

## **Arts & Entertainment – Service Update**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

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

### **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 and Westlands Entertainment and Conference Centre – the newly refurbished venue for conferencing and entertainment. This report details arts activities taking place in Area East which is supported and initiated by the Service and the development of two venues which attract audiences from across South Somerset and beyond.

### **Recommendation**

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

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

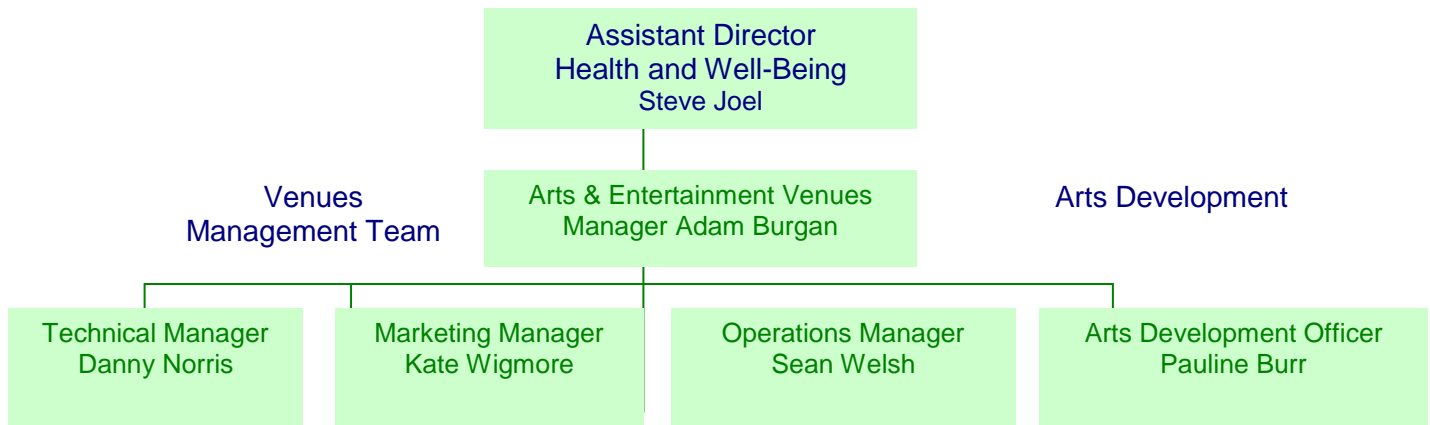
### **Background**

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. The recently re-opened Westlands Entertainment and Conference Centre will complement the existing programme at The Octagon, broadening the programme of entertainment events on offer and striving to become the premier venue for conferencing, banqueting and meetings in the area. 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, Westlands Entertainment and Conference Centre 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 venues being a ‘cultural and entertainment hub’ for the District.

## Arts & Entertainment Structure



## The Arts Development Service

### The Octagon Theatre and Westlands Entertainment and Conference Centre

With the addition of Westlands Entertainment and Conference Centre and management for the Westlands Leisure Complex site, the Arts & Entertainment Venues Service has gone through a significant transformation with the team almost doubling in size via recruitment for specialist and dedicated staff team. The service has grown from 9.8 FTE staff to 22.2. The management team work across both venues ensuring that programming at the venues compliment each other with the ambition to develop audience and attendance across both venues. Sharing resources such as the Box Office, staff, marketing and customer database and making the most of the combined buying power means that both venues also benefit from the shared knowledge and skills of staff, the ability to develop staff skills across two venues and a more varied and diverse programme. The flexibility of the venues and increased capacity at Westlands is balanced by the stronger technical capability at The Octagon which will lead to a more diverse programme of events serving a wider range of tastes and customers.

### 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 £254,800 (budget 2016/17 and achieving efficiency savings of £90k in the last two years), that equates to £1.61 per year, per resident, 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 for 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, social media, posters, flyers, press and ad-hoc promotions through local radio.

## 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, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Grimethorpe Colliery Band, Seth Lakeman and The Chinese State Circus. 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 took place 20<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> October. The line-up included 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 Circo Cuba Libre, ‘America’s Got Talent’ Winner Paul Zerdin and Collabro all selling well.

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Number of Events	239	244	235	242	260	264	288
Attendance	85,358	93,519	90,149	101,634	119,366	123,339	132,376
Capacity for SSDC Promoted Events	58%	60%	62%	68%	82%	83%	78%

- Ticket sales broke all records selling 132,376 tickets for the financial year 2015/16 (9,000 up on the previous year).
- Our pantomime production of ‘Peter Pan’ broke the record set by ‘Sleeping Beauty’ the previous year being seen by over 29,000 people. Ticket sales were up 7% on the previous year. For Christmas 2017 we are presenting ‘Cinderella’ and ticket sales are currently ahead of this point last year.
- Our ‘Strike A Chord!’ project, 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 and regular appearances on BBC Radio Somerset.
- We have continued to develop our Social Networking sites – over 8,910 Facebook users and 4,174 followers on Twitter with 584 subscribers on our YouTube Channel and over 1,000 followers on Instagram.
- 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.

## **Westlands Entertainment & Conference Centre**

### **Background**

Westlands Entertainment & Conference Centre is the council’s flagship venue for conferencing, meetings, banqueting and entertainment events. The venue significant in provision across the district and provides:

- One of the largest and most flexible venues in Somerset with 870 seats, 350 capacity for banqueting, standing capacity of 950 or festival capacity (using the whole building) at 1,500.
- The venue is also home to The Wheeldon Suite and The Parish Suite. meeting rooms available to hire with discounted rates for local charities and 'not-for-profit' groups.
- The Lounge Bar is open through the day for users of the site or visitors to the venue offering a café style menu and Box Office for events at both Westlands and The Octagon.
- The flexible venue is suitable for a wide range of events from large-scale conferencing, weddings, parties, balls, boxing and wrestling events, trade fairs and standing gigs to theatre style shows.
- The Foyer Club – the team of volunteers who have been volunteering at the Octagon for over thirty years have taken on FOH duties at Westlands. The Friends of Westlands have setup as a independent fundraising body to support the development of Westlands.
- The Footlights Club – rewarding regular customers with discounted tickets and priority booking now applies to both The Octagon and Westlands.

The refurbishment work is nearing completion but events have been taking place at the venue since the end of March.

We are taking a commercial approach to running Westlands. The venue is budgeted to be subsidised in the first year of operation by the following bodies

SSDC £269,598  
Leonardos Helicopters  
Yeovil Town Council  
Yeovil Without Parish Council  
Brympton Parish Council

Following the petition to save Westlands that was signed by over 8,000 people, officially the largest petition ever submitted to SSDC, a £2 million refurbishment has taken place to improve the facilities for guests and artists. The venue refurbishment follows the agreement between South Somerset District Council and Leonardo Finmeccanica, of a 30-year lease. The cost of refurbishment has been paid for via a loan that will be repaid over 30 years with the introduction of a £1 ticket levy.

## **Report**

Westlands is enjoying a busy first year since reopening with staff working hard to ensure the venue was ready to welcome guests. Building work and 'snagging' is still being completed but events have been going very well with thousands of visitors already through the door. Here are some of the key points:

- Sold out events from 'Justin's Party' – which sold out two performances within an hour. Popular events from stand-up comedians Joel Dommett, Rich Hall with Henning When - already sold out for end of May. Themed party nights like 'Poptastic!' proving a success. There are many more events to look forward to including Brian Conley, Dr Hook and Nathan Carter to name a few.
- Local events like Yeovil Amateur Boxing and Yeovil Beer Festival have returned with over 3,000 people attending the Beer Festival alone. We have weekly hires from Westlands Ballroom and Latin Club and LeRoc modern jive.

- There is a subsidised rates for local 'not for profit' groups and it is good to see a number of local hirers returning to the venue.
- The Official Opening for the venue is planned for Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> June when Darcey Bussell CBE will perform the opening in a special afternoon event for invited guests. In the evening a ticketed event open to the general public will see BBC Somerset's Claire Carter interview Darcey Bussell about her life and career with the opportunity for audiences to put forward their questions.
- Screenings from The Royal Opera House are proving popular and we plan to expand our screening programme to complement our programme and offer a different film experience with film festivals, independent and foreign language films and the best of mainstream cinema.
- Interest in the venue for events has been very high and it has been difficult to accommodate all the requests for tours and meetings. Prospects for developing usage of the venue and a busy and vibrant programme look promising.
- Social Networking pages are still in their infancy but the Facebook page already has 2,228 followers.
- We have an open day planned for Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May when members of the public will be able to see the new facilities and tour the building. Events and activities throughout the day will showcase the different opportunities for people to join in working with the other facilities and groups on the site.

## 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:

- **Rural Touring:** the Take Art Rural Touring programme will have brought 22 shows to 16 different village halls across South Somerset, including in Area East; Bruton, Charlton Horethorne, the Charltons, Kingsdon, North Cadbury and Rimpton.
- **Support to Performance Practitioners:** Take Art's Theatre Service continue to offer particular support to new emerging professional companies such as Wassail Theatre as well as established companies such as Boiling Kettle Theatre Company
- **Tangle:** Tangle, SW African Caribbean Theatre Company continues to have their administrative base at the Take Art office.
- **Diversity Forum:** Take Art launched this forum for Somerset based performing arts practitioners and administrators in Jan 2016
- **The Early Years' service** has focused its energy on fundraising for the new programme. The efforts have borne fruit and they have had major success with grants from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Youth Music and the Real Ideas Organisation.
- **Spring Forward Youth Dance Platform** takes place at the Octagon Theatre with over 200 dancers taking part from across the Somerset (including South Somerset Groups - groups from

Westfield School, Helen Laxton School of Dance, Dance Factory, Jump Start Boys group based at the Octagon, groups from Yeovil College).

- **Somerset Youth Dance Company** continues its long standing connection with the Octagon Theatre and as an extension to this we have developed an all-boys youth dance company **Jump Start** that runs from the venue. This has grown to have 10 boys aged between 8-14 years old.

**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.

In partnership with Sound Foundation Somerset, Actiontrack brought Afriquoi to Somerset for another World Music Residency. Afriquoi is a London based group that fuse traditional African music with electronic dance music. The workshops in schools in the Wincanton area taught the students about traditional African music styles and offered a different cultural experience.

Afriquoi ended their week's residency with a dynamic public performance at Caryford Community Hall in Castle Cary.

Actiontrack was commissioned by Hauser and Wirth Somerset to work with children from two local primary schools in developing a performative response to Subodh Gupta's exhibition at the gallery.

#### **Somerset Art Works:**

- The SAW Open Studios Event took place between 17<sup>th</sup> September to 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2016, 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 **£203**. SAW also offered associated training and bursary opportunities for Artists and Makers.
- Touring pop-up studio to schools and local venues in Somerton and Castle Cary.
- Herbarium a contemporary craft exhibition with the National Trust at Lytes Cary associated business development for local makers, schools and teachers' professional development training <http://somerstartworks.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/current-projects/herbarium/>
- Education offer InspirED subscribers in South Somerset; schools can subscribe to arts support from the partnership of SAW, Take Art, Somerset Film and SPAEDA. They provide inset training opportunities, priority access to arts residencies and a variety of resources to participating schools.
- In 2017 they will be working with local museums in Bruton and Chard in a partnership project with the South West Heritage Trust.

- The theme for this year's main project is **Prospect**. It will offer - training and bursary opportunities for artists and makers. And culminate with work being shown at Art Weeks: 23<sup>rd</sup> September – 8<sup>th</sup> October 2017. In South Somerset:  
**A Landscape of Objects**
  - Forde Abbey residencies, exhibition, school and families workshops
  - Art Weeks Contemporary Craft Showcase weekend 23-24 Sept with the National Trust at Lytes Cary
  - 'Plein Air' painting project exchange Somerset/Russian artists, schools and families workshops hosted by the National Trust in South Somerset
- Funding from the Heritage Lottery and Arts Council England is in place for the **Muse, Makers in Museums**, project. Working with the South West Heritage Trust, the project will develop the cultural offer to schools/communities/local museums focussing on Chard and Bruton in South Somerset.

### 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

Recent achievements in South Somerset include:

- Continuation of Ignite 2.0 – second year of a three year programme that supports professional artists in the use of digital media. 7 x SSDC based artists received one to one surgeries through year.
- BFI Film Academy - a programme of master-classes, screenings and film-making for 16- 19 year olds that offers bursary and travel support. 7 x SSDC residents have registered onto the programme.
- Launch of Polish Voice TV on 28 Feb 2017 in association with Phoenix School of Languages (Yeovil) and Yeovil Advice Centre. Polish Voice TV encourages understanding between Somerset communities, demystifies national stereotypes and provides a space to share ideas and to promote collective endeavour – training course supported by SSL to follow x 15 adults.

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.

We are working with Somerset Film in the development of the "Holman Hub" film resource in South Cadbury. Based at Chapel Cross Tea Rooms, in conjunction with Tea Room Arts, a video production and editing facility will be available for pre-booked community use. Some initial training will be available and we will work with Tea Room Arts and Somerset Film to develop future projects in response to local aspirations.

We supported a short holiday activity programme with Tea Room Arts in August 2016, where artist, Jo Cassidy worked with children and families to create wire sculptures for an exhibition in the tea room.



We helped to fund Somerset based Jackdaws Music Education Trust to bring their opera project to King Arthurs school. Feedback from the school indicated that the project had a very positive impact on the students and was inspirational.

In September 2016, we supported the first Wincanton Town Festival with a funding contribution towards artist workshops.

Renowned children's book illustrator, Paul Stickland, worked with children in Ilchester and Milborne Port Primary Schools in creating pop up creepy crawlies which were displayed in Yeovil Town Centre during the Super Saturday event.

The Arts Service has given support to Wassail Theatre Company, a local group that brings creative performance into non-traditional settings and specialises on themes that resonate with our communities. One of their latest shows, Rex the King, the story of a Somerset darts champion who ruled the world, but lost it all will be performed in some of our local pubs, including the Barton Inn, in Barton St David and in the Montague Inn, in Shepton Montague.

We are in the process of developing the third South Somerset Arts Directory, which publicises cultural activities across the district and encourages participation at a local level.

### **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 & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)**

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