



THE BRUNTON

**THE BRUNTON THEATRE TRUST REPORT
For Audit and Governance Committee for the year ended 31 March 2025**

Charity No SC022422



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In January 2024, East Lothian Council made the decision that due to budget pressures it would reduce the annual payment to Brunton Theatre Trust (BTT) by £200,000 from 2024/25 onwards. BTT responded to this reduction by making plans to increase and diversify its funding streams from other sources and apply to Creative Scotland for additional funding.

1.2 Due to the change in venues and a dominant narrative that The Brunton was closed (even though this just referred to Brunton Hall) audience numbers also dropped below projected levels, and as the new venues did not have the same facilities as Brunton Hall, programming also suffered as BTT were not able to welcome large scale works in to the programme.

1.3 The decision by East Lothian Council to cut the annual payment was re-considered in February 2025 and a decision was made to reinstate the funding to the original amount for financial year 2025/26.

1.4 In October 2024 East Lothian Council made the decision to permanently close Brunton Hall, with a commitment to conduct a place-based project review in order to determine the most appropriate, sustainable and affordable future for the site. This clarity has allowed BTT to confirm their new venues as a long-term home for performance work, and to start researching what improvements can be made to improve these venues to provide a suitable, high-quality home for BTT's work.

1.5 The Aims of BTT are set out in the Declaration of Trust as follows:

“for the advancement of education in the fields of the performing arts and related cultural activities and for the promotion of social welfare of the public at large and in particular of the inhabitants of Musselburgh and of visitors thereto by the promotion of performances and displays of drama, music and similar arts suitable for presentation to the general public in appropriate halls, theatres and other premises in the UK and in particular in the Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh”.

1.6 The aim of the programme is to provide the highest quality drama, dance, music, theatre for children and young people, film and comedy nights for the enjoyment and enrichment of the communities that the theatre serves.

1.7 In addition to offering a high-quality programme of arts events for audiences to attend at the Theatre, BTT aim to provide opportunities for involvement and participation in the arts through education and outreach activities for all sections of the community including harder to reach groups.

1.8 Through the provision of a high-quality accessible programme of performances and participatory activities, BTT seeks to achieve the Aims as set out in the Trust Deed.



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1.9 The cost leasing Haddington Corn Exchange, the equipment required to support the performance programme and renting the other 2 venues remains a high cost to BTT. In addition programming and audiences remained low due to the change in the venues.

1.10 This unplanned situation has continued to impacted on BTT’s finances resulting in the use of reserves to enable their programme to continue.

1.11 Financial support from Creative Scotland during this period helped to support the performance programme and some of the infrastructure costs.

2. PROGRAMME OUTCOMES 2024/25

2.1 In 2024/25, BTT continued to deliver a strong and diverse programme across multiple sites. Although Council funding was reduced during this period, resulting in a necessary contraction of activity and a reduction in the overall number of performances and screenings, the programme nevertheless achieved significant positive outcomes.

2.2 Despite these financial constraints, BTT maintained its commitment to high-quality cultural provision and successfully delivered on outcomes.

2.3 The continued use of alternative venues due to the closure of Brunton Hall has impacted on the programme and resulted in a reduction in the number of performances and screenings, and audience attendance. The below details the attendance level per genre:

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Genre	Ticket Sales				
	Target No. Events	Actual No. Events	Target Attendance	Actual Attendance	% Attendance
Children’s	6	2	310	290	94%
Classical - Large	8	6	1300	586	45%
Classical - Small	12	14	1460	1042	71%
Comedy	8	4	950	631	66%
Cover / Tribute	23	14	3990	3248	81%
Dance	1	2	40	38	95%
Literature / Talk	1	1	200	228	114%
Music	6	7	1318	1141	87%
Panto	46	46	9230	5421	59%
Theatre	10	9	1200	931	78%
Film	34	50	2600	2846	109%
Hire Events		26	7368	6218	84%



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Youth Musical Theatre	14	12	2000	1668	83%
TOTAL	168	195	32266	24288	75%

3. Participatory Arts

3.1 In 2024/2025 the Brunton Performing Arts Network continued to flourish as a thriving programme of creative learning, offering an extensive range of drama, musical theatre and dance activity, delivered across the region. Participation remained strong throughout the year, with weekly classes demonstrating sustained demand for high-quality performing arts opportunities within our communities.

3.2 The network upheld its commitment to accessibility by keeping classes affordable and providing referral spaces, ensuring that young people facing financial or social barriers could still take part. Provision also included specialist dance and drama sessions for adults and young people with additional support needs, further enhancing the programmes inclusive reach.

3.3 This was an especially ambitious year for performance activity, with three fully staged Musical Youth Theatre productions. *School of Rock* brought together 76 young performers for a two-week intensive culminating in six live performances. This was followed by a staging of *The Addams Family* at Loretto Theatre with a cast of 31, and a lively production of *Grease* at Haddington Corn Exchange featuring 37 young performers.

3.4 The continued development of the network plays a key role in supporting BTT and East Lothian Councils priorities around expressive arts, health and wellbeing, and social inclusion.

3.5 Creative Scotland funding further enhances this impact by enabling more focused, collaborative work with Council Services, allowing us to design activity that meets the needs of specific groups.

3.6 In total 778 children and young people participated in the Brunton Performing Arts Network throughout 24/25.

Pantomime

3.7 In 2024 the Brunton worked in partnership with Glasgow-based theatre company Wonder Fools to present A Christmas Carol. This was presented at Haddington Corn Exchange and Loretto Theatre to critical acclaim, and the production has been nominated for Best Panto at the Critics Award for Theatre in Scotland showing the high-quality artistic output.

3.8 Attendance for our Schools performances was lower than anticipated which can be linked a range of factors such as being unable to provide a theatre experience in the new venues, and that schools have adapted to bringing work into schools rather than visiting a venue in order to reduce costs.



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3.9 Our Public audiences were also lower than expected, again due to the change of venues and the challenge around marketing.

4. THE FUTURE

4.1 2024-25 has been a challenging year due to the impact from the closure of Brunton Hall, and the difficulties raised by the new venue spaces being used.

4.2 BTT had a strong level of reserves which has enabled it to navigate the last two years, but the reserves are close to their minimum level and cannot be relied upon for future years – and in fact need to be rebuilt.

4.3 The key short-term aim of BTT over the coming months is the provision of its high quality programme of performing arts for the benefit of audiences and participants at a range of venues now that the permanent closure of Brunton Hall is known. This will require operating costs to be kept to a minimum and funds raised from additional sources to balance the lower levels of income able to be raised through box office sales.

4.4 BTT aims to continue to play a significant role in the provision of arts activities for the benefit of Council residents. This aim will be supported by ongoing monitoring to achieve income targets. Monitoring will also be undertaken on expenditure and performance to ensure that the programme delivers to the highest standard while achieving best value and reaches the widest possible audience.

4.5 Longer term aims for BTT will include the implementation of an income generation strategy, a review of the current artistic service provided for the residents of East Lothian, an improvement plan for the new venue spaces, and a development plan for a new venue in East Lothian in the future.

4.6 Brunton Theatre Trust has identified 4 key risk areas:

- **Reduction in Earned Income:**

Income generation is a principal risk factor for BTT and risks associated with raising sufficient income to deliver the organisational aims has been considered. To mitigate the loss of earned income, BTT has reduced its operating expenditure where possible.

- **Reduction in annual payment from East Lothian Council:**

This annual payment is crucial to the effective delivery of services on behalf of the Council for the residents of East Lothian and the reduction of £200,000 in 2024/25 had a significant impact on the delivery of the services provided. East Lothian Council have now reinstated this grant for 2025/26 onwards.

To mitigate the loss of income if a future cut is to be instated and to rebuild the reserves that have been used during this period of instability, BTT is preparing its income generation strategy and looking to raise funds from a variety of sources including Creative Scotland, Trusts and Foundations.



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- **Reduction in Programme:**

The reduction in the programme will impact on earned income levels and a corresponding saving on expenditure is required to be made.

The Corn Exchange offers only one performance space, which significantly limits BTT's income generation potential, as they are unable to run multiple events simultaneously as they could at the Brunton Hall. Using other venues to expand the programming, comes with additional venue hire and staff costs.

The reduction in programme would impact on the breadth of programme presented and the Brunton's role as a key receiving house in the Scottish cultural landscape.

BTT is committed to providing an accessible, entertaining yet thought provoking programme to deliver high quality artistic experiences for audiences and participants regardless of scale.

To mitigate this risk BTT will reduce its operating costs where possible and aim to source a high quality programme at a variety of scales.

- **Reduction in earned income from ticket sales and bars:**

Earned income is the largest percentage of BTT's income and a reduction in the ability to generate sufficient funds from ticket sales and bars would prove detrimental to the cultural aims of the organisation.

Haddington's smaller population relative to Musselburgh also contributes to lower audience numbers and reduced sales potential. This demographic shift further limits income generation, particularly when combined with the constraints of operating from a single space venue.

In order to mitigate losses during this period of crisis, BTT will reduce its operating costs where possible and apply for additional funds from other sources.

5. Finance

5.1 The Brunton Theatre Trust continues to operate in a challenging financial environment, however a number of financial mitigations were implemented for 2024/25 and beyond to offset the pressures.

5.2 Total income for 2024/25 was £866,532, down from £1,081,914 in 2023/24. This was largely driven by the £200,000 reduction in grant given by East Lothian Council to Brunton Theatre Trust. This £200,000 grant reduction has been reinstated for 2025/26.

5.3 Multi-year funding from Creative Scotland was also secured, with a commitment of £470,000 due to be received over the course of three financial years, starting in 2025/26 with funding of £130,000.



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5.4 Total Expenditure for the year amounted to £1,246,721, down from £1,381,640 in 2024/25. This reduction was due to lower Staff Costs through extended vacancies and a reduction in Buy-Ins, as well as a reduction in the Accommodation Charge from East Lothian Council to Brunton Theatre Trust. This was one of the in-year mitigations.

5.5 Overall, the Trust made a loss of £380,189 for the year 2024/25. This resulted in a reduction of the total available funds from £800,781 at the start of 2024/25 down to £420,592 by the close of the year.

5.6 All financial information related to financial year 2024/25 can be noted in the signed accounts: <https://www.thebrunton.co.uk/media/sy1lfc2/btt-annual-report-2024-25.pdf>

6. Conclusion

6.1 The aim of the Brunton Theatre Trust is to provide an accessible, engaging, and high-quality programme of live performance and creative learning for the community of East Lothian.

6.2 Following the closure of our main performance spaces in 2023, and the buildings mothballing in October 2024, the Trust has experienced many challenges including a reduction in audience attendance and a limitation in their programme ambitions.

6.3 However, the team have demonstrated their resilience and flexibility in the face of adversity, ensuring that the programme has continued to run whilst embedding clear improvement and development day by day.

6.4 It is crucial to BTT that it continues to work in partnership with East Lothian Council and receives support to deliver arts services on behalf of the Council for East Lothian residents.