



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 Monday, 11
January 2021 at 2.00 pm

County Borough Councillors - Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group Members in attendance:-

Councillor R Lewis (Chair)

Councillor A Crimmings Councillor J Brencher
Councillor S. Rees-Owen

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr C Coppock
Ms M Dunning

Officers in attendance:-

Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Ms C O'Neill, Strategic Arts & Culture Manager
Mr A Williams, Theatre Operations and Development Manager
Ms W Edwards, Service Director – Community Services
Ms A Hayes, Arts & Creative Industries Manager
Ms A Gould, Theatre Programme and Audience Development Manager

28 Apologies

An apology of absence was received from County Borough Councillors J Rosser and G Hughes.

29 Welcome

The Chair, County Borough Councillor R Lewis and Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Wellbeing and Cultural Services, extended a welcome to the members of the Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group. Councillor Lewis commented on the challenging past year and confirmed that the Arts Service staff had been re deployed to support priority services such as the Community Resilience Centres, supporting residents who were shielding, and later, Test, Track and Protect and Mass Testing (which had been reflected in the report to the Panel on the progress of the Arts in RCT during the COVID-19 pandemic).

The Chair thanked the staff for their efforts over the past 12 months and referred to the update later on in the meeting that would provide an overview of the online activities that have continued during the National Lockdown.

30 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations of personal interests were made pertaining to the agenda:-

County Borough Councillor S Rees-Owen – In relation to Agenda Item 4 'Serving Our Communities during the Covid-19 Pandemic – "I have been in receipt of the Culture Recovery Fund Freelancer Funding which was administered by the Arts Service on behalf of Welsh Government's Creative Wales department".

County Borough Councillor J Brencher - In relation to Agenda Item 4 'Serving Our Communities during the Covid-19 Pandemic – "I am Director of the YMCA"

31 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the Minutes of the 6th February 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

32 Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group Work Programme 2020/21

The purpose of the report was outlined to the Strategic Culture & Arts Steering Group with information on the key issues to be considered in the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

Members considered the key themes on the forward work programme for the remaining 202/21 Municipal Year and the Chair referred members to the meeting scheduled for the 17th March 2021 at which it is intended to deliver an update on the progress of the Muni Awen Cultural Trust. Members of the Steering also noted the future topics to be considered to include the Eisteddfod and preparations for the Cultural Arts Programme and the link with the Education curriculum for 2021/22.

In response to a query about the possibility of bringing the key players together to engage in a wider discussions around the YMCA, Pontypridd Library, the Muni all within the arts quarter of Pontypridd, the Service Director Community Services confirmed that there was an appetite for bringing organisations together and an update would be relayed to the Steering Group in respect of maximising this opportunity for key stakeholders to meet.

A member of the Steering Group praised the RCT team for its hard work which had been recognised by the Arts Council for Wales but raised a query regarding the business plan for both enterprises and the importance of having both models in place.

The Chair advised that sustainability remains at the forefront of how the Council builds for the future and he added that the Cabinet is also mindful of the revenue support which will be also required.

The Group Director Community & Children's Services commented that it was positive to be discussing investment in the 'Arts Quarter' in Pontypridd and advised that although the work on the Muni had been delayed because of Covid 19, a consultation exercise is underway and the business plan has been

revisited in collaboration with Awen Cultural Trust. The Group Director stressed that the Council has committed fully to the initiative both from a financial and supporting role. He added that an update regarding the ongoing consultation exercise, tender process and building works would be provided to the Steering Group at its next meeting in March 2021.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to approve the draft work programme subject to any changing priorities throughout the year.

33 Serving our Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Strategic Arts & Culture Manager presented the report of the Director, Public Health, Protection and Community Services, which outlined the progress of the RCT Arts Services in serving its communities during the covid-19 pandemic 2020.

The Strategic Arts & Culture Manager provided an overview of how the service has operated since the closure of all the RCT theatres in March 2020 with live events having been cancelled or postponed. A number of services were transferred to an online platform and have been operating and reaching out to audiences of all ages since.

The Steering Group was advised that a number of Arts Service staff, Senior Management Team and wider management were re deployed to assist with the Test, Track and Protect Service with other staff supporting the Community Resilience Centres.

As an Arts Council of Wales Arts Portfolio Wales client, the Steering Group was advised of the comprehensive free programme of arts events and activities online from April to December 2020 which has resulted in the Coliseum Theatre and Park and Dare Theatre Facebook pages having exceeded 347,356 reaches combined. In addition, the Arts and Creative Industries team has also reached out to a number of 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).

The report provided a detailed account of the financial support provided to the Arts and Creative Industries such as the Culture Recovery Fund Freelancer Funding which had seen 181 eligible applicants who each received grants of £2,500.

In conclusion, the Strategic Arts & Culture Manager commented that for the Arts Services, 2021 would be a time of reflection, an opportunity for discussions to be held with staff, colleagues and the third sector and respond to the impact the pandemic has had on the Service and undertake a review of its processes and procedures. Information was also relayed with regards to the revenue funding strands such as the awards by the Arts Council of Wales.

The Steering Group was provided with the opportunity to raise questions and did so concerning the impact of the pandemic on children and young people and whether future plans for Arts and Culture to work collaboratively with education, particularly through the medium of Welsh. The Strategic Arts & Culture Manager

advised that the future programme of work does include bilingual activity and highlighted particular strands of work which would be forthcoming.

Discussions centred around whether libraries could play a more prominent role in encouraging storytelling, competitions, from residents of all ages and local communities as there had been an increased interest in local history during lockdown. In response, it was reported that a number of online projects have been ongoing, involving young people and a close relationship has been developed between the Library and Arts Services with the libraries hosting a number of writing competitions and collection of old photographs for the annual anthologies.

The Chair acknowledged the talent of local authors whose work had been published recently and how they could be celebrated and promoted through the local libraries.

Members of the Steering Group commented that, although online and digital services could not replace the live performance experience for audiences, the digital services had served the communities well during the lockdown, enabling many residents the opportunity to engage with the Arts service. Many hoped the Arts Council for Wales would re set the dial to include the valleys and not just the capital.

In response to a query regarding the return to live theatres and whether audiences will need to produce vaccine cards, the Group Director Community & Children's Services commented that it was still too early to anticipate how the return of theatres, travel will be undertaken and scientific evidence would inform the future return to live performances in theatres.

The Arts Services staff present provided an account of their experiences having been redeployed to the Test, Track and Protect Service and they stressed the importance of the work and connection with the local communities.

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services reflected on the staff experiences and praised all council staff for their contributions to the Test, Track and Protect Service which had been established quickly and effectively. He attributed the success of the programme to the talent of the staff from the Arts Service and from across the whole of the Council and commented that the experience would change the way the Council engages with its communities.

The Chair re-enforced the message of thanks to all staff and commented that the council has been held in high regard following its response to the pandemic and the interaction of its staff with residents. He thanked Officers and members of the Steering Group for their comments and engagement at the meeting and confirmed the next meeting would be held on the 17th March 2021 when it was hoped

This meeting closed at 3.05 pm

**CLLR R LEWIS
CHAIR.**