

Area West Committee – 19th May 2010

7. 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 West.

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 West, which is supported and initiated by the Service and the development of the Octagon Theatre, which attracts audiences from across South Somerset and beyond.

Recommendations

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

- (1) suggestions to improve service delivery;
- (2) potential projects it wishes to see incorporated into the 2010-11 service planning process.

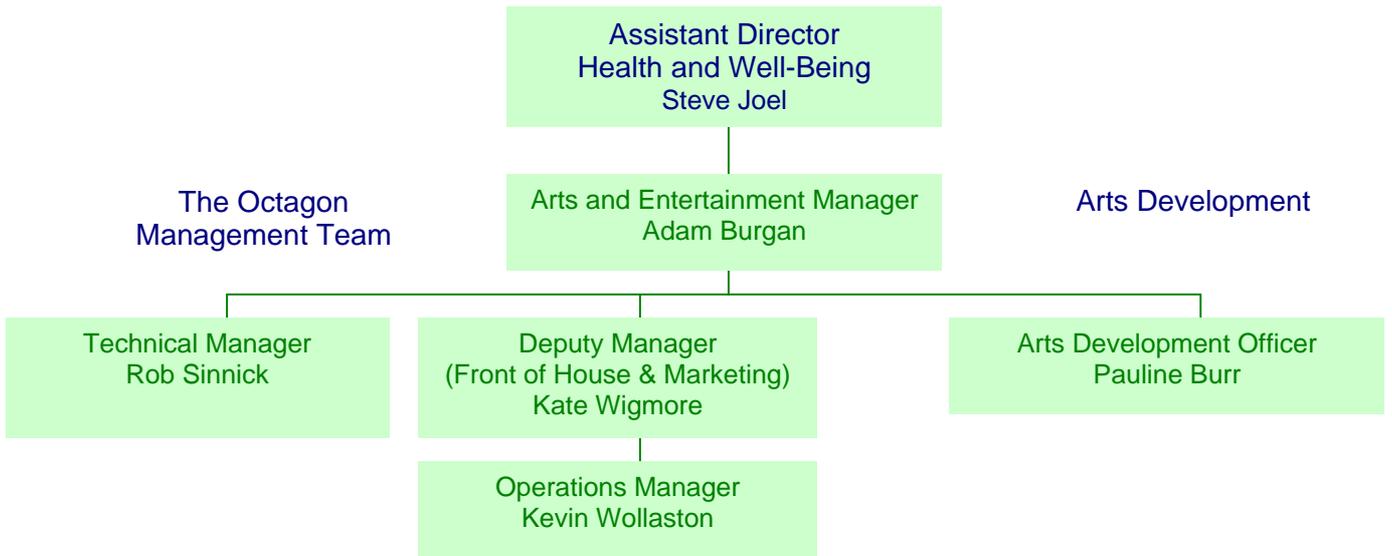
Background

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 has come through the joining of the Octagon Theatre with Arts Development as a result of the changes in the management structure of SSDC. What was Sports, Arts and Leisure is now part of Health and Well-Being under Assistant Director, Steve Joel. The new structure will provide a more cohesive approach to developing and promoting the arts in South Somerset and will develop the Octagon as a 'cultural hub' for the District. The Arts Development Office is now based at the Octagon and this will allow a more co-ordinated approach to delivering arts activities across South Somerset.

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. In partnership with the other districts and county council, these organisations receive core funding through a shared service level agreement. Some of them also receive ongoing funding from the Arts Council (South West); they use this as a basis to maintain their ongoing stability and attract additional funding from grants and direct payment for services to carry out their projects.

These organisations include:

Take Art:

Take Art is an arts development agency serving Somerset. It is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Its purpose is to promote performance and participation in the arts in Somerset. Its arts development programme is delivered through its five core services: -

- **Dance:** Take Art has formulated a 3 Year Strategy for Dance, which provides opportunities for artists, participants, audiences and other agencies.
- **Live:** This scheme forms a partnership with village hall promoters to bring high quality professional arts events to rural communities.
- **Start:** A popular and successful participatory arts project across Somerset where local artists go into nurseries and playgroups to stimulate the creative imagination of small children.
- **Theatre:** The development of a theatre programme for Somerset based on the priorities identified within the Somerset Theatre Locality plan, which places emphasis on opportunities for emerging theatre practitioners within the county.

They are based in South Somerset, at Flax Drayton.

- The Take Art Live, Village Performance Scheme, brings top quality live arts and performances into around 25 rural villages across the district each year. In Area West this has included performances in Chaffcombe, Clapton, Hinton St George, Misterton, Tatworth, Winsham and the town of Ilminster.

- Children attending the children's centre in Crewkerne and the preschool in Misterton have taken part in creative activities as part of Take Art's work with young children as part of the START and Big Bang initiatives.
- The two and a half year project "Step Change" has brought dance to communities across Somerset and was subject for a research programme around the health benefit of dance as a physical activity. People of all ages and abilities have taken part in workshops and ongoing sessions, but specific target areas included teenagers, people in the 50plus age range and adults with learning disabilities. Amongst other participants students from Holyrood and Wadham schools have taken part and an adult group was established in East Chinnock.
- Take Art co-ordinated the biennial event "Made in Somerset" at the Merlin Theatre in Frome to showcase the work of artists and performers from across the county.

Actiontrack:

Actiontrack is a charity and works collaboratively to deliver opportunities for individuals and groups to access practical involvement in music, drama, dance and the visual arts. The organisation develops and delivers wholly accessible projects, predominantly with children and young people and often with marginalised groups. They are based in South Somerset, at Flax Drayton.

Over the past two years, Actiontrack have delivered a range of creative activities to schoolchildren in South Somerset. They have a long-standing relationship with the schools of the CHICS partnership, so those children in Areas West and North have benefited particularly. From September 2008 they delivered 28 taster workshops in dance, drama, music and creative writing to almost 1100 children aged between 4 and 18 from first, primary, middle and secondary schools. Schools in Area West include: Ashill Primary, Ashlands First, Avishayes Greenfyld First, Haselbury Plucknett First, Hinton St George First, Holyrood Community, Maiden Beech Middle Merriott First Neroche Primary, Swanmead Middle Tatworth Primary, West Chinnock Primary and Winsham Primary.

The Actiontrack Artist In Residence Projects, lasting between one and three days, engaged over 500 children in South Somerset schools, including:

- A school mural at Haselbury Plucknett to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the school
- Drama showbuilds at Maiden Beech, Swanmead and Wadham,
- Music making and composition at Merriott
- Visual arts workshops at Hinton St George
- Animation master class at West Chinnock!

Actiontrack also developed and supported The Gifted and Talented Showbuild and Tour. For 5 days gifted and talented students from Holyrood, Maiden Beech, Swanmead and Wadham Schools came together to create a musical theatre piece designed for a younger audience. After performing the show to an audience of family friends at the end of the half term week, the group came together again to perform to audiences of primary school children. Children and staff from Ashlands visited St Bartholomews for one performance whilst Avishayes visited Tatworth Primary for their performance. The short tour was finished with a final performance for Tintinhull Primary School.

Somerset Art Works:

Somerset Art Works (SAW) is a non-profit making organisation promoting the Visual Arts and creating opportunities for Visual Artists and Makers in Somerset through advocacy, promotion and development. It is a membership organisation for practicing artists, initiating and managing a range of events, projects and opportunities throughout the county. The well known Somerset Art Weeks event now runs annually with an alternating focus.

In 2009, under the new branding of Somerset Art Works, the organisation changed format by holding its first “Group Exhibitions and Events” fortnight. It had moved from a biennial to an annual event in 2008, alternating the open studios with this new showcase format. Well over 450 artists took part in over 100 venues across the county; in South Somerset there were over 10,000 visits recorded with sales of over £37,000, a projection shows an estimation of actual visits and sales to be in the region of almost 19,000 visits and £66,000 sales in this district alone. Of the 28 venues in South Somerset, 8 were in Area West, showing work of 57 local artists.

Just over a year ago, Somerset Art Works moved into their new base in the Langport Town Hall, creating a county hub for artists, offering training and networking opportunities.

In addition to their events, training and support for local artists, SAW continues to develop projects within community settings. Supported by SSDC funding, over 170 school children from local schools, including some from Neroche Primary, joined artists along the River Parrett Trail, where they used new technologies to locate their position and recorded their creative work on the River Parrett Revisited website.

Local artist, Becky Buchanan, was supported by SAW to work with pupils from Holyrood School to create work for a shop window in the high street in Chard.

As a new initiative, SAW has created a post-graduate internship programme for a young emerging artist to join the organisation on a short-term contract to give them work-based experience. Two young artists from South Somerset have been the first to receive bursaries from the scheme.

They are developing their curatorial services element of the organisation and have recently curated an exhibition of local artists’ work at the Meeting House in Ilminster.

SPAEDA

SPAEDA is a countywide arts education agency that provides information, training, advocacy and support for the development of arts education. Its key aims are to:

- Increase access for young people to high quality participatory arts events both in and out of school
- Increase the capacity of teachers, youth and community leaders, arts organisations and artists to deliver quality arts education experiences
- Raise awareness of the value of the arts in education

Based at the Great Bow Wharf, in Langport, Somerset Partnership for Arts in Education Development Agency (SPAEDA) provides information, training and support for artists in educational settings. Each school in Somerset receives a termly arts education magazine and has access to a database of artists who are CRB cleared and

experienced in working with children; SPAEDA also provides a portfolio of 1 day projects for schools to use.

SPAEDA supports schools to achieve the Arts Council initiative Artsmark which provides a benchmark for arts provision. They also provide training and support for the young people's Arts Award Scheme. At Holyrood School the Arts Award is run as a 2 hour weekly, after school club, with all students aiming to achieve a gold or silver award. In September 2009 they piloted a focussed year 11 class to do their Gold Awards, as all the students had completed GCSE textiles in year 10, a year earlier than usual. Thanks to funding from South Somerset District Council, SPAEDA were able to award a bursary to assist with the costs of putting on a fashion show with these students. This was part of a plan to provide Chard young people with 'What next...?' options and motivate them further particularly through career opportunities in the Arts.

The students visited some of the London galleries and worked with ex-students who had followed degree courses in fashion and textiles since leaving Holyrood; and as part of the leadership element of their award they in turn passed their skills onto younger students.

Holyrood has established cultural links to communities in India, in a project running since 1986. It aims to give the participants the opportunity to visit India, a culture and environment very different from their own and to establish lasting links with communities and individual in a very different part of the world. As part of a partnership, students in India initially produced traditional designs for the Chard students to develop into textiles. South Somerset funding enabled them to contract Dawn Dupree, a professional screen print artist to work with our young people for 2 days to develop a range of 'bags for life'. These were then printed by students at Holyrood and sold in aid of the India project. As a result, 6 students and 3 staff visited Holyrood from Chennai, India.

Somerset Film

The Engine Room is Somerset's accessible community media centre and the base for the services of registered charity Somerset Film Ltd. From the Engine Room, Somerset Film enables and undertakes moving image projects across Somerset and the South West. They are committed to access and innovation as the core principles of their operation.

Core activities include:

- Drop-in access to equipment and expertise
- Courses and seminars
- Production and training opportunities and facilities
- Advice and information
- Project and outreach work

Somerset Film operates from the Engine Room in Bridgwater where they offer advice, support, training and information to a wide range of film and digital media makers, from absolute beginners to high-level professionals. They deliver outreach project work to community groups across the county and work on behalf of countywide agencies such as the NHS and Social Services; recent work has included films on the Mental Health Act, Oral Hygiene and Transition from Hospital to Community Care.

With South Somerset based Trilith Video Company they have recently secured funding to source and collect archive film of the county and to train local people as community chroniclers, to capture footage for the future.

Family Connections is a brand new, community initiative from Somerset Film supported by The Engine Room with funding from the Big Lottery. The initiative aims to deliver a series of workshops and outreach projects in each of 5 districts in Somerset and offer 400 families the opportunity to have fun and learn together using film, photography and digital media.

South Somerset Arts Directory: An audit of voluntary groups and clubs was carried out and circulated in print and on the SSDC website. It provides a valuable resource in advertising the range of activities available within the community.

Alice Through the Looking Glass: Quantum Theatre returned to Ilminster in July to stage this performance at Greenfylde School.

Borderdance: Artist Ella Huhne worked with professional dancers to offer a series of weekly sessions for people to explore creative/contemporary dance and the visual arts. The sessions, delivered at Holyrood School, were open to all ages and abilities. The project culminated in two performances at Castle Neroche as part of the Somerset Art Weeks event 2009.

During the next 6 months, the service will be working on:

SomerZest: A new initiative held at the Octagon Theatre will be the SomerZest contemporary arts and crafts markets. Held four times a year, they will provide a showcase event for artists, craftsmen and food producers from across the region. The first event will be held on the 27th and 28th August and the second on 4th December 2010.

South Somerset Arts Directory: The first edition of the Arts Directory was well received by the community but will need to be refreshed within the next year. The production of the directory has generated a database of community groups with an interest in the arts; the arts service is looking to use this to set up an e-bulletin service to pass on information to the local community arts groups.

Somerset Song Project: Initiated by the Octagon, this countywide project will engage a number of high calibre folk artists in creating a range of new songs which will be performed on a short tour and promoted on a CD. Funding permitting, we also hope to develop a schools engagement element to the project with Folk South West.

Barrington House: The National Trust has recently started closer collaborative working with the Arts Council. Barrington House has been chosen as a venue where artists will be engaged to explore how a National Trust property can attract new audiences. SSDC Arts sits on the steering group for this project.

Space from Waste: Working with the schools in the Huish Schools federation, Space from Waste gives children from the 14 schools the chance to make creative dens from recycled materials.

Somerset Art Weeks 2010: The open studios event will run from 18th September until 3rd October.

FLUX 2010: The Somerset Arts and Disability Festival running in various venues across Somerset in May 2010. This is arranged by the Disability Arts Co-ordinator for Somerset, Catherine Beedell, a post supported by the Somerset Arts Officers Group.

Somerset Arts Review: The local authorities, the Arts Council England (SW) and a number of funded and voluntary arts organisations, are currently undertaking a review of arts provision in Somerset. While funding is in place to continue the core work of the existing portfolio of arts organisations, it is possible that there will be a different model of practice in the next financial year.

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 performances per annum (20% local organisations / 80% professional performance companies).
- CRE8ive Arts – The Octagon's visual art exhibition programme.
- CRE8ive Writing – The Octagon's literary section.
- The Johnson Studio – The Octagon's rehearsal studio, which 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 £1.2m and has the lowest net revenue subsidy of any theatre in the South West of England.

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. *This data was gathered by the previous Theatre Manager. A Postcode Analysis is planned to be completed this Summer which will detail more accurately where the Octagon audience comes from.*

The mailing list contains 17,000 households and 35,000 Preview brochures are distributed to drive ticket sales every quarter. 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 150,000 people throughout the year. 2009 saw many changes at the Octagon including a change of manager with the departure of Grant Sellen and the appointment of Adam Burgan as Arts & Entertainment Manager. Here are some of the key points:

- Development of new programme, which has seen advance sales for the Summer 2010 Season exceeding expectation selling three times the value and number of tickets against the same period for the previous year. The Spring/Summer Programme features Lesley Garrett, Hayley Westenra, Barbara Dickson, Tony Benn, Fron Male Voice Choir, Russian Ice Stars, Moscow State Circus to name but a few.
- Ticket sales £717,652, secondary spend £166,360
- Building work was completed on the Scene Dock and the installation of electric winches was delivered on time and on budget.
- Staff turnover for 2009/10 was high and the following people were successfully recruited: Adam Burgan (Arts & Entertainment Manager), Kevin Wollaston (Operations Manager), Emma Meecham (Marketing & Sales Team Leader), Louise Field (Relief Front of House Manager). The Octagon also suffered with two key members on sick leave for extended periods. During these difficult periods the Octagon staff pulled together and the service to our customers was not disrupted.
- The Octagon Café Bar menu was reviewed and now boasts local produce and 'home cooking'.
- This year's pantomime, Dick Whittington, was seen by 12,716 people. Ticket sales for next year's pantomime - Peter Pan – are significantly up against this time last year.
- £8.5k secured from Area South Community Forum to establish Arts & Craft Markets (first scheduled for August 2010) and three Community Choirs.

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*