

## **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 North.

### **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 North 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 North Committee notes the report and identifies:-

- Suggestions to improve service delivery;
- Potential projects it wishes to see incorporated into the 2014-15 service planning process.

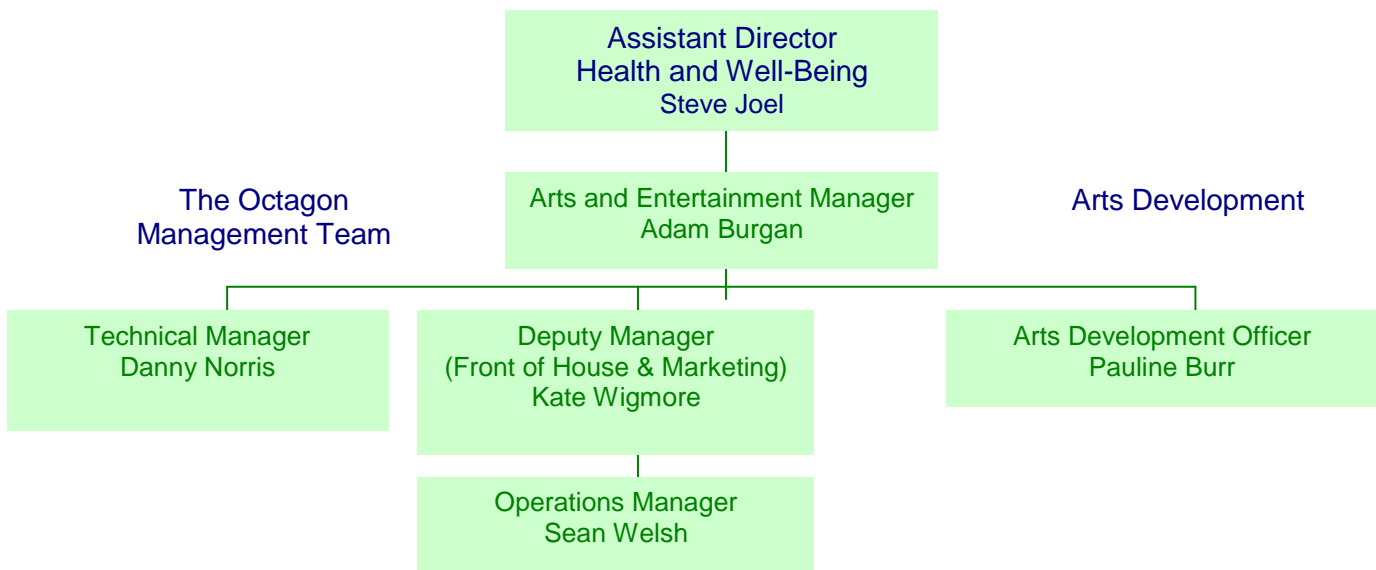
### **Background**

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 Arts Development Service works in partnership with a number of arts delivery agencies to bring a range of arts activities to the district. In previous years we worked as a consortium with the County Council and the other four districts, supporting the arts organisations through core funding via a shared service level agreement. This came to an end in 2011; while the other authorities give reduced funding to the organisations on a project by project basis, 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 give a high level of return for the authority's investment.

These organisations include:

#### Take Art!

**The Take Art Live** programme brings on average 22 shows to village halls across the district, with audiences maintaining a good average of 75% capacity. In Area North this includes performances in Tintinhull, Curry Mallet, Chilthorne Domer, Kingsdon, Langport, and South Petherton

**Spring Forward** For the second year Spring Forward happened at the Octagon Theatre with around 200 young people performing from around 22 youth dance groups and schools from around Somerset.

**Somerset Youth Dance Company** SYDC uses the Octagon studio as a weekly rehearsal space for classes, training and working with choreographers.

**Big Dance – Urban Jam & Main Event** around 300 young dancers took over the theatre for a day of free activities, these included dance workshops, music workshops, graffiti workshops and mini performances. The evening 'Main Event' showcased professional companies and local crews on stage together.

**Early Years** Using the arts the Take Art programme aims to develop the creative potential of all small children in Somerset. They offer training and creative activities for Early Years workers, parents and children under five.

**Word Play** is a participatory arts project using theatre and the spoken word. It encourages people with mental health problems or with learning disabilities to have a voice and aims to be a catalyst for social change.

**Seed Fund** Take Art Theatre was successful with their application to the Somerset County Council Creative Industries Development Fund for the second year of their Seed Fund for local artists. During the first round, four of the ten awards were given to South Somerset based artists.

**Networking & Support** is on-going across all the Take Art Services of Dance, Theatre, Live, Music and Start.

Take Art hosts and maintains the Dance & Theatre website, [www.danceandtheatresomerset.net](http://www.danceandtheatresomerset.net) which is currently receiving about 650-750 hits per month and has about 120 profiles registered.

#### **Actiontrack:**

Much of Actiontrack's work in South Somerset has focused on the smaller towns and villages and has an on-going relationship with the National Trust, being a preferred delivery organisation for their schools projects, particularly with the National Portrait collection at Montacute House. They are a delivery agency for the Somerset Music Education service and also work with young people on the edge of mainstream education. **My Tunes**, a Youth Music Project that ran from November 2012 to January 2014, Actiontrack worked with Take Art to offer a range of music provision for Pupil Referral Units across Somerset – those that took part in South Somerset were Horizons, Yeovil, the Yeovil PRU Centre, the Link Education Centre and Steps Centre, Chard.

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

The SAW Open Studios event took place between 15<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013, attracting visitors into the county and generating sales for small, independent businesses and additional custom for local services. There were 35 venues in South Somerset; based on feedback from the artists, it is anticipated that there were almost 23,000 visits generating about £40,000 of direct sales.

In addition to the Art Weeks event, Somerset Art Works supports local artists and invites national and international artists into the county with their on-going programme of events and projects. This year this has included:

#### **The Great Crane Art Project**

Somerset Art Works (SAW) and The Great Crane Project have been working in partnership since 2010. SAW has engaged a number of professional artists to develop a programme of community engagement projects, inspired by cranes, to offer creative opportunities to local schools, groups and individuals and to help raise awareness of this fascinating conservation project.

In 2013 Somerset Art Works appointed artist Melanie Tomlinson to work with Ash Primary School and their European partner schools. Melanie is an acclaimed metal worker, illustrator and experienced participatory project artist. To widen the reach of the project Melanie worked with Somerset Film to develop interactive online resources for schools. The work was subsequently shown in the Levels Basket Centre (formerly the River Parrett Visitor Centre) as part of the Somerset Art Weeks event, with additional schools workshops at Shakspeare Glass and Arts in Langport. The RSPB uses the images created as part of this project on their Great Crane Project website.

#### **Make the Most (2013)**

Working with partners Craftspace and the National Trust, Barrington Court was transformed in September 2013 by five internationally-renowned makers. Using locally sourced willow, paper, wood, leather and stone, the new works acknowledged the contribution of the local

raw material suppliers and local manufacturers to the local economy and ecology of the county.

Using materials from Musgrove Willows in Bridgwater, artist Laura Ellen Bacon was commissioned to create a large-scale willow work for the 'Old Kitchen' and Irish artist Maeve Clancy's collaborated with the Two Rivers Paper Company, Watchet, to create large-scale cut paper installations telling the history of Barrington Court and its gardens.

Sculptor Thomas Appleton produced a work in stone supplied by Harveys Stone Quarry, Gary Allson paired with supplier Yandles of Martock and textile artist Laura Youngson Coll used leather from Burfield and Co (gloves) Ltd in creating a piece of work inspired by Barrington's head gardener.

In addition, the 'Treasures of Somerset' programme featured a selection of six local makers in order to highlight the vitality and wealth of craft practitioners whose work is not always seen locally. The six local artists being featured were Mike Dodd - ceramics, Tom Kealy - furniture, James Horrobin - blacksmith, Patrick Reyntiens – stained glass, Caroline Lytton – fine metalwork and Jacy Wall - textiles.

### **Hunky Punks Project at All Saints Church Langport**

The grotesque rooftop carvings of All Saints Church have inspired a community project and the spawning of a whole new generation of Hunky Punks in the form of peculiar creatures made by the young people of Langport out of fabrics and recycled materials.

Led by professional artists Sarah Dicks, Julie Roberts and Penny Dyer, the young people from Huish Episcopi Academy, Langport and Huish Youth Group, Curry Mallet Primary School and Huish Episcopi Primary School participated in a series of workshops and their creations were displayed as part of Langport Festival 01-08 June 2013 and as part of Somerset Art Weeks.

### **Somerset Film**

Somerset Film provides support for local community groups and professional and amateur individuals in all aspects of digital media. Their project work is a mix of cross county initiatives, working with organisations such as Social Services and the Youth Offending Team, to more targeted and locally delivered programmes. In the last year this has included:

- On-going development of somerset.tv – an online TV channel, where the local community can upload and view film content from anything to camera phones to camcorders. [www.somerset.tv](http://www.somerset.tv)
- Skills training for young film makers , 16-19 years with BFI Film Academy training
- Support for communities in transition with digital technology through Awards for All supported Talking Communities programme
- Working with the Youth Offending Teams in Somerset and Oxford generating materials for national Youth Justice Board training materials
- Growing international creative skills exchanges with the developing world through establishing partnership with Ilminster based Purple Field Productions
- Ignite Somerset – Somerset Film is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. Through the ACE funded Ignite Somerset programme they enable artists, makers, performers and audiences in Somerset to harness new opportunities afforded through digital technology. It has already supported ten artists, including writers, poets, visual and digital artists. A further seventy young people from South Petherton Infants School have participated in one of the Ignite supported initiatives.
- Curry Rivel –pre-production and filming has already started on a short film documenting the history of Curry Rivel as seen through the eyes of current residents. Filming of the Wassail on twelfth night directly involved fourteen people and indirectly

many more. Film production will continue over the coming year and the work will be a significant feature of the village's first heritage day.

- Offering on-going training in the use of digital media to artists, in partnership with Somerset Art Works and supporting artists to grow audiences and engage with communities through creating digital platforms.

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. Help was given in re-establishing the Petherton Folk Festival, in developing a new cultural festival in Langport, on-going support for the Hamdon Film Festival and the Hamdon Ha! Ha! - a series of comedy nights in Norton sub Hamdon and the inaugural Hamdon Ha! Ha! mini-festival which will bring acts from the Edinburgh Fringe to the Hamdons.

In Langport the service supported the Writers' Group with the production of their first anthology, a visual artist to set up weekly drawing classes that regularly attract about 30 people to each session and backed an application to the Arts Council from a dance tutor to set up her studio in Westover.

In 2013 the service provided advice and support for the first Curry Mallet history festival. This was a precursor to an event coming up in 2015 to celebrate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta, of particular significance as Curry Mallet's Lord of the Manor, William Mallet, was one of the 25 rebel barons who travelled to Runnymede and brought about the sealing of the Magna Carta on 15th June 1215.

To celebrate the royal jubilee and the Olympics, our support and funding helped young people in Martock and Langport decorate the streets of their towns with brightly coloured flags and pennants, made to their own designs. In Martock, children from the local primary school worked with artist, Andy Hawthorne and in Langport, Richard Godden worked with the youth club. The flags are retained by the towns and continue to be used for local celebrations and festivals.

### **Creative High Streets Seminar**

Following the Mary Portas report on revitalising town centres, the Arts Council England helped to fund local initiatives that addressed the issue. In partnership with ACE, Taunton Deane Borough Council and Somerset Towns Forum, SSDC Arts Development helped to coordinate a county wide seminar on Creative High Streets, which gave attendees the opportunity to see examples of good practice from other parts of the country and enjoy an inspiring presentation from a leading authority on cultural planning.

### **The Octagon Gallery**

We continue to offer a varied programme of exhibitions in the Octagon Gallery from both the amateur and professional sectors. In addition to the ever popular Yeovil Arts Group and Yeovil Camera Club, we have welcomed Yeovil College; the A303 artists and Society of Graphic Fine Art. We have diversified the programme to include sculpture, printmaking, illustration and textiles in addition to the more traditional painting and drawing exhibitions.

To complement last year's pantomime, we commissioned a local community artist to work with schools on large scale pictures of scenes from the story of Snow White.

## **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.
- 240 events per annum (25% local organisations / 75% professional performance companies).
- Octagon Academy – The Octagon's participatory programme.
- CRE8ive Writing – The Octagon's literary section.
- The Johnson Studio – The Octagon's rehearsal studio 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 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.

It has an annual turnover of £1.9m and has the lowest net revenue subsidy of any theatre in the South West of England. Subsidised by South Somerset District Council by £353,870 that equates to £2 per year, per person or 8p per household per week. While no recent economic impact assessments have been done for the Octagon Shropshire Council recently published a report by an independent body who estimate that Theatre Severn in Shrewsbury (638 seats) contributed £5million to the local economy over an 18month period.

Between fifty to seventy percent of the population of South Somerset use the theatre throughout the course of the year and satisfaction levels are consistently high (80-90%) and 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 selling over 100,000 tickets for the first time in its history and welcoming approximate 180,000 people throughout the year. Here are some of the key points:

- Continued development of programme. 2013 Highlights included Paul Carrack, Richard Alston Dance Company, The Grand State Opera of Belarus, James and the Giant Peach, Sean Lock, An Evening with the Stars of Strictly Come Dancing, Al

Murray, Grimethorpe Colliery Band, Seth Lakeman, Ken Dodd, Barbara Dickson, Adam Hills, Blake, Mary Berry, Pam Ayres, Alan Davies, Sandi Toksvig, Paul Merton, Reginald D Hunter and Show of Hands. The season also saw the return of our big talent competition – Let Me Entertain You with BBC Somerset’s Emma Britton joining the judging panel. 2014 events to date include Lee Evans, Ed Byrne, the National Dance Company of Wales, Jason Manford, Brian Conely, Lee Mead, Lesley Garret, Sir Willard White, Des O’Connor, X Factor Winner – Joe McElderry, Suggs, Joe Brown and Joan Armatrading

- 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 College, Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society, University College Yeovil (Graduation), Helen Laxton School of Dance, Razzamatazz, The Dance Factory, Stage4Kidz (based in Chard), Castaways Theatre Group, Yeovil Amateur Pantomime Society, Yeovil Youth Theatre, Girl Guides Somerset Divisions, Yeovil Floral Society, Salvation Army, Yeovil Town Band and many more.
- In September we presented the first Yeovil Literary Festival in partnership with Waterstones and Yeovil Community Arts Association. Our first festival welcomed an impressive line-up including Sir Tony Robinson, Dame Jenni Murray, Rula Lenska, Michael Morpurgo, Tom Fort, Wendy Cope and attracted national press coverage including the ‘Top Pick’ within The Independent and ‘I’ newspapers. Our next festival is being planned for November and will welcome Yeovil Library as a new partner in the festival and double the number of events from the first festival. Events include David Mitchell, Shirley Williams, Polly Toynbee, Jonathan Dimbleby, Michael Portillo, platforms for new writers (including local authors), Juliet Stevenson and Samuel West.
- 2013 was also an award winning year with Adam Burgan winning ‘Theatre Manager of the Year’ at the National Encore Awards. The Award is nominated and voted for by industry professionals. Adam is the youngest recipient and only person to have won the award twice. For the third year in a row the Theatre was awarded an ‘Our Street’ Award from Lufton College to recognise the excellent service for students with learning difficulties.
- Our autumn season of shows includes performances from Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Jasper Carrott, Ruby Wax, Richard Alston Dance Company, Show of Hands and the play ‘Not About Heroes’ to commemorate the beginning of WWI .

Year	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Number of Performances	239	244	235	242
Total Box Office Income (Gross)	£1,223,074	£1,362,419	£1,335,182	£1,549,590
Secondary Spend	£344,452	£364,735	£410,600	£477,181
Total Number of Tickets sold	85,358	93,519	90,149	101,634
Capacity	57%	65%	65%	68%

- 2013/14 saw a number of staffing changes with Kate Wigmore going on Maternity Leave and the appointment of a Marketing Intern – Hannah Lury. Sally Fulcher has moved to the Arts & Entertainment Service with the new role of Development and Admin Support Officer. Rob Sinnick retired from his role as Technical Manager following 33 years of service and his Deputy, Danny Norris, was appointed to the role.

- Staff have been focussing on increasing profitability of the café bar by reviewing suppliers, developing the menu, the installation of a new electronic till system and development of a permanent secondary café bar server area.
- Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs – our most successful pantomime ever! The production of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs sold more tickets than any other pantomime in our history and received rave reviews. Over 24,000 people saw the pantomime with Box Office income up 37% on the previous year and additional schools performances added to cope with demand for tickets. The production played to 95% capacity across the 41 performances. For Christmas 2014 we are presenting Jack and the Beanstalk and we have added an additional week of performances.
- We secured our first funding from Arts Council England with a grant of £77K for a two year dance development project in partnership with Take Art. The project will support the professional programme at The Octagon, support workshops and community engagement events, support professional artists to create work in South Somerset and support audience development. £1K grant from Yeovil Town Council to Summer School.
- Continued developing our relationship with local media and with a weekly column with the Western Gazette and regular appearance on BBC Somerset.
- We have continued to develop our Social Networking sites – over 4,000 Facebook users and 2,500 followers on Twitter. YouTube – 17,500 views of our videos.
- The Octagon Academy was launched in 2010. We now have 16 weekly classes for all ages and abilities. Over 200 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 80 members.
- Increasing daytime use of The Octagon with weekly hirers including Somerset Cancer Care Café, African Drumming Workshops, University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age, Castaways Theatre Group, Somerset Siders (retired Tesco employees) and Yeovil vineyard Church.

## **Financial Implications**

No new financial implications stem from this report.

## **Council Plan 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

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