



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL
STRATEGIC CULTURE AND ARTS STEERING GROUP**

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group held on Thursday, 16 November 2023 at 2.00 pm.

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors – The following Councillors were present:

Councillor B Harris (Chair)

Councillor A Crimmings Councillor R Lewis
Councillor J Brencher

Officers in attendance

Ms C O'Neill, Strategic Arts & Culture Manager
Mr A Williams, Theatre Operations and Development Manager
Mr N Kelland, Principal Libraries Officer

8 Welcome and Apology

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and an apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor D. Grehan and Mr A Owen-Hicks, Arts Council of Wales.

9 Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations made in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct.

10 Minutes

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group held on 13th July 2023.

11 External Funding accessed by the Arts Service during 2023/24

The Strategic Arts and Culture Manager provided the Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group with an update on external funding accessed by the Arts Service during 23/24 and for future years in respect of the Arts Council Wales and Levelling Up funding.

The Chair thanked the officer for the informative report and praised the Arts Service for securing funding in excess of £1.28M for the 2023/24 Municipal Year. When questioned about the duration of the grants, the officer advised that all grants detailed within the report, apart from Arts Council for Wales funding and Levelling Up funding were awarded on an annual basis, which provides a level of uncertainty each year.

One Member spoke positive of the Levelling Up fund and commented that it would be a substantial boost for the local areas. Referring to funding made available to the Cardiff Capital Region, the Member queried if there was a monitoring process in place to ensure the funding is allocated fairly throughout the capital region and emphasised the importance of the development of an Arts Quarter in Pontypridd.

The Head of Arts, Culture and Library Services informed the Member that there is an allocation provided to each Local Authority from UK Government and that a plan in respect of how the funding is spent, is then agreed at Cabinet level. In terms of a wider scale, it was explained that officers were engaging in conversations around the creative industries, in terms of increasing and strengthening the skills for working within the sector in RCT whilst working with the Cardiff Capital Region. As an example, the officer spoke of the University of South Wales provision, which was based in Cardiff and emphasised the importance of ensuring the provision reaches into RCT through the higher education provision. The officer also spoke of a recent conversation with the University of South Wales, which was about working better together.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure took the opportunity to congratulate officers on securing the substantial amount of funding, which would be a huge benefit to the residents of RCT. The Cabinet Member was particularly pleased to note that RCT Theatres had received a conditional offer of £153,065 per year for the next 3 years and spoke of the diverse offer available at the theatres.

In terms of Families First funding, the Cabinet Member spoke of the importance of working with young people and building their confidence as a young age. The Cabinet Member was thrilled to hear of young people from RCT, who had engaged with the Fortitude through Music programme, who are now successful on the radio.

The Chair echoed earlier comments and spoke of the vast improvements at the theatres as a result of the Levelling Up funding. The Chair spoke of the South Wales Metro and hoped that the increase in late trains and the establishment of a park and ride would add increase the demand at the theatres and make them more accessible to individuals outside of RCT.

The Chair took the opportunity to inform the Steering Group that the Cardiff School of Art had developed an interest in the history of RCT; and that future exhibitions on the Tonypany riots would be held at Tonypany and Treorchy Libraries. The Chair proudly spoke of the history of RCT and was pleased that it was being recognised outside of the Borough.

The Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group **RESOLVED:**

1. To consider the contents of the report and comment on the information provided.

12 Libraries Service Update

The Principal Libraries Officer provided the Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group with an update on the performance of the Council's Library Service. The report contained a detailed breakdown of the services available, visitor numbers

and activity levels.

The Chair thanked the officer for the detailed update and echoed the conclusion of the report, which stated: *'RCT council is proud of its Library Service and the manner in which it adapted its services during the Covid pandemic and the hard work it's staff have carried out to return service delivery to pre-pandemic levels after the lifting of Covid restrictions'*.

The Chair spoke of the diversity of the libraries within RCT, which was illustrated within the report before Members. The Chair praised the diverse range of initiatives taking place within the libraries, such as a Dementia café, which tied in with Treorchy endeavouring to become a dementia friendly town. The Chair praised the phenomenal scope of resources available through both the libraries and e-library.

In respect of the survey feedback contained within the report, the Chair was pleased with the level of engagement and emphasised the importance of children and youth involvement, to ensure the history of RCT is kept alive.

Prior to concluding, the Chair recognised the challenging times ahead faced by all Local Authorities but emphasised the importance of such a valuable service.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Leisure echoed the comments around the vibrant library facilities and took the opportunity to compliment and thank the staff working at the libraries.

One Member questioned whether the libraries would have any involvement with the 2024 Eisteddfod in RCT. The officer informed the Steering Group that elements of the large local history collection would be showcased throughout the libraries during the Eisteddfod and that each community library would be utilised to spread the work throughout RCT and ensure that each local area play a part in its success.

The Member then questioned what work was undertaken to draw in children and youths to libraries and whether there is a pupil voice behind the selection of books available at the libraries. The officer assured the Steering Group that the service engages with the Council's YEPS team and undertakes school visits where possible. In terms of asking children which books they would like available at the libraries, the officer advised that they don't have a process in place but should an individual, whether that be an adult or child, ask for a book which is not in stock, it is generally then purchased. The officer advised that he would take on board the Member's suggestion.

The Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group **RESOLVED:**

1. To consider the contents of the report and note the information provided.

This meeting closed at 3.00 pm

**Councillor B Harris
Chair.**

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