

## **Arts and Entertainment Service Update**

*Assistant Director:* Steve Joel, Health and Well-Being  
*Service Manager:* Adam Burgan, Arts & Entertainment Manager  
*Lead Officer:* Adam Burgan, Arts & Entertainment Manager  
*Contact Details:* adam.burgan@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 845911

### **Purpose of the Report**

This report provides an update on the work of the Arts & Entertainment Service in Area South.

### **Public Interest**

The Arts & Entertainment Service at South Somerset District Council (SSDC) works to provide access to high quality cultural events across South Somerset. Through Arts Development the Service supports and encourages various arts agencies and organisations to deliver arts activity across South Somerset. The Service operates The Octagon Theatre – Somerset’s premier theatre for arts and entertainment. This report details arts activities taking place in Area South which is supported and initiated by the Service and the development of The Octagon Theatre which attracts audiences from across South Somerset and beyond.

### **Recommendation**

That the Area South Committee notes the report and identifies:-

1. Suggestions to improve service delivery;
2. Potential projects it wishes to see incorporated into the 2016-17 service planning process.

### **Background**

The Arts & Entertainment Service aims to provide access to high quality cultural events across South Somerset. Using The Octagon Theatre as a hub of creativity we work with our partners to engage the residents of South Somerset in arts activities and encourage visitors to the region. We aim to deliver a programme which inspires, educates and ultimately enriches the lives of those taking part making South Somerset an ever improving place to live and work.

### **Report**

The Arts & Entertainment Service consists of The Octagon Theatre and Arts Development and is part of Health and Well-Being under Assistant Director, Steve Joel. We aim to offer a cohesive approach to developing and promoting the arts in South Somerset with The Octagon as a ‘cultural hub’ for the District.

## Arts & Entertainment Structure



## The Arts Development Service

### The Octagon Theatre

#### Background

The Octagon Theatre is the council's flagship venue for high quality professional theatre, music, dance, comedy, entertainment, visual arts and literary events. The theatre is the keystone of our cultural provision across the district and provides:

- One of the largest theatres in Somerset with 626 seats.
- 260 events per annum (25% local organisations / 75% professional performance companies).
- The Octagon Academy – The Octagon's participatory programme.
- CRE8ive Writing – The Octagon's literary section.
- The Johnson Studio – The Octagon's rehearsal studio and home of The Octagon Academy that is also available for hire, functions and seminars.
- The Foyer Club – The Octagon's team of volunteers who greet our customers at performances and show them to their seats. The Foyer Club is a charity that also undertakes fundraising activity to support the development of The Octagon.
- The Footlights Club – The Octagon's special service to support regular attendees of the theatre.

The theatre was completely refurbished in 2003, and has excellent facilities, not only for staging performances but also in providing a bar, café bar and restaurant as well as a rehearsal studio.

The Arts and Entertainment Service (Octagon Theatre and Arts Development) is subsidised by South Somerset District Council by £269,598 (actual 2015/16 and achieving efficiency savings of £70k in the last two years), that equates to £1.70 per year, per person or 3p per week. Official statistics published in 2014 show that the UK's creative industries, which includes the film, television and music industries, are now worth £71.4 billion per year to the UK economy – generating just over a staggering £8 million pounds an hour. The UK creative industries are renowned across the globe driving growth, investment and tourism. The creative industries consistently punch well above their weight and are a powerhouse within the UK economy.

Between 50-70% of the population of South Somerset use the theatre throughout the course of the year and satisfaction levels are consistently high (80-90%); the theatre has been rated as the top SSDC service (86%) used by residents in the 2005 BMG Research survey used to underpin the development of the corporate plan.

The mailing list contains 20,000 households and 35,000 Preview brochures are distributed to drive ticket sales three times a year. Customers come predominantly from Somerset and Dorset. Ticket sales are supported by effective marketing through a well-maintained website, posters, flyers, press and ad-hoc promotions through local radio.

The service is delivered by an extremely capable, specialist and dedicated staff team with just 9.8 FTE.

## **Report**

The Octagon Theatre has enjoyed another successful and busy year welcoming approximately 200,000 people throughout the year. Here are some of the key points:

- Continued development of programme. Highlights included Sir Willard White, Lesley Garrett, Des O'Connor, The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, Joe McElderry, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Blake, Dave Gorman, Blackeyed Theatre Company, Richard Alston Dance Company, Julian Lloyd Webber, Paul Merton, Al Murray, The Manfreds, Jack Dee, Reginald D Hunter, Pasha Kovalev, Rich Hall, The Pasadena Roof Orchestra, BalletBoyz, Tim Vine, Only Men Aloud, The Glenn Miller Orchestra, Pam Ayres, G4, Rhydian, Lee Mead, Josh Widdicombe, Adam Hills, Fisherman's Friends, Northern Ballet and The Grand State Opera of Belarus. We presented the national tour of 'The Mousetrap' in May 2016 for 8 performances selling out every performance and 4,954 tickets!
- The Octagon Theatre is proud to be at the 'heart' of the community in South Somerset. Many local groups and societies stage performances and events at the theatre including Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society, University College Yeovil (Graduation), Helen Laxton School of Dance, Razzamatazz, The Dance Factory, Motiv8 Productions, Castaways Theatre Group, Yeovil Amateur Pantomime Society, Yeovil Youth Theatre, Yeovil Floral Society, and many more.
- The fourth Yeovil Literary Festival in partnership with Waterstones, Yeovil Library and Yeovil Community Arts Association will take place 20<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> October. The line-up includes Clare Balding, Sir Ranulph Fiennes, Alan Carr, Gok Wan, Kirsty Wark, Miles Jupp, Simon Weston, Peter Davison, Mark Watson and Ned Boulting to name but a few.
- We were delighted to receive a Certificate of Excellence from 'Trip Advisor'. The Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence is awarded to organisations that consistently achieve outstanding reviews on Trip Advisor. Businesses that are awarded the Certificate of Excellence demonstrate hospitality excellence and represent the upper echelon of businesses listed on Trip Advisor, the world's largest travel site.

- Arts & Entertainment Manager, Adam Burgan, was presented with a 'Western Gazette Pride Award' for 'Contribution to the Arts' on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> December.
- Our new season has been well received with performances from Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Grimethorpe Colliery Band, Al Murray, Seth Lakeman and The Chinese State Circus all proving popular.

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
<b>Number of Events</b>	239	239	244	235	242	260	264
<b>Attendance</b>	77,316	85,358	93,519	90,149	101,634	119,366	123,339
<b>Capacity for SSDC Promoted Events</b>	59%	58%	60%	62%	68%	82%	83%

- Ticket sales broke all records selling 123,339 tickets for the financial year 2015/16 (4,000 up on the previous year).
- Our pantomime production of Sleeping Beauty broke the record set by Jack and the Beanstalk the previous year being seen by over 27,000 people. Ticket sales were up 9% on the previous year. For Christmas 2016 we are presenting Peter Pan and ticket sales are currently ahead of this point last year.
- Our 'Strike A Chord!', which brought in Arts Council England funding of £49K, has been successfully delivered bringing The Philharmonia Orchestra to Yeovil to work with nine local primary schools with musicians going into the schools to deliver workshops. Charles Hazlewood conducted the full orchestra at a special schools concert in June introducing children to a live orchestra with the story covered on BBC Points West.
- Continued developing our relationship with local media and with a weekly column with the Western Gazette, a monthly column for the Western Daily Press and regular appearances on BBC Radio Somerset.
- We have continued to develop our Social Networking sites – over 7,604 Facebook users and 3,875 followers on Twitter.
- The Octagon Academy was launched in 2010. We now have 17 weekly classes for all ages and abilities. Over 300 people aged from 15 months to 73 are taking part classes at The Octagon in singing, dancing and drama every week. The Octagon Choir now has around 70 members.
- Increasing daytime use of The Octagon with weekly hirers including Somerset Cancer Care Café, University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age, Castaways Theatre Group, Somerset Siders (retired Tesco employees) and Helen Laxton School of Dance.
- Staff are working on the plans for Westlands Leisure Complex (WLC) that will be run as a sister venue to The Octagon. A shared management team and officers will bring their knowledge, skills, expertise and passion that has made The Octagon a success to the refurbished venue. Opening in March 2017, there will be

a programme of events that complement each other and develop an exciting, diverse and commercially astute programme of events.

## **The Arts Development Service**

The Arts Service works in partnership with a number of arts delivery agencies to bring a range of arts activities to the district, SSDC's on-going financial support ensures that this district maintains a good level of service for our communities. Our core funding helps the organisations to attract funding through grants, sponsorship and payment for services and gives a high level of return for the authority's investment.

These organisations include:

### **Take Art!**

This arts development agency is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and receives funding from them. Their activities in the last year include:

Take Art, Live! which continues to bring at least 22 professional or semi-professional performances into rural locations.

Word Play: Supported with funding from Yarlinton Housing Group, Take Art is recently working with Ryalls Park Medical Centre in Yeovil on a ground breaking project that uses non-traditional therapy to help people with mental health issues. A small group of patients have been working with their health coach and Hip Yak Poetry Shack; this is a follow on from recent work with South Somerset Mind and the Chard WATCH Project.

Support to Performance Practitioners: Take Art's Theatre Service offers support to new emerging companies and practitioners. Wassail Theatre based in West Coker and Boiling Kettle Theatre Company, linked to the David Hall are continuing to produce work on a local level as a result.

Tangle: Tangle, SW African Caribbean Theatre Company now have their administrative base at the Take Art office. Take Art supported their Navigational Global tour to Somerset schools.

Diversity Workshop/Conversation: Take Art invited Arts Council England to facilitate a 'conversation' for performance practitioners and arts organisations around diversity and equality in the arts in Somerset. SSDC's Equalities Officer is helping with ongoing work around equalities in the arts.

Youth Theatre: A research and development project for youth theatres has continued with Somerset based youth theatre groups coming together for a Showcase Event in at The Warehouse Theatre, Ilminster.

Spring Forward Youth Dance Platform took place at the Octagon Theatre with over 200 dancers taking part from across the South West (including South Somerset Groups - groups from Westfield School, Helen Laxton School of Dance, Dance Factory, Jump Start Boys group based at the Octagon, Somerset Youth Dance Company who are company in residence at the Octagon Theatre and two groups from Yeovil College).

Somerset Youth Dance Company continue to be dance company in residence at the Octagon Theatre, the company has been selected to represent the county at the regional dance event run by Youth Dance England – U.Dance South West.

InspirED is a partnership project between Take Art, Somerset Film, Somerset Art Works and SPAEDA to support arts in education projects funded by the SCC Compact.

### **Actiontrack:**

Actiontrack works collaboratively with individuals and groups to get involved with originally devised music, drama, dance and the visual arts. The organisation develops and delivers wholly accessible projects, predominantly with children and young people and often with marginalized groups. They continue to work with the pupil referral units in Chard and Yeovil providing music provision on behalf of Sound Foundation Somerset, the county's service for music in education. They are also a delivery partner in a variety of targeted youth support initiatives with the young offending team.

Well known for their "Showbuild" week long activity programmes where young people devised and create a piece of musical theatre, they offered a master class at the Octagon for young people who are thinking of performing arts as a career option.

They have also encouraged young people to engage in physical activity and delivered a number of static trapeze workshops in the Yeovil area.

### **Somerset Art Works:**

SAW 2015 – Somerset Exhibitions and Events Festival:

The festival took place between 3<sup>rd</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> October 2015, attracting visitors into the county and generating sales for small, independent businesses and additional custom for local services. Data collected for in-direct spend at local facilities indicates that visitors spent on average £70.88. Using an Economic Event Impact calculator this translates across the whole county to a total of £3,408,262, contributing to the economy of Somerset during this two week period.

This year the organisation will be co-ordinating the Open Studios event from 17<sup>th</sup> September till 2<sup>nd</sup> October. 69 venues in South Somerset will attract visitors, including The Emporium in Yeovil where two young artists have received a SAW bursary to enable them to participate.

Somerset Art Works is the visual arts partner of InspirED, the art in education partnership for Somerset. As part of this they produce education resources to encourage schools to view Somerset Art Weeks as a provider of fantastic opportunities right on their doorstep

As a delivery partner with SSDC's Countryside Service, Somerset Art Works appointed Carolyn Lefley as Artist in Residence at Yeovil Country Park for 2016. This is the second year for the Water-Meadow-Wood residency programme; Carolyn is worked with community groups to co-create artworks that respond to the Meadow theme. Participants explored a range of photographic techniques, from traditional sun prints to digital photography walking tours. The Meadow residency culminated in an outdoor showcase exhibition at Ninesprings.

### **Somerset Film:**

Somerset Film provides support for local community groups and individuals, professional and amateur, in the use of digital media. Based in Bridgwater but serving the whole of Somerset they offer:

- Drop-in access to equipment, on line resources and training
- Production and training opportunities and facilities

- Advice, support and information to a wide range of film and digital media makers, from absolute beginners to high level professionals
- Project and outreach work – specialising in working with community groups and individuals who want to get started with film

They have recently produced a film with Fiveways Resource Centre, “Adrian’s Story,” a healthy living instruction film for people with learning disabilities

In addition to the work of these arts organisations, the Arts Development Officer continues to support voluntary and professional groups and individuals in South Somerset, in developing their own projects at a grass roots level.

Working with local performers, arts enthusiasts, Yeovil Town Council and Area Development, we continue to support “Super Saturday” a celebratory event in the town centre, particularly the “Buskfest” element which showcases local talent and raises funds for local charities. We co-ordinated project with four local primary schools; highly acclaimed author and illustrator, Paul Stickland, worked with the children to create paper bugs, which were displayed in a shop window. The children brought their families to see their work, therefore adding to the footfall on the day.

The Arts Service supports colleagues from the Countryside Team with the visual artist programme in Yeovil Country Park; this includes the work with Somerset Art Works and a commissioned sculpture trail which will see a number of pieces created over the next two years and installed throughout the length of the country parks.

Following last year’s project based around water, we have supported an additional short residency at Fairmead School to help students who are studying GCSE Art. Feedback from the teacher suggests that the standard of work has improved greatly as a result.

Located on the top floor of an old glove making factory, Eastville Project Space is a multi-functional space includes a studio for multi-media production, a residency space for all kind of creative projects, an exhibition/event/project space for showing. Supported by SSDC Arts and the Arts Council England, they have attracted local, national and international artists to their space in the Newtown area of Yeovil. They were invited to attend “Supernormal”, a cutting edge festival of contemporary art in Oxford, putting Yeovil firmly on the contemporary arts map.

OSR Projects is a contemporary artist group that works predominantly out of the Old School Room, an artist run studio and project space in West Coker. This year we have supported their “Ropewalkers” project, attracting three high quality artists to Coker to create work inspired by Dawes Twine Works; this has added a different dimension to the interpretation of this historic site.

We have supported West Coker based Wassail Theatre Company in the development of three new plays. Wassail Theatre Company creates original theatre inspired by the people, places and stories of Somerset and engages with the community it represents.

In helping to ensure good practice amongst our community arts groups, we provided child safe training for volunteers.

### **The Octagon Gallery:**

We continue to offer a varied programme of exhibitions in the Octagon Gallery. In addition to the ever popular Yeovil Arts Group and Yeovil Camera Club, we encourage

local artists, photographers and printmakers to exhibit with us and celebrate our local talent.

The Strike a Chord orchestral project and the Heritage Lottery funded Archive Project both included exhibitions as part of their programmes of work. We commissioned an artist to work in the nine participating schools, creating an exciting variety of visual arts to complement the children's musical experiences. The work was displayed throughout the gallery for the month leading up to the performance. We supported Windrose Rural Media Trust in putting together an exhibition of the history of entertainment venues in Yeovil as a visual accompaniment to their work.

## **Financial Implications**

No new financial implications stem from this report.

## **Corporate Priority Implications**

The Arts & Entertainment Service is primarily linked to THEME 3: IMPROVE THE HOUSING, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF OUR CITIZENS

*"We consider that decent, affordable housing is vital to the overall health of our citizens. We want to ensure that all of the community have access to sport, leisure and arts and heritage opportunities"*

*Specific priorities associated to the service are 3.31 Increase engagement in the Arts.*

## **Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications**

The Arts & Entertainment Service contributes to SSDC targets of Reducing Carbon Emissions by adopting a culture where this is considered in everyday decision-making. The service has appointed a Carbon Champion who encourages staff to save energy, recycle, and adopt more environmentally friendly ways of delivering our service. Audiences at The Octagon Theatre are benefiting from improved comfort cooling following a major upgrade of facilities that has seen Moducel's FAN WALL Technology™ units replace the air handling system. The new technology is also making significant energy cost savings for the Service.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

The Arts & Entertainment Service strives to make the service and those offered by its partners accessible to everyone. We ensure that all our partners hold an Equality and Diversity Policy and that equality is one of the core principles of the organisation. Our programme of performances and projects aims to offer a diverse range of events which inspire, educate, enlighten and entertain whilst bringing the community together.

## **Background Papers**

None

---