

Arts Engagement & Outreach Service Proposal

This proposal is linked to the proposed capital development of The Octagon Theatre, the funding generated by the redeveloped theatre and new facilities in the development are imperative to the proposals laid out here for a successful arts engagement and outreach service to be created.

Background

The Arts Development Service is based at The Octagon Theatre with an annual budget of £57,180 (2020/21). The majority of the budget is used to support one part-time member of staff and to make annual grants (£19,000) to four key arts organisations who deliver work across South Somerset – Take Art, Somerset Art Works (SAW), Somerset Film and Actiontrack. The work delivered by these organisations include the Village Performance Scheme (Take Art) and Somerset Arts Weeks (SAW). The remaining resources are used to support arts projects and activities around the district with recent recipients including Wassail Theatre Company, OD Arts Festival and artists who live and work in the district. With recent appointments to the service this has expanded to take on outreach projects that were previously led by the Arts and Entertainment Venues Manager. This includes funding from Arts Council England and Yarlington Housing Group to support the dance based ‘Move To Improve’ project (£55K) and led the applications for the Cultural Recovery funds with £333K awarded from Arts Council England. The service co-ordinates the Octagon Theatre participatory programme – The Octagon Academy – that hosts 17 classes per week, co-ordinates community shows like SHiNE and A Festival of Song. The service also programmes the visual arts exhibitions at The Octagon Theatre and provides advice and support for artists and arts organisations in the district.

Report

The redevelopment and extension of The Octagon Theatre offers the opportunity to develop the Arts Engagement and Outreach service with increased funding and improved facilities that will:

- Deliver an innovative and creative programme of arts engagement and outreach work that will focus on helping to achieve SSDC’s priorities as laid out in the Council plan
- Support the business plan and development of audiences at the redeveloped Octagon Theatre
- Attract additional funding and investment into the district from trusts, foundations and bodies including the Arts Council
- Raise the profile of arts in South Somerset and offer increased opportunities for artists working in the district and for residents to engage regularly with arts activity benefiting from an improving quality of life

An innovative programme of Arts Engagement and Outreach work would be an innovative way help to address SSDC priority areas:

- High rates of children growing up in poverty and poor social mobility
- Large numbers of struggling families
- Growing numbers of older people who are increasingly living in poor health

- The climate emergency
- Homelessness and the lack of genuinely affordable housing
- The economy including productivity, skills and wage levels

Projects and initiatives based in the creative arts that focus on raising aspirations, building self-confidence, improving mental and physical well-being, developing skills and supporting community cohesion will help us support our communities and develop audiences for events at the theatre. We will seek additional funding from trusts, foundations and other sources using our core and project funding from SSDC to leverage external funding. We will look to make our Arts Engagement and Outreach Service an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation receiving annual funding on the three year basis. The NPO goals from ACE align very well with the priorities for SSDC and the aspirations of the organisation.

ACE NPO Goals 2018-2022:

Goal 1: Excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries

Goal 2: Everyone has the opportunity to experience and be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries

Goal 3: The arts, museums and libraries are resilient and environmentally sustainable

Goal 4: The leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled

Goal 5: Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries

With the commitment to redevelop the Octagon Theatre, accompanying business and need for capital funding from ACE to support the project, we will develop an Arts Engagement and Outreach Strategy with a 10 year business plan that includes a revised staffing structure and delivery plan. It is anticipated that the Arts Engagement and Outreach Service budget would increase to £150,000 per year that would be paid for by increased income generated by The Octagon Theatre. It is also projected that as audiences/users and income develops the theatre will be generating enough income that it will be able to invest further income into the Arts Engagement and Outreach Service to deliver additional projects and be used as 'seed funding' to attract additional investment. The amount of money available for these projects will depend on the financial performance of the theatre and this approach will limit financial risk to the authority. With the increased core funding and ambitious plans in place we would be applying to become an NPO for the Arts Council and our application would be in the region of £125,000 per year to support our core programme.

Core activity we are already exploring as part of this plan would include:

- Supporting artists and arts activity across the district by providing advice, support and grant funding to Arts Organisation(s) who deliver work that meets our objectives.
- To provide advocacy, support and leadership for the arts in South Somerset
- Deliver an innovative and creative programme of arts engagement and outreach work that ties in with the programme of events taking place at The Octagon Theatre, Westlands

Entertainment Venue and other events taking place across the district that supports audience growth and the understanding and appreciation of the arts.

- Support artists, graduates and those seeking a career in the creative arts with advice, support and networking opportunities.
- Raise the profile of arts in South Somerset and offer increased opportunities for artists working in the district and for residents to engage regularly with arts activity benefiting from an improving quality of life
- Developing our relationship with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (BSO) to commit to three public concerts per year when the redeveloped Octagon Theatre opens. An education project giving schools access to specially curated concerts to introduce children to a live orchestra.
- Develop a programme linked to Yeovil District Hospital (YDH) and the Somerset NHS Foundation as part of an 'arts on prescription' initiative, to improve the health and wellbeing of residents across South Somerset, and to reduce hospital admission rates e.g. falls prevention
- Building on the success of our Octagon Academy we would like to expand the range of classes providing new opportunities for participants and employment for teachers. We would like to expand our range of music, dance and drama classes with satellite classes setup across the district.
- Build on the success of our 'Move To Improve' Dance Development projects to develop audiences and appreciation for dance, provide opportunities for professional dance artists. It is widely acknowledged that dance can reduce loneliness and alleviate depression and anxiety.

To complement our core work would be an exciting and ever changing range of projects centred around the creative arts, using our venues as a creative hub to deliver excellent opportunities across the district and extend to the region.