



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC CULTURE AND ARTS STEERING GROUP

11th January 2021

AN UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE RCT ARTS SERVICES IN SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC 2020

**THE DIRECTOR, PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY
SERVICES, IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE DEPUTY CABINET MEMBER FOR
PROSPERITY & WELL-BEING, COUNCILLOR, RHYS LEWIS**

Author(s):

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update members of the steering group on the progress of the Arts Services in serving our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group:

- 2.1 Note the update within the report.
- 2.2 Consider whether they would like any further information.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the members are updated on the progress of the Arts Service in serving our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 On 17th March 2020 Rhondda Cynon Taf Theatres, the Coliseum Theatre and the Park and Dare Theatre, closed following public health advice and have remained closed to the public.
- 4.2 The programme of live events at RCT Theatres has been rescheduled or cancelled, with the first live event now scheduled for 11th August 2021 at the Park and Dare Theatre – Francis Rossi: I Talk Too Much and at the Coliseum Theatre on 10th September 2021 – The 80s Live.

- 4.3 The Take pART participatory programme at the theatres has also been postponed until further notice; however, workshop delivery transferred to an online platform and thereafter, when permitted and following strict government guidelines, workshops were held in community venues.
- 4.5 The Arts and Creative Industries Team with its commissioned Youth Arts and SONIG Youth Music Industry programmes, and the externally funded Forte project, quickly transferred provision online in order to continue to deliver a service that met the needs of young people.
- 4.6 The Arts Service has developed staff skills and responded to needs to provide an online offer for audiences and participants to continue to be creatively active, supporting with home schooling, positive mental health and wellbeing, and providing a connection for many.

5 SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES DURING THE PANDEMIC

5.1 FRONTLINE COVID-19 RESPONSE

- 5.1.1 First and foremost, Arts Service staff were deployed to support priority services, this included the Community Resilience Centres, supporting residents who were shielding, and later, Test, Track and Protect and Mass Testing.
- 5.1.2 50% of the Senior Management Team were redeployed to Test, Track and Protect, playing a key role in establishing this new service within Cwm Taf Morgannwg.
- 5.1.3 Members of the Wider Management Team were deployed to assist the Test, Track and Protect Service. At present, 1 member of staff is seconded into a Contact Tracer role, and 2 members of staff continue to provide support to the Test, Track and Protect Team and, as required, to the Mass Testing provision.
- 5.1.4 Members of the Theatre Technician Team and Sales and Box Office Team continue to assist in providing support for our communities at the Community Resilience Centres and on an individual basis, for example, dog walking for a shielding resident.
- 5.1.5 Casual members of staff are also supporting the Mass Testing provision, as required.
- 5.1.6 All service staff understand the urgency and pressures to respond to our communities needs at this challenging time and all have been prepared to be deployed to support in the Council's response to the pandemic.

5.2 CREATIVE PROVISION – RCT THEATRES

5.2.1 Throughout the pandemic RCT Theatres has continued to offer creative opportunities that encourage residents of all ages to be creatively active, thus supporting their positive health and wellbeing at such a difficult and challenging time for many.

5.2.2 As an Arts Council of Wales Arts Portfolio Wales client, RCT Theatres have been able to provide a free programme of arts events and activities online from April to December 2020:

Online Activity	Target Audience	Platform
Singalong with Steve Preston in association with the Hapi Project	Families Older People	Facebook
Welsh language singing and movement activities with Ffa La La	Families with young children	Facebook
Craft and Storytime with Artists in Residence Flossy and Boo	Families	Facebook YouTube Rhondda Radio Featured on Radio Wales
'Phyl and Ieuan on....' monthly programme on theatre topics with Associate Artists Phyl Harries and Ieuan Rhys	Older People	Facebook YouTube
Take pART participatory programmes Dimensions Dance workshops	Children and Young People	Facebook Zoom
Welsh language 'Sgwigs' project with Leeway productions	Families	Facebook Zoom
Lee's Big Night In' concert with Associate Artist Lee Gilbert	Families Adults and Older People	Facebook YouTube Rhondda Radio
'Come Chat with Me' magazine show with Associate Artist Lee Gilbert	Adults and Older People	Facebook YouTube
A series of Radio Plays with Associate Artists Bale and Thomas, including 'The Nativity – Behind the Curtain' a 4 part mini-series broadcast in December.	Adults and Older People	Facebook Rhondda Radio
Flossy and Boo's bilingual 'Abandoned Base Camp'	Children, young people and their Families	Facebook Libraries Service

and 'Festive Adventures' Activity packs		Community organisations
Flossy and Boo's 'Madame Quail's Mysterious Tales' Halloween play	Families	Facebook YouTube
British Sign Language and Sign Supported English co-production with Taking Flight - 'First Three Drops'	Families	Facebook Zoom
Once Upon a Panto – a series of 5 pantomime character's stories, fully accessible with audio description, BSL and captions.	Children, young people and their Families Older People	Facebook YouTube

5.2.3 RCT Theatres' pantomime is a key production within the annual calendar. With theatres' remaining closed a proposal was made to Cabinet to produce an online Christmas offer that would be free and fully accessible with BSL, audio description and captions. With further financial support from the Council, 'Once Upon a Panto' – a series of 5 stories performed by traditional pantomime characters, were filmed at Orchard Studios, adhering to strict workplace guidance, and release online via the RCT Theatre's YouTube channel from 20th December – 24th December 2020.

5.2.4 The Live! Brochure has not been produced this year and our offer has instead been promoted via social media platforms and our community partner organisations.

5.2.5 The Coliseum Theatre and Park and Dare Theatre Facebook pages have exceeded 347,356 reaches combined. By reach we mean the number of people who have viewed posts. We are encouraged by this level of engagement having not utilised this platform previously in this manner.

5.3 CREATIVE ACTIVITY – ARTS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES TEAM

5.3.1 Throughout the pandemic the Arts and Creative Industries Team have continued to offer opportunities for children and young people via the Families First commissioned Youth Arts and SONIG Youth Music Industries programmes, Forte (funded by the Arts Council of Wales and the PRS Foundation), and Beacons (funded by Arts Council of Wales and Welsh Government's Creative Wales).

5.3.2 Many young people have felt disconnected from their peers during this challenging year. Feedback received from participants noted that they welcomed the opportunities to participate. The pandemic has been a real interruption to the social and creative journeys of many young people and we recognise that providing these opportunities supports their resilience.

5.3.3 Fortitude 2020:

- Transferred online immediately following lockdown in March with 1:1 mentoring and support for participants. An online sharing took place in October 2020 followed by a Christmas Concert on Facebook Live bringing together Fortitude participants from the last five years in December 2020.
- The intimate online events gave extremely moving insights into the impact that the course has had on the lives of some of the participants. One of the young people following 1:1 mentoring repaired family relationships and enrolled for a college course.

5.3.4 Young Promoters Network

- With no live events to support, participants were offered masterclasses online with industry professionals.
- Having succeeded in gaining full-time employment at Coleg y Cymoedd, the departure of the projects lead created opportunity for two young promoters to gain paid experience within the sector.
- To meet participant needs whilst adhering to government guidance, a new scheme has been developed to provide a loanable recording kit to individuals for creating content to share online.

5.3.5 Youth Service Support

- Identified creative practitioners for the provision of arts and creative industries activity at the key worker childcare hubs during the Summer school holidays.
- Supported the Poppy Art Workshops and Competition for Remembrance 2020.
- Potential for pathways for young people accessing Youth Service provision who are interested in the visual arts have been identified.

5.3.6 Hot Jam Rock School

- An online summer school for young people aged 8 and over to develop instrumental and songwriting skills.

5.3.7 Dance Activity

- Programme of online Youth Dance workshops provided by Afon Dance during Summer 2020 for young people aged 16 and over
- An online Performing Arts Summer School provided by Artis Community and Ransack Dance Company for ages 8 to 18 years old

5.3.8 Children's Service Support:

- The provision of craft packs created by Craft at Heart for children at risk of and looked after.
- Keyworkers observed that the activity enabled a different and positive focus for their engagement with at risk young people and, in turn, some young people's engagement with their families improved.

5.3.9 Visual Arts

- The Search the Rainbow Graffiti Challenge and the Illustration Challenge were set for young people, also linking to schools.
- Bespoke activity boxes were provided for young people without resources at home to enable them to participate.

5.3.10 Creative Writing

- A series of Creative Writing sessions with hip hop and poetry artist Rufus Mufasa launched via Zoom in December 2020 for young people aged 11 to 17 years old.

5.3.11 Libraries Service Support

- The Engaging Libraries Fake News project, In collaboration with Liverpool University and funded by Carnegie UK, is being delivered by the Library and Arts Services' Teams.
- Following an open call, artist/researcher and filmmaker duo Mud and Thunder have been commissioned to engage with our communities and capture their experiences of fake news.

5.4 ARTS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES SECTOR SUPPORT

5.4.1 Culture Recovery Fund Freelancer Funding

- This fund was administered by the Arts Service, with the support of ICT, Corporate Communications and Finance, on behalf of Welsh Government's Creative Wales department.
- Delivered across three phases from October to December, the Arts Service assessed 214 applications from freelancers based with RCT
- 181 applicants were eligible and received a grant of £2,500 each.
- One applicant noted:
 - “I'm absolutely over the moon to have been offered a Freelancer Fund Grant. After months of being worried if I could sustain myself, this grant will mean that I can continue to stay in the field of work that I've trained in and professionally worked in for 6 years. Stories, entertainment and the arts is even more important now than it was before and all of these elements are created by freelancers.”
- Another captured the uncertainty to a long-standing career:
 - “The grant means a safety net for a short while. A chance to consolidate and plan for what seems to be an uncertain future in my chosen profession of 36 years.”

5.4.2 The Arts Service has provided employment to in excess of 100 freelancers this financial year to date, many of whom are RCT residents.

6 ARTS SERVICE CHALLENGES

- 6.1 Due to the RCT Theatres box office system only being available at the theatres, and limited access for staff throughout the pandemic, refunds and transfers for ticket holders are slow to be processed.
- 6.2 The implementation of the new cloud-based box office system – ProVenue – has been delayed due to the pandemic.
- 6.3 Capital works at the theatres have also been delayed, including the completion of Stiwdio 1 and the redevelopment of the gentlemen's toilets on the ground floor at the Coliseum Theatre.

- 6.4 With no certain date as to the reopening of theatres, the live event and participation programme continues to be under-review.
- 6.5 An advantage to the enforced closure of the theatres is that the works listed above can be completed without disrupting service delivery; however, with pressures faced by support services such as Corporate Estates and ICT as this time, this is a challenge.
- 6.6 With staff salaries and building costs continuing to be paid and no income from ticket sales and secondary spend generated this financial year to date, and unlikely to be generated at all, the Council was very grateful to have a successful application to the Arts Council of Wales' Culture Recovery Fund and receive a grant of £458k.
- 6.7 With the Arts Council of Wales Lottery Scheme temporarily closed, the Forte Project sourced alternative funding to continue to provide opportunities for young artists' development and launch Forte 6. Successful applications to the Arts Council of Wales' Culture Recovery Fund for £13k and a further £19k from the PRS Foundation has ensured its continued delivery until May 2021.

7 CONTINUING TO SERVE OUR COMMUNITIES IN 2021

- 7.1 As a public arts service we need to consider the impact of Covid on our staff, communities and the creative sector. As such, 2021 will be a year in which we pause to review what and how we do things, and ensure that the service meets identified needs.
- 7.2 Our focus will be on having conversations with staff, other Council services, the third sector, our communities and creatives to identify needs and provide a service that is relevant based on our values of:
- Creativity – recognising, valuing and unleashing the creativity of our communities
 - Rootedness – understanding our place and being a part of our communities
 - Calon – welcoming to all sectors of our communities
 - Connectedness – joining the dots and sharing our networks
 - Joy – celebrating and improving the quality of life with our communities
- 7.3 In essence, we will not be co-producing or developing new projects during 2021 whilst we create capacity to support and develop with our communities through creative conversations.
- 7.4 As stated in the Arts Council of Wales' 'Re-setting the dial: Responding to Covid-19' (November 2020):

“Areas of Wales blighted by poverty and economic disadvantage have been harshly affected by Covid-19. And the heightened attention in recent months given to the lived experiences of Black Asian Minority Ethnic and People of Colour has filled our newspapers and television screens. No-one can now be unaware of the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 virus on diverse communities and disabled people. But if our culture is the reflection of who we think we are, then the Black Lives Matter and We Shall Not be Removed movements are telling us that we still haven’t recognised that society continues to reinforce discrimination and lack of equality. Entitlement to culture shouldn’t only be for the entitled.”

- 7.5 During 2021, the Arts Service will review its processes and procedures, programme, partnerships and public value to provide a service to our communities that considers fairness and equality to meet our communities’ needs.
- 7.6 Early in 2021 we will be recruiting for an Assistant Creative Producer as one of the chosen hosts for the Weston Jerwood Creative Bursary Fellow scheme, which will be a step-change in our journey to be inclusive and relevant to our communities.
- 7.7 Due to the delayed Welsh Government budget announcement, the Arts Council of Wales are unable to share definitively the revenue funding award to its Arts Portfolio Wales clients for 2021-22 until after their Council has met on 18 Jan.
- 7.8 The Arts Council of Wales Culture Recovery Funding received to for service staff and its theatres as well as the Forte Project is for support to 31st March 2021.
- 7.9 There is no certainty as to when the Arts Council of Wales’ Lottery scheme will reopen to applications.
- 7.10 The Arts Service’s RCT Theatres is currently exploring an application to the Arts Council of Wales’ Connect & Flourish scheme in collaboration with identified partners, particularly focused on support for emerging artists within the Valleys region.
- 7.11 The Youth Arts and SONIG Youth Music Industry programmes commission from Families First is until 31st March 2021. The programme has been commissioned annually providing no certainty to the programmes future.

8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

9 CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

9.1 No consultation exercise has been required.

10 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

10.1 There are no financial implications aligned to the recommendations in this report.

11 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

11.1 There are no legal implications aligned to the recommendations in this report.

12 LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

12.1 The Arts Services offer during the pandemic has enabled us to continue to support the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities.

12.2 Our plans to pause, reflect and review during 2021 will enable us to contribute more effectively to the Council's corporate priorities, by acknowledging our operating context and recognising the impact of Covid-19 on our communities and their subsequent needs.

12.3 Our online provision and our focus going forward will enable us to more effectively contribute to the seven national wellbeing goals, particularly:

- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- A prosperous Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities

12.4 The service provision and way of working is consistent with the sustainable approach promoted by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act through the five ways of working:

- Long-term – understanding our public value and relevance enables us to gain support for a long-term and sustainable arts and creative industries provision within the county borough.

- Prevention – by understanding our community’s needs, concerns, opportunities and aspiration we can provide engagement and participation opportunities that address needs identified as a result of Covid-19.
- Integrated – understanding our public value and relevance will enable us to contribute more effectively to a range of local, regional and national strategic priorities, in an integrated and coherent way.
- Collaboration – understanding our public value and relevance will enable us to identify stakeholders (locally, regionally and nationally), whose values align with ours and with whom we can work in partnership to meet our communities’ needs.
- Involvement – exploring the communities’ needs and exploring how the service can support through creative conversations, co-creation, collaboration and professional networks.

13 CONCLUSION

- 13.1 This report updates members of the Steering Group on the progress of the Arts Services in serving our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 13.2 RCT Theatres have developed an online offer of live events and arts activities for all ages, as well as a partnership to broadcast content to our communities via Rhondda Radio, and the distribution of activity packs via the Council’s Libraries, community organisations and businesses.
- 13.3 The Arts and Creative Industries Team have continued to support children and young people through online provision across a variety of art forms.
- 13.4 Service staff have developed new skills and knowledge in their support of key frontline services and in their development of online provision.
- 13.5 The Arts Service will pause, review and reflect in 2021 to consider the impact of the pandemic on our communities and the sector, in order to establish a way forward that meets identified needs.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET / COUNCIL

DATE

**REPORT OF (DIRECTORATE) IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT
PORTFOLIO HOLDER (CLLR)**

Item:

Background Papers

Background papers should be a List of documents relating to the subject matter of the report which in the officers opinion will:

- a) Disclose any facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the report is based; and
- b) Which have been relied on to a material extent in preparing the report

But does not include published works or those which disclose exempt or confidential information

Officer to contact: