 5088
e-mail: petitions@scottish.parliament.uk
Public Petitions Committee – a template for e-petitions

Should you wish to submit an e-petition allowing signatures to be gathered online on the Public Petitions Committee e-petitioner web pages please complete the template below. Before submitting your e-petition please consult the Guidance on submission of public petitions for advice on what is and is not admissible. You may also seek advice from the Clerk to the Committee whose contact details can be found at the end of this form.

### Details of principal petitioner:

Please enter the name of person and organisation raising the petition, including a contact address where correspondence should be sent to.

| Chris Bartter, Chair, 7:84 Theatre Company |

### Text of petition:

The petition should clearly state what action the petitioner wishes the Parliament to take in no more than 5 lines of text, e.g.

The petitioner requests that the Scottish Parliament considers and debates the implications of the proposed Agenda for Change legislation for Speech and Language Therapy Services and service users within the NHS

Petition by Chris Bartter, on behalf of 7:84 Theatre Company, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to act urgently to prevent the closure of 7:84 Theatre Company.

### Period for gathering signatures:

Please enter the closing date for gathering signatures on your petition, which we would usually recommend is a period of between 4-6 weeks

| Closing date: 31 May 2006 |
Additional information:

Please enter any other information relating to the issues raised in your e-petition, including the reasons why the action requested is necessary. The text entered in this field should not exceed 2 pages. However, you may wish to provide further sources/links to background information.

The petitioner hereby acknowledges and marks support for:

- the valuable contribution that this company has made and continues to make to Scottish culture;

- the unique role it plays in bringing political topics to the stage, encouraging debate, engaging communities and their elected representatives in political discourse through theatre across the country;

- the outreach work undertaken by the company that has enabled over 2300 people just in the last year to participate in producing their own work and has enabled participants, some of whom who have felt otherwise excluded by society, to get their own voice heard; and

- the opportunities presented by and support from this company for developing fresh talent in Scottish theatre, as demonstrated by the 7:84 Writers Summer School and readings.

Across Scotland, theatre companies that have enabled communities across the country to access the theatre for decades are threatened with imminent closure.

The Scottish Arts Council has decided that some will be allocated funding until March 2007, with possible access to ad hoc project funding from then on. However, 7:84 Theatre Company sees all funding cease in August and almost definite closure. With the current outlook, the company will not exist to be able to compete for ad hoc project funding in 2007.

With it will go the high profile work it has been famous and valued for, making political issues accessible and challenging through theatre which tours to remote and disadvantaged parts of Scotland. For decades it has been bringing people to the theatre that would otherwise not have the opportunity to go.

The outreach work with people across the community – largely with those whose voices are often excluded - will be lost as well. There are thousands of people who, without 7:84, would not have had such an opportunity to get their own voices heard or gain confidence through participation in theatre – over 2000 last year alone. In the future, others will not have this opportunity.

Although other companies will face funding uncertainties from March 2007, 7:84 is the only one that faces the cut in August. It has been dealt with in a different way to all other companies and it is not clear why.

Without urgent action, the closure of 7:84 will be inevitable. The demise of the company will leave a void not filled by any other in Scotland. Since it was established, it has had and continues to have a unique and vital role in Scottish life and our society will be the poorer without it.

Since the announcement, 7:84 has been inundated with messages of support. This petition has been set up to enable people across Scotland and beyond to demonstrate their support for 7:84 to be saved.
Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting an e-petition:

Before submitting a petition to the Parliament, petitioners are expected to have made an attempt to resolve their issues of concern, by for example, making representations to the Scottish Executive or seeking the assistance of locally elected representatives, such as councillors, MSPs and MSPs. Details of those approached should be entered.

There have been regular representations to and meetings sought with Scottish Arts Council over the course of the last few years.

There have been meetings and continued dialogue with Members of the Scottish Parliament.

Support for 7:84 has been demonstrated by Members in various Parliamentary motions.

A meeting has been sought with the Minister for Culture.

Comments to stimulate on-line discussion:

Please provide at least one comment to set the scene for an on-line discussion on the petition, not exceeding 10 lines of text.

Since the announcement that all funding is to be cut, 7:84 has been inundated with messages of support. This e-petition has been set up to allow people to get their comments heard in a public forum and will be presented to the Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament soon, with a call for the Scottish Executive and Scottish Arts Council to act immediately to save this valued company.

Thanks to all supporters for their efforts to save 7:84.

Petitioners appearing before the Committee

The Convener of the Committee may invite petitioners to appear before the Public Petitions Committee to speak in support of their petition. Such an invitation will only be made if the Convener considers this would be useful in facilitating the Committee’s consideration of the petition. It should be noted that due to the large volume of petitions it has to consider, the Committee is not able to invite all petitioners to appear before the Committee to speak in support of their petition.

Please indicate below if you do NOT wish to make a brief statement before the Committee when it comes to consider your petition.

I do NOT wish to make a brief statement before the Committee
Signature of principal petitioner:
When satisfied that your petition meets all the criteria outlined in the Guidance on submission of public petitions, the principal petitioner should sign and date the form in the box below. Other signatures gathered should be appended to this form.

Signature ........................................................................................................

Date ..............................................................................................................

For advice on the content and wording of your e-petition please contact:
The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 5186  Fax: 0131 348 5088
e-mail: petitions@scottish.parliament.uk

Note
Completed e-petition forms should also be sent to petitions@scottish.parliament.uk
7:84 Briefing Document for the Public petitions Committee
Meeting of 14 June 2006-06-06

Thank you for taking the time to consider this petition. Nearly 1,700 people from across the world have signed this e-petition. 7:84's grant will run out in August 2006

Background to the position of the company

Who are we?
7:84 is Scotland’s only political touring theatre company, dedicated for 33 years to bringing accessible theatre that entertains and politically energises to people across Scotland. Over the past three years we averaged 75 touring performances per year and 10 000 audience members per year. Praise for recent 7:84 tours includes:

'Full of black humour and sharp dialogue' Kirsty Wark (Guardian) on Borderland, Autumn 2005 tour

'There are hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens who would recognise this play, far more than any other produced in Scotland in recent months, as having something to do with them and the real-life dilemmas they face' – Joyce McMillan (Scotsman) on Freefall, Spring 2006 tour

Outreach
7:84's ground-breaking outreach projects work with some of the most marginalised and disenfranchised groups in Scotland to use theatre as a tool to express their views and voices in communities. Recent projects like Right Here Right Now and Unheard Voices brought young offenders and homeless people into the Scottish Parliament to perform to MSPs. Last year 7:84 ran 23 outreach projects with 3400 participants.

SAC actions
The Scottish Arts Council's recent Strategic Review labelled 7:84 as an 'audience focussed' company, and as such it no longer fell within their new funding remit, along with other notable touring theatre companies (Borderline, Theatre Babel), and some venues such as the Citizen's and Byre theatres.

Two points should be made as far as their actions were concerned;
1) The criteria for considering the funding applications was changed by the SAC, AFTER the submission of application forms. No opportunity was afforded the companies to revise their applications.
2) Two theatre companies, who were not core-funded, and as such had NOT applied for core-funding, were phoned up by SAC officials and offered funding without any plans or assessment of them.
Unique case
We know you have considered a similar petition from Borderline Theatre Company. However we do feel that, for all the similarities, there are unique features affecting 7:84 which did and do not apply to Borderline. Namely

1) Our grant runs out mid-August 2006 with no 'bridge' of funding to the new funding regime. Indeed our appeal to the SAC will not be heard until mid-August at the time our funding runs out! - Borderline has full funding until March 07, when all companies have been told they can apply for funding under the new criteria. Obviously this means we are threatened with not being in existence to apply for these funds.

2) Our 06/07 application was judged on the new Strategic Review Criteria, (applicable from March 07) a year ahead of everyone else - this is discriminatory and the basis of our appeal against the decision. It was also not the criteria that we were told would apply to the bid we put into the SAC for 06/07.

3) Unlike Borderline, there has been a change of artistic direction in the past 3 years with greater political engagement and improved assessments with no improvement in our SAC relationship. (The breakdown of the SAC assessments in the enclosed briefing shows the differences between those assessed by the SAC officer direct and those by other 'outside' assessors.)

4) Also unlike Borderline 7:84 has a different remit and objective. We are a national political touring theatre company. We aim to both tour and run outreach in parts of Scotland that do not traditionally get to see theatre. In this we have been very successful, attracting new audiences to drama across Scotland and from disadvantaged groups.

Appeals machinery
7:84 are appealing the decision through the SAC's appeals process and are awaiting a date for a hearing with the SAC Appeals Committee. This is a standing committee of the SAC, comprising of four Council members with an independent Chair, Solicitor Nicholas Whyte.

7:84 are appealing on two grounds: Firstly that the SAC failed to follow their published procedures when considering our application and secondly that the decision was wholly unreasonable.

Funding dilemma
7:84's funding runs out in mid-August 2006 and no 'wind-down' funds have been offered. The SAC Drama Officer states in her report on 7:84's application that the company has been on a year's notice and is therefore not entitled to any wind-down funds. However the company had never been informed of this and an application for funds covering 2007 – 2009 was accepted by the SAC.

The funding decision contravenes stated SAC aims to allocate at least six months wind-down funds to long-term core funded companies like 7:84. This has resulted in both
touring and outreach projects being aborted mid-way through their process. This is an unreasonable way to treat 7:84.

The company has been told it can apply for one-off project funds from April 2007 but with no money allocated to manage the transition, any application is hampered by a lack of staff and resources.

**Are we poor quality?**
7:84 have also been criticised for poor artistic quality through the SAC’s assessment process which uses both SAC staff and external advisers. Under the direction of Lorenzo Mele, the company’s Artistic Director, the company show assessments were as follows: 9 Good, 8 Competent and 2 Poor. Once the SAC’s Drama Officer own assessments are excluded, the breakdown is 9 Good and 7 Competent. External expert advisers, along with our 10 000 audience members, rate the company’s work more highly than the SAC drama officer.

**What can you do?**
It is hoped that you can put pressure on the SAC to reverse its decision and honour the large audience that wants to continue to see and be part of 7:84’s work.

The petition has gathered nearly 1700 signatures expressing their hope that the Scottish parliament can help 7:84 survive.

To do this we would like the PP committee to
1) write to the SAC urging a rethink on the funding of this important company, and
2) to write to the Minister for Culture to ask if there are ways in the new cultural structure she envisages that 7:84 can have its National identity and remit for touring political theatre, and/or work with disadvantaged groups recognised.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

For more information contact either:
Lorenzo Mele, Artistic Director on Lorenzo@784theatre.com or 07855 778 120
Or Chris Bartter, Chair, on chris.bartter@unison.org.uk or 07715 583 729