

Arts and 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 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:-

- 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. 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 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!

The Take Art Live In addition to bringing 22 live performances to 14 venues across the district, last year they co-ordinated a short pub tour, which included 3 pubs in South Somerset one of which was the Old Barn Club. The rural touring programme continues to be a successful and popular strand of their work; audience levels are maintained at 70% capacity and above.

Word/Play Over the two years, Performance Poets worked with groups of adults from Chard Intentional Peer Support Group and South Somerset Mind in Yeovil running regular weekly workshops at the Octagon. Following on from the success, Take Art formed a productive new partnership with Yarlinton Housing Group. A programme of 8 spoken word and poetry workshops were set up at the Octagon for South Somerset residents. These were well attended and culminated in two performances including one at the Yeovil Literature Festival as well as a specially featured programme recorded for Yeovil Radio.

Support to Performance Practitioners: Through County Council funding Take Art have been running a small Seed Fund initiative to help emerging theatre and dance practitioners. They have also set up an Action Learning Set to support 7 people working in the dance and theatre industry and 2 of those places have been taken up by South Somerset based artists.

InspirED is a partnership project between Take Art, Somerset Film, Somerset Art Works and SPAEDA to support arts in education projects funded by SCC Compact. During this year in South Somerset, Take Art co-ordinated; a *Drama Festival for Secondary Schools* at the Octagon; offered 3 high quality touring shows by *Theatre Centre, China Plate, Travelling*

Light and as a result delivered shows to Sexey's School, Bucklers Mead, Huish Academy. Take Art also coordinated a special tour of a new theatre piece '*Transition*' by Huish Sixth students about the 'transition' of students from primary to secondary schools. This workshop and show package went to West Chinnock, Preston, Huish Episcopi and Hambridge Primary Schools.

Geminus was an Early Years dance commission, made by French company, Compagnie Ubi. It was a visually and musically stimulating show, tailor-made for children aged 3-5 years and their families. Take Art worked in partnership with Yeovil College Childcare Centre to bring an audience of 120 to two performances at the college. College performing arts students were also invited and took part in a stimulating post show discussion with the company and explored with them the idea of working in this specialist field.

Spring Forward Youth Dance Platform will take place at the Octagon Theatre on 3rd March with over 200 dancers taking part from across the South West (including 3 groups from Westfield School, Somerset Youth Dance Company who are company in residence at the Octagon Theatre and 3 groups based at Yeovil College).

Octagon Dance Development Project – Take Art have worked in partnership with the Octagon Theatre to support their Grants for the Arts project to develop dance at the venue. This includes supporting a steering group of young people from Yeovil in running a community dance event, Big Dance Urban Jam. **Somerset Youth Dance Company** continue to be Dance Company in residence at the Octagon Theatre, one Yeovil dancer has been selected to be a National Youth Dance Ambassador with Youth Dance England.

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 are a delivery agency, providing music provision in Pupil Referral Units, on behalf of Sound Foundation Somerset, the county's service for music in education.

Somerset Art Works:

SAW 2014 – Somerset Open Studios Event:

The SAW Open Studios festival took place between 20th September to 5th October 2014, attracting visitors into the county and generating sales for small, independent businesses and additional custom for local services. In our district 36 venues took part; they received over 18,000 visits, generating more than £100,000 worth of sales for local artists. Data collected for direct and indirect spend at local facilities indicates that visitors spent on average £68.79 during Art Weeks.

Each year SAW produces an education pack to encourage schools to view Somerset Art Weeks as a fantastic resource right on their doorstep. There are many ways for schools to get involved and discover opportunities for inspiring creativity and learning outside the classroom. The pack includes: advice on visiting venues, organising tours, engaging with artists, workshops, setting homework activities and a range of activity resources.

Somerset Art Works was commissioned by SSDC Countryside team to create a temporary arts installation in Yeovil Town centre to investigate the kind of activities local people would like to see in the country park. As a result a successful application was made to the Arts Council England for a three year programme in Yeovil Country Park. Each year an artist will be engaged to lead a programme of participatory arts with local groups that have been hitherto under-represented in visiting the park.

During the first commission artist, Deborah Westmancoat has worked with Fairmead School, a group supported by RAISE (Racial Awareness, Inclusion and Support in Education) and with families who have disabled children on the theme of water. Many of the children and families had not explored the park before and were delighted with what it has to offer. An exhibition of the work will be shown during Art Weeks 2015 in the Octagon Gallery. As a result of the project, Fairmead will engage Deborah to deliver a further programme of art sessions in the school next year.

Momentum is the theme of Somerset Art Works' creative programme between 2015 – 2017. Local artist, Simon Lee Dicker, based in West Coker has received a bursary from SAW for a six month residency at Dawes Twineworks, where he will creatively explore the heritage and process of rope making. This compliments a programme of exhibitions and events at the artist's studio, OSR Project Space in West Coker.

Somerset Film

Somerset Film provides support for local community groups and individuals, professional and amateur, in the use of digital media.

In 2014 they worked with the Arts and Entertainment Service, the 'iSNAP' phone/tablet photographic competition and exhibition at the Octagon Theatre. The project provided an opportunity for the community to submit their photographs to an online gallery and winning entries featured in the Octagon showcase. Alongside the open competition they delivered phone/tablet photographic workshops in schools in South Somerset.

During the summer of 2014 Somerset Film created a Pop-up Engine Room in the Quedam Shopping Centre, offering a week of activities including drop in, screening, animation workshop and film in a day workshop. They also showcased work generated through the digital training sessions and work by other artists in the unused retail units.

Their main base at the Engine Room in Bridgwater currently offers the BFI Film Academy – a programme of master-classes, screenings and filmmaking for 16 – 19 year olds with bursaries and travel support to help young people access the facilities.

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.

"Golden Oldies" continues singing sessions for elderly people in the Milford area of Yeovil and has now extended to two further sites in the district. As part of the WW1 commemorations, Goldies from Yeovil visited Holy Trinity School. As part of an HLF funded project, the Golden Oldies organisation developed a project where people of both generations would come together to sing songs of the First World War.

Working with local performers, arts enthusiasts, Yeovil College and Yeovil Town Council we have encouraged singing in the town centre by helping to develop Yeovil's "Buskfest," providing entertainment for the annual Gardeners' Fair, raising money for local charities and showcasing local talent.

In addition to supporting the visual artist programme in Yeovil Country Park, we have been working with our colleagues from the Countryside Team on a number of projects. Armed Forces Day was celebrated with a show of flags in the park, created in a community workshop that we helped to co-ordinate. Plays in the Park, brought together playwright and producer Nick White, the Yeovil Writers Group and students from Yeovil College in a

promenade piece performed in the park in July. We continue to work with the team on a commission of 12 sculptural pieces that will be created over the next two years and installed throughout the length of the country parks in Yeovil.

We were happy to support Nick's theatre company with a small grant to support their tour of "Giants", an original piece of theatre inspired by and performed at Yeovil Town Football Club.

Eastville Project Space is a new contemporary art space in the Newtown area of Yeovil. We have supported a successful application to the Arts Council England for a programme of artist residencies, talks and publications. The first talk by photographer and film maker, Maria Mochnacz was enjoyed by an audience of more than 50 people; digital artist Gavin Morris is their first artist in residence.

2014 saw the revival of the ever popular Well Dressing event in Ninesprings. Responding to requests from the local community, the Arts Service worked with Countryside Rangers and Friends of Yeovil Country Park to adorn the springs and pools in the Valley Garden. The public were invited to enjoy the site by candlelight, with music provided by our wandering minstrel.

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. To complement this year's panto, we produced our own exhibition that traced scenes from our pantomimes in photographs.

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).
- 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 who also undertake 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.

It has an annual turnover of £1.8m and has the lowest net revenue subsidy of any theatre in the South West of England. Subsidised by South Somerset District Council by £296,469 that equates to £1.87 per year, per person or 7p 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 18 month 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 welcoming approximate 190,000 people throughout the year. Here are some of the key points:

- Continued development of programme. Highlights included Paul Carrack, Richard Alton Dance Company, The Grand State Opera of Belarus, Jasper Carrott, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Ruby Wax, Joan Armatrading, Kate Rusby, Al Murry, Show of Hands, Seth Lakeman, Barbara Dickson, Nicola Benedetti, Germain Greer, Alan Davies, Paul Merton, Julian Lloyd Webber, Jack Dee, Pasha Kovalev, Tim Vine and Only Men Aloud. The season also saw the return of our big talent competition – Let Me Entertain You with BBC Somerset's Emma Britton on the judging panel.
- 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, Motiv8 Production, Yeovil Musical Theatre Company, Castaways Theatre Group, Yeovil Amateur Pantomime Society, Yeovil Youth Theatre, Yeovil Floral Society, Salvation Army and many more.
- In November we presented the third Yeovil Literary Festival in partnership with Waterstones, Yeovil Library and Yeovil Community Arts Association. Our third festival welcomed an impressive line-up including Shirley Williams, Polly Toynbee, Samuel West, Katherine Ryan, Jonathan Dibleby, Michael Portillo and David Mitchell and attracted national press coverage including the 'Top Pick' within The Independent and 'I' newspapers. Our next festival is being planned for October/November.
- For the fourth 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 new season has been well received with performances from The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, Pam Ayres, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Russell Watson, Rydian, Milton Jones and the national tour of 'The Mousetrap' all proving popular.

| | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 | 2013-14 | 2014-15 |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of Events | 239 | 239 | 244 | 235 | 242 | 260 |
| Attendance | 77,316 | 85,358 | 93,519 | 90,149 | 101,634 | 115,042 |
| Capacity for SSDC Promoted Events | 59% | 58% | 60% | 62% | 68% | 78% |

- Jack and the Beanstalk became our most successful pantomime ever! The production sold more tickets than any other pantomime in our history and received rave reviews. Over 25,000 people saw the pantomime with Box Office income up 6% on the previous year. The production played 49 performances. For Christmas 2015 we are presenting Sleeping Beauty and ticket sales are currently ahead of this point last year.
- Our two-year dance development project which received Arts Council England funding of £77K has been successfully delivered and we are currently developing a follow on project. We received our first funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund of £37K for a project that celebrates the 40th anniversary of The Octagon and will create an archive for theatre in Yeovil. We received a £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, a monthly column for the Western Daily Press and regular appearance on BBC Somerset.
- We have continued to develop our Social Networking sites – over 5,600 Facebook users and 3,200 followers on Twitter.
- The Octagon Academy was launched in 2010. We now have 18 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 3rd Age, Castaways Theatre Group, Somerset Siders (retired Tesco employees) and Helen Laxton School of Dance.

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