

23 February 2023

Brian Stanley, T.D.
Committee of Public Accounts
Leinster House
Dublin 2

Ref: S1192 PAC33

Dear Deputy Stanley

Thank you for your letter of the 10th of February seeking further information regarding *Toy Show the Musical*.

Number of shows & future plans

On Saturday the 17th of December RTÉ cancelled five shows (two on that day and three on Sunday 18th) because of rapid onset illness in the cast. We apologised sincerely for the inconvenience the cancellations caused. On Monday the 19th we announced we would be reducing the number of shows from three performances a day to two on Wednesday 21st and Thursday 22nd, cancelling the 12.30 show on Wednesday and the 7.30pm show on Thursday. This reduced the number of scheduled shows at the time from **34** to **27**.

RTÉ outlined at a recent session of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media that we are currently considering our options on how we might remount the show based on lessons we have learned from our experience in 2022. We are continuing to consult with a range of people from theatre and beyond on different options and have not yet made any decisions.

Considerations around the future staging/re-imagining of the show are ongoing and we are therefore not in a position to definitively state our plans with regard to 2023.

Analysis & Review

As you will be aware RTÉ forwarded a comprehensive briefing note on *Toy Show the Musical* to the Public Accounts Committee, as requested on the 11th of January detailing the rationale for RTÉ to develop new live events consistent with its remit and purpose, the development process that went into *Toy Show the Musical* and the governance of the project.

Detailed analysis of all costs, benefits and risks (including those related to Covid or illness in the cast) of developing and staging *Toy Show the Musical* were central to the decision making on developing and staging the show.

From the outset and consistent with new original musicals of this scale and ambition, *Toy Show the Musical* was conceived and planned as a multi-annual proposition, and as such many of the creative costs e.g. story and script development, music and lyrics composition, set and costume design, production design, etc are frontloaded. As RTÉ has made clear, bookings were lower than we had hoped in year one, but as with all creative investments, we remain focused on exploring all opportunities which could deliver a return over time.

As per our correspondence of 11th of January, as a commercial semi-state RTÉ must protect its commercial interests, and therefore RTÉ does not disclose the costs and revenues of individual creative or commercial projects, whether they be TV dramas, sports events or a live event such as *Toy Show the Musical*.

As appropriate, from a governance and oversight perspective, the Audit and Risk Committee of the RTÉ Board and the full RTÉ Board were fully briefed on year one of *Toy Show the Musical* (both in advance of the show run and since) and will continue to be fully appraised of any or all future plans.

Cancellations & contingency arrangements

In relation to the issue of the cancellations of the shows, due to the rapid onset of illness in the cast (largely amongst children), we did the best we could in very difficult circumstances. While we had significant resilience with understudies, the number of cast that fell ill became too great to stage the show safely. Clearly the very short notice experienced by audiences for the Saturday 18th show was especially regrettable, for which we offered sincere apologies and a prompt refund. In order to try and ensure that no other families experienced such inconvenience, we took no further chances regarding the days that followed and a further show was cancelled that day and three shows on Sunday 18th.

On Monday the 19th we announced we would be reducing the number of shows from three performances a day to two on Wednesday 21st and Thursday 22nd. This was to reduce the risk of having to cancel further shows due to illness and ensure greater cover across the cast (particularly the children) as respiratory illness was still prevalent both in the community and the cast.

As we noted in our previous submission, having to cancel a series of sold out/close to sold out shows on the 17th/18th of December due to cast/crew illness had a big impact on audience numbers, not just to the those shows but also the knock on impact to sentiment and word of mouth about the show over the Christmas period. It was not a decision that we took lightly.

We acted as swiftly as we could to give full refunds to all who were due to attend shows and also offered a substantial discount (25%) to those who wanted to rebook. Please see the statements we issued at the time for more details: <https://about.rte.ie/media-centre/statements-and-speeches/>

As noted by the Committee, it is important that RTÉ innovates, in terms of its content, and its commercial activities. In any given year RTÉ develops and launches a whole variety of new creative and commercial propositions, 2022 was no different. Some are instantly successful, some are not, some return, some don't, others evolve – in all cases we learn and apply that learning to new projects.

Yours sincerely



Dee Forbes
Director-General, RTÉ