



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021-22

PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY,
COMMUNITIES AND PROSPERITY
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, PUBLIC
HEALTH AND PROTECTION, AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES

Agenda Item No. 5

**AN OVERVIEW OF CULTURAL AND
HERITAGE SERVICES IN
RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

Author(s): Wendy Edwards, Service Director – Community Services (07557082875)

Chris Richards -Visitor Attractions and Heritage Manager (01443 682036)

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of cultural and heritage services in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the content of the report.
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any further matters.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Cultural and heritage services cover a variety of provision and venues and what is included in the phrase can differ across organisations. For the purposes of this report, cultural and heritage services include arts provision, theatres, libraries, local studies collections and websites, and heritage.
- 3.2 'Heritage' can be defined as all that has been passed to us by previous generations. This includes everything from the built environment, in the places we live, work, play and pray, and including the tangible possessions displayed in our museums and our own family heirlooms. It also includes, the intangible, such as our history, traditions, legends and language, all of which reflect the communities in which we live and all of which contribute to our identities.
- 3.3 Cultural and Heritage Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council are spread over the several service areas as follows:
- Arts Service;
 - Adult Education Service;
 - Heritage Service;
 - Library Service.

It should be noted that the Arts Service, Adult Education Service and Library Service are part of Community Services while the Heritage Service is part of Leisure, Parks and Countryside. They are all part of the Public Health and Protection and Community Services Directorate. Appendix 1 includes the management structures for each service. In respect of Heritage Services, it reflects the recently revised structure.

- 3.4 These services include the following buildings:
- **Coliseum Theatre, Aberdare** was built in 1938 in an art-deco style. Its auditorium has a seating capacity of 590 and it is the only valleys theatre that has an orchestra pit. The Gallery Bar at the Coliseum can be used for smaller-scale performances.
 - **Park and Dare Theatre, Treorchy** is a Grade II* listed building. While the building itself dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, the theatre was established in 1913. Its auditorium has a seating capacity of 660 and it is the largest working Miners Institute in the country. Most recently significant investment has been made by the Council and the Arts Council of Wales establishing Stiwdio 1 which will allow smaller-scale productions to be delivered without the need to use the main auditorium. A range of other rooms are available for use within the building including a dance and drama studio.
 - **Muni Theatre, Pontypridd** is in the process of being leased to AWEN Cultural Trust. Phase 1 works on the building are due to be completed by the end of September and it is expected that the lease will transfer over to AWEN by mid-October. The Council has been working closely with AWEN to support the ambitious vision for the Muni and are currently awaiting the outcome of an application to the UK Levelling-Up Fund which, if successful, would enable the Muni building to be transformed to make it a significant venue in South East Wales, whilst retaining its historic architecture.

- **13 libraries**, of which 5 are designated community hubs. Significant Council and Welsh Government funding has been invested in a number of libraries over recent years. Llys Cadwyn is the flagship library and the community hub in Pontypridd. Other library-hubs include Canolfan Pennar (Mountain Ash), Porth Plaza, Yr Hwb Ferndale, Llantrisant library, and Church Village library/Gartholwg Lifelong Learning Centre.
- **Garth Olwg Lifelong Learning Centre (GLLC) and theatre** were built as part of the development of the Garth Olwg Community Campus in 2006. The GLLC is the base of the Adult Education Service which delivers a wide range of employability and wellbeing courses across the county borough as well as facilitating partner provision and delivering a wide range of cultural activities and events. The theatre's auditorium has a seating capacity of 150 while there are a range of rooms available for community use including a function room, arts and pottery room, two IT suites and general classrooms. Church Village library is also located within the building.
- The Heritage Service is based at **Rhondda Heritage Park (RHP)** which is the site of the former Lewis Merthyr Colliery (1850 -1983) in Trehafod, Porth. The site is managed by the Council's Visitor Attractions Service that has considerably developed the visitor experience in recent years. It is an anchor point of the European Route of Industrial Heritage. The Heritage Service also has an office within the Cynon Valley Museum, where they base themselves on a part time basis.
- The Heritage Service is also responsible for advising on **70 Scheduled Monuments** – 9 Scheduled Ancient Monuments owned by the Council as well as **5 Historic Parks & Gardens**.

3.5 In 2018 the Council established a Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group consisting of a cross-party membership with representation from Cabinet Members, Elected Members, Arts Council of Wales and an independent member, and it is supported by Council Officers. The aim of the Steering Group is to provide advice and guidance on matters relating to the strategic context in which Rhondda Cynon Taf Arts Service operates, in particular to advise on items affecting the resilience of RCT theatres and the long-term sustainability of the Arts Service in general. The Steering Group is chaired by Cllr Rhys Lewis, Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Wellbeing and Cultural Services and it meets on a quarterly basis.

4. OVERVIEW OF PROVISION

4.1 Arts Service

4.1.1 The **vision** of the Arts Service is:

- To be a place where everyone belongs;
- To be a safe creative space for expression, challenge and conversation;
- To find and amplify the unheard voices in our communities.

4.1.2 The Arts Service consists of two teams - the Theatre team and the Arts and Creative Industries team. **RCT Theatres** are an Arts Portfolio Wales client of the Arts Council of Wales, receiving annual revenue funding as a Venue and Producing House.

4.1.3 The **Arts and Creative Industries team** works in partnership with internal Council services and external organisations to offer a wide range of opportunities for children and young people such as those outlined below. (Please note that these were either moved online during the Lockdown or, in the case of crafts involved delivering packs with instructions directly to young people's homes):

- **Forte** – this supports the development of emerging young music artists aged 16-25 years old across South Wales through the provision of creative and career development opportunities.
- **Young Promoters Network** creates opportunities for aspiring young promoters, photographers and music artists aged 14-25 years old to develop their skills and knowledge of careers within the music industry through providing supported real experiences in performance, photography and event promotion.
- **Fortitude through Music** - ten-week pre-employability programme that is delivered for young people aged 16+ not in education, training or employment. The programme engages participants in self-development techniques and music activity, from learning instruments to song-writing and performance, and in doing so, supports them to realise their potential, improve their confidence, work with others, be creative, and explore future career opportunities.
- **Hot Jam Rock and Pop Summer School** - Participants are coached by Hot Jam's expert tutors on a variety of music techniques specific to their instrument, improvisation and song-writing.
- **Craft sessions** – weekly craft sessions facilitated by Craft of Hearts were normally held for young people accessing the Miskin project at Glyncornel, designed to improve confidence and self-esteem.

4.1.4 RCT Arts Service are also partnered with a number of organisations in the delivery of successful Arts Council of Wales Connect & Flourish applications:

- **'Torri'r Ffinniau / Breaking the Box'** – led by Taking Flight this project will build a network of inclusive, accessible venues in Wales that are confident & supported in welcoming diverse artists, backstage crew & administrators as well as audiences.
- **'Where We Begin / Dechrau'r Daith'** – led by Flossy and Boo, this is a collaboration with RCT Arts Service and Awen Cultural Trust to connect young people, venues and family audiences with freelance artists, exploring the barriers that families and young people face in experiencing the arts. Partners include Chapter Arts Centre, Grange Pavilion and Elan Isaacs.
- **'Together We Create / Creu Gyda'n Gilydd'** – led by National Dance Company Wales, this is an artist led project based in Penrhys, with much of the groundwork

in place being led by a professional dance artist. Co-creation is central to the activity, with a strong mix of agencies operating at cultural and social levels.

- **‘Make it!’** – led by emerging artists in RCT and hosted by Valleys Kids. This two-year proposal looks to create an emerging artist network and ecology where RCT is a place to sustain an arts career and work.

4.1.5 RCT Theatres continue to be an Arts Portfolio Wales client and has received £152,000 revenue **funding** as a contribution towards its activity during 2021/22. The Council contributes £943,870 towards the Arts Service. However, additional funding is gained through external grants in particular for the Arts and Creative Industries Team provision receiving £94,000 from Welsh Government Families First funding to deliver the Youth Arts and SONIG Youth Music Industry programme and £60,000 Creative Wales funding for the Beacons project in 2021/22.

4.1.6 The service was successful in applying for £12,675 from the **Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries**. The aim of the bursary is to provide an opportunity for talent from socio-economic backgrounds that are currently under-represented across the arts to develop and thrive. It is being used to match-fund a 1 year Assistant Creative Producer post as part of the Weston Jerwood Creative Bursaries Fellowship Scheme.

4.1.7 Participation in the Arts Council of Wales **Designing Public Value with Purpose Programme** in 2019/20 has resulted in a review of how theatres engage with their communities and has highlighted the need to further develop the relationship with residents. To support this, the service has, in partnership with the Library Service, been successful in being granted a Graduate Community Engagement Officer post that will undertake this work under the direction of the Strategic Arts and Culture Manager.

4.1.8 RCT theatres closed on 17th March 2020 and have remained closed throughout the pandemic. The Arts Service was fortunate to have benefitted from a Cultural Recovery grant of £458,300 from the Arts Council of Wales in 2020 in recognition of the impact of Covid on its theatres. This has been invaluable in supporting the service through what has been a really challenging year. A **reopening plan** has been developed that will enable both theatres to re-open for cinema screenings from October half-term onwards. All professional bookings have been moved on to Spring at the request of the artists or their agent and live amateur performances will also be reintroduced in the Spring. The team will use this period to engage in creative conversations with communities as part of the ‘re-setting the dial’ approach advocated by the Arts Council of Wales.

4.2 **The Adult Education Service**

4.2.1 The **vision** of the service is to provide learning that makes a difference to individuals and enables them to achieve their potential. In addition to providing a wide range of accredited courses and programmes to increase knowledge, skills and improve employability, the service offers a wide range of arts and history courses (both local and family history) across the county borough and online. The service usually operates out of libraries and community centres but is currently adopting a blended approach to delivery in line with Welsh Government guidance for the sector.

- 4.2.2 The Adult Education Service directly manages Garth Olwg Lifelong Learning Centre and **Garth Olwg theatre** where, in normal times, national touring companies such as Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru are hosted, and professional performers as well as local amateur groups perform.
- 4.2.3 It works closely with the Arts Service so that there is no duplication of provision and due to its size, it can facilitate more niche performances. It has established an excellent reputation for hosting Welsh-medium performances including some of the most well-known Welsh speaking actors, performers and touring companies.
- 4.2.4 Other **cultural activities** include literary festivals, book launches, literary and music workshops, and a wide range of craft sessions. These activities moved online during Covid at which time the Literature festival saw over 4,000 registrations on its workshops.
- 4.2.5 Due to its large **exhibition area**, GLLC is able to host both professional and amateur arts and history exhibitions.
- 4.2.6 **Funding** for the Adult Education Service is provided by Welsh Government (£356,000) through the Community Learning Grant that can be used for delivery of courses. In addition, the Council provides funding towards the staffing and running costs of GLLC. However, GLLC is required to generate at least £75,000 per year to cover all the costs associated with running the centre and its programmes. In normal years this has not been a problem as the popularity of the venue with learners, audiences and providers has meant that the target has always been achieved and often exceeded. As with other venues in the cultural sector its closure and then the continued restrictions on re-opening has had a significant impact on its ability to generate that level of income this financial year.
- 4.2.7 Additional funding was made available to the service during the pandemic to ensure that learners could continue to **access** provision for example, funding was provided for digital tablets/lap-tops and data that could be provided to learners who could not engage online; and funding was provided for training materials and video sessions to support staff to support their learners' wellbeing during Lockdown.

4.3 The Library Service

- 4.3.1 The Library Service's over-arching **vision** is to support people and communities to achieve their full potential. 3 key priorities were identified for 2019/21:
- To keep the service relevant in a rapidly changing environment
 - To embed new models of delivery
 - Improve the library experience for customers
- 4.3.2 In addition to its static and mobile provision, it has a Schools Library Service, Youth and Children's provision, @Home service and a Local Studies and Reference service that provides advice and support to both amateur and professional researchers.
- 4.3.3 Members on this Committee will be very aware of the service's performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards which are reported annually to the Committee.

- 4.3.4 Of particular note in respect of the Library Service's cultural offer is the service's two websites **Rhondda Cynon Taf Libraries – Heritage Trail** and the **RCT Digital Photographic Archive**. Links to both these websites can be found on the Library pages of the Council website. The former provides an outline of the history of RCT while the latter currently hosts 29,690 images which are accessed by local and family history researchers, professional researchers, authors and media companies including the BBC.
- 4.3.5 There are **3 local studies collections** hosted in the Library Service's area libraries. The Rhondda collection is kept at Treorchy library, the Cynon collection including the W. W. Price archive is kept at Aberdare library while Llys Cadwyn has the Taf Ely collection. These collections offer an invaluable insight into the history of the communities across the county borough. They are used for a variety of purposes and also enable the service to develop exhibitions to support events of local or national importance and publish products such as memory books that can support people with dementia.
- 4.3.6 The Library Service also directly delivers **projects** in partnership with other organisations. For example, the Engaging Libraries Fake News project, is delivered in collaboration with Liverpool University and the RCT Arts Service and funded by Carnegie UK. Artist/researcher and film-maker duo Mud and Thunder are engaging with local communities to capture their experiences of fake news. The Schools Library Service has also developed work packs using examples from the local history newspaper collections for children to consider whether the stories are reliable or 'fake.'
- 4.3.7 The work of the **Youth and Children's service** includes promoting and facilitating reading among children and young people, organising the Summer Reading Challenge across the libraries in the county borough, delivering and facilitating story-telling and craft sessions. It is also responsible for the teenage library at Treorchy that in normal times delivers a wide range of experiences for young people using a variety of media.
- 4.3.8 Support is provided in a range of ways to local authors and a platform for new and emerging talent is provided in the service's annual **Poetry and Prose Anthology** which is published every year and includes submissions by amateur writers of all ages.
- 4.3.9 The majority of posts and all the facilities provided through the Library Service are **funded** by the Council. Grant funding has been accessed to develop specific projects or additional activities that are unable to be funded from the usual library budget. In addition, significant Welsh Government and Council capital funding has been invested in upgrading library buildings. During the pandemic the service benefitted from a Welsh Government (MALD) grant of £27,958 to install **self-service machines** across each branch library in order to make venues safer from Covid transmission; and additional funding was provided by Welsh Government to make more e-books available online. (This resulted in a 108% increase in downloads.)

4.4 **The Heritage Service**

- 4.4.1 Following the transfer of the Heritage Services to the Visitor Attractions Service, the service set itself eight key objectives:
- **Improving care standards** of the Council's Museum artefacts.

- **Improving the heritage visitor experience** at Rhondda Heritage Park, by integrating cutting edge technology into the guided tours to enhance the user experience, whilst retaining the essential real-life authenticity that comes from the former miners that work as guides. Installing a permanent exhibition 'Black Gold' that provides an insight into the mining history of the Rhondda Valleys.
- **Heritage Tourism** – To promote the key heritage assets of the borough to both the day visitor and group travel market in order to raise the profile of the borough, celebrate its vibrant heritage and for it to contribute to the local economy.
- **Making Heritage accessible and relevant** - to increase understanding, awareness, and appreciation of our Heritage through improved and diverse accessibility.
- **Heritage Strategy** – work with partners within Economic Development to establish a borough wide heritage strategy which looks to improve and preserve our rich and diverse heritage for both present and future generations.
- **Partnership working** - To create and support Heritage partnerships approach with schools, colleges and communities.
- **Increase understanding and awareness.**
- **The promotion and enjoyment of heritage.**

4.4.2 The service is responsible for a range of activities that include:

- **Museum Artefacts** -The safeguarding, management and conservation of the Councils 36,000 artefacts located across three venues. The collections are predominantly owned by the Local Authority however, a number of items will be on long term loan from members of the public. The ownership and responsibility for the management of all the artefact collections based at the Cynon Valley Museum and National Lido of Wales are the responsibility of RCTCBC Heritage Services.
- **National Museum Accreditation Status** - In 2019 and for the first time in its history, RHP attained National Museums Accreditation Standards as a result of demonstrating best practice in its application of its policies and procedures.
- **Peoples Collection Wales** – Is part of the National Museums network and the Heritage Service feed into their events and themes by sharing images and information about aspects of the RCTCBC artifacts collections.
- **Professional advice** - The service provides or deals with enquiries as well as coordinates professional advice and can be called upon for guidance on issues and enquiries associated with but not limited to Listings on War Memorials, Scheduled Monuments, Historic monuments, Plaques & Busts.

- **Exhibition Programmes** - As a result of being located at Rhondda Heritage Park, the Heritage Service works closely with the Attractions Manager and produces an annual programme of temporary exhibitions at Rhondda Heritage Park that enable the venue to delve deeper into the wider stories associated with the cultural, domestic and environment impacts that arose from the industrialisation of the Rhondda. These temporary exhibitions work well to support the permanent Black Gold Exhibition gives insight into the mining history of the Rhondda Valleys.
- **Educational Visits** - In addition, the Heritage Service run a programme of onsite school educational visits that cater predominantly for primary schools with the occasional secondary and college visits.
- **Loan boxes and online workshops** – The service provide a range of artefact loan boxes for schools along with a range of workshops. During the Covid period, the service responded by undertaking online classes.
- **Dementia & reminiscence workshops** – Prior to Covid the service began to deliver a number of workshops within care homes as well as holding workshops at RHP. The workshops proved hugely popular and a programme of dementia outreach with care homes was beginning to be established. The service is looking at the opportunities to develop this service as an online interactive service going forward.
- **Blue Plaque Scheme** – 65 blue plaques are located throughout the Borough. The service administers the borough's Blue Plaque scheme and provides funding for up to 6 Blue Plaques each year. The scheme has been developed in recent years and in working with partners from the various historical societies throughout the Borough, the process now ensures that any nomination put forward, are evaluated by an independent panel, made up of citizens of the borough. Each nomination is evaluated by the panel and compared against other nominations made by the public of which up to 6 plaques funded by the authority. Prior to Covid, the panel sat twice a year, and considered all nominations made by the public.
- **Kids Take over the Museum** - Delivered by Heritage Outreach – pre covid, a day where children are encouraged to work in (take over) running the museum for the day.
- **Heritage Tourism** – The Heritage Service working in collaboration with RHP Attractions Manager and Royal Mint Visitor Attraction, exhibit twice a year at the National Exhibition Centre Birmingham to the Group Travel sector in their industry show, promoting the borough's key heritage visitor experiences.
- **The Cynon Valley Museum** is operated by the Cynon Valley Museum Trust on a lease basis. The trust, who reopened the former museum rely heavily on funding through grant applications and employ their own manager and staff and have been successful in securing over £500,000 of external funding over recent years.

- **Partnership working and stakeholders** – The heritage service work with a wide range of partners and stakeholders and service allies, with which it continues to maintain and develop relationships. This includes partners in the Archive and Museums sector, Welsh Government (MALD), Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, local historical societies and groups, Community and Town Councils, and partners in the field of education such as the University of South Wales.

4.4.3 The Heritage Service (excluding funding for RHP) receives £99,808 from the Council. It attracts additional funding for projects through applying for external grants.

5. **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND FUTURE PLANS**

5.1 The Council has been successful in gaining approval in 2020/21 for 2 new NLHF projects. An application to the **Parks for People Programme** on behalf of Ynysangharad War Memorial Park was approved in December 2020. The over-arching aims of the project are to:

- Retain and enhance the original features of the park including the Bandstand
- Reinforce the unique character of the Park;
- Link the varied landscape components and facilities together to form a stronger and more cohesive park;
- Improve accessibility;
- Enhance biodiversity;
- Provide a new learning and wellbeing centre (Canolfan Calon Taf) that will facilitate access to artistic and creative activities; enhance opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge; and increase engagement and participation in community events and activities;
- Improve visitors' understanding of the social and industrial heritage of the Park.

5.2 The work on **Canolfan Calon Taf** is due to be completed by June 2022. In the meantime, the Project Coordinator will commence his duties in the Autumn providing him with sufficient time to interact with partners, groups and organisations, provide support to the Friends of the Park, develop in collaboration with local artists, schools and community groups a programme for the Bandstand, and ensure everything is in place for the opening of Canolfan Calon Taf by summer 2022.

5.3 The Heritage Service working in partnership with the attractions' management will be engaging with leading multimedia creative agencies, specialising in **innovative digital interpretation** and learning resources and who use the latest developments in digital technology, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), to capture and record the current tour guides undertaking their tours, and preserving these experiences in a way that will enable the venue to offer future generations with a similar experience to current customers in meeting with, hearing from and seeing the guides of today in the decades to come.

5.4 Further projects currently being planned/delivered include the following:

- NLHF provided £48,000 for a project to commemorate **RCT's Sporting Heroes Past and Present** with an interpretation board in each of the authorities 64 changing rooms. This is seen as a key initiative and has been extended due to the impact of Covid.
- A 2-day **Imagining History conference** will be held in Pontypridd and Treforest (and online) in November, addresses a number of topics relating to imagining the histories of Wales. It includes contributions across disciplines, historical periods, and methodological approaches and is supported by RCT Heritage Service, the University of South Wales, Llafur, Welsh Women's Archive, Pontypridd Museum, and the Association of Welsh writing in English.
- Funded by the NLHF via their 15 Minute Heritage scheme, the Heritage Service supported '**A Hall for All- connecting the community through the history of Tylorstown Welfare Hall**'. Staff and volunteers from Tylorstown Welfare Hall have been working with staff from the Richard Burton Archives and South Wales Miners' Library at Swansea University on a project to capture memories - through oral history and photographs - about the Welfare Hall and Institute and showcase the outputs through an online exhibition.
- The National Manuscripts Conservation Trust grant awarded £3,804 to the Heritage Service for the **conservation** of the records of the Tynwydd Women's Labour Party circa. 1920-1936 (five volumes). These offer a wonderful insight from a women's perspective of the lead up to, impact and aftermath of 1926 General Strike. Following their conservation, the volumes will be digitised and added to both the Archives Hub and to The People's Collection Wales website.
- **Dare Valley Historic Interpretation** – The provision of 5 interpretation panels celebrating the heritage of the Dare Valley Aberdare – Funded via Valley Regional Park fund - £5000 as part of a £3500 grant for improved signage.
- '**Last Voices of the Rhondda**' – Working with Vision Fountain to create 3D portraits of miners, record oral histories and work with schools to create and exhibition on at Rhondda Heritage Park.
- **Proud Valley: Wales and Atlantic Activism** - the aim is to create an education Hwb at the Museum supporting and mirroring developments in the curriculum. Schools and colleges will be supported with informed guidance in terms of current thinking on race, equality and diversity as well as access to source materials. Seminars, day schools and online support for teachers will be offered alongside onsite interpretation in the form of exhibitions and workshops. The opening exhibition will focus on 'Robeson and Roper: Wales and Atlantic activism'.

5.5 Discussion has been on-going throughout the past year with officers from the **National Eisteddfod of Wales** on developing the arts and cultural offer in the run-up to the Eisteddfod which will form an important part of the National Eisteddfod's Community Engagement Strategy. This festival will offer a platform to showcase Rhondda Cynon Taf's heritage and culture to the rest of Wales and the wider world.

- 5.6 On 18th June 2021 the Council submitted an application for funding to the **UK Community Renewal Fund** for £613,265.34. Included in the RCT Together application is the cost of artists in residence who will adopt an arts-based approach to engage with individuals so that they can have a say in what's important to them, their family and the wider community. If approved, two artists (1 established and 1 early career) will be located at the hubs in Pontypridd, Aberdare and Treorchy.
- 5.7 To facilitate the development of a **cultural hub at Treorchy**, the Council has invested in upgrading the exterior of Treorchy library while the interior of the library is currently being redesigned to accommodate its focus on expanding its creative and cultural offer. This has been funded through a grant of £128,400 from Welsh Government's Museums, Archives and Libraries Division and match-funding of £30,000 by the Council. Work on this should be completed by December. Further work to redevelop the foyer of the Park and Dare Theatre is also being discussed, and funding secured to develop the land adjacent to the theatre for community use.

6. CHALLENGES FOR THE CULTURAL AND HERITAGE SECTOR

- 6.1 The digital age has posed a number of challenges to the Cultural and Heritage sector over the last two decades and it has had to work hard to remain relevant to current service users while seeking to **increase engagement** among groups who currently do not engage. These groups would include, but are not limited to, a younger demographic and communities that have traditionally displayed a reluctance to visit heritage sites and/or libraries and theatres. All services in this sector have adapted their provision to enhance their digital offer to attract new customers. For example, the Heritage Service's VR Headset project for use in reminiscing workshops and tourism promotions. The closure of sites and locations due to Covid hastened further the changes that would otherwise have taken place over a much longer period with a large amount of provision being transferred online, one result of which was attracting new service users.
- 6.2 The growth of the Black Lives Matter movement has led to significant attention being focussed on the cultural and heritage sector in the past year and how it deals with concepts of race, equality and diversity. Services have been reviewing how they deal with these issues and have increased the focus on ensuring that they are accessible to all, engage widely and ensure that provision reflects the varied experiences of residents and communities both now and in the past.

In recognition of these issues an audit has been undertaken of memorialisation in the authority which will go to Cabinet in the Autumn.

- 6.3 The **negative impact of Covid-19** on the cultural and heritage sector has been widely reported in the media. During Lockdown and up until Wales reached Alert Level 2, no theatres or artistic/heritage venues were able to open. Even now there remain challenges for some venues in relation to re-opening. During this period most Cultural and Heritage Services staff were transferred to support Test, Trace and Protect, mass testing and/or community hubs. Wherever possible delivery of programmes and access to services were transferred online as highlighted in section 4 above.
- 6.4 In order to mitigate the negative impact on this sector Welsh Government and the Arts Council of Wales introduced a series of funds to **support the businesses** and creative

freelancers affected. RCTCBC Arts Service has been responsible for administering the 3 rounds of Welsh Government Freelancer Fund that enabled freelancers to apply for grants to help support them through the challenges they experienced as a result of being unable to work through the pandemic.

- 6.5 Conversely, the pandemic has had a **positive effect** on people's appreciation of the importance of culture and heritage on mental health and wellbeing. Significant research has been undertaken in recent years into the importance of this sector for health with the results of an online survey of 50,000 people undertaken by the BBC and University College London finding that "taking part in creative activities helps people manage stress, face up to challenges and explore solutions to problems in their lives." [Sharrat, C (2019)]. Since the pandemic the evidence for the health enhancing effects of participation in, or engagement with, creative and cultural activities has increased further.
- 6.6 Cultural and Heritage services have a vital role, therefore, to play in the Council's **early intervention and prevention** agenda and investment in these areas will have a long-term financial benefit to the Council by reducing and/or delaying pressure on statutory services.
- 6.7 However, **funding** is a challenge. As highlighted in section 4 above, some of these service areas rely to a large extent on external grant funding. These funding sources are usually allocated on an annual basis making it difficult to plan ahead and retain staff. At times of financial pressures, the amount of grant funding available reduces and it can be difficult to maintain service levels. Also, older buildings such as the Park and Dare and Coliseum theatres and Rhondda Heritage Park require significant on-going investment if they are to remain in good condition and be able to offer the type of experience that will continue to attract customers. In addition, there are specific challenges to address in respect of accessibility for theatre buildings as they were built at a time when no consideration was given to disabled access for audiences or performers.
- 6.8 It is a challenge for many venues to generate sufficient **income** to cover their costs at the best of times. It remains to be seen what the impact of Covid is on audiences and participation levels on arts and cultural programmes as everything re-opens. There is some evidence to suggest at present that there is a reluctance among customers to return to the same level of participation in activities as pre-Covid. This will have an impact on income generation and place more pressure on Council funds.
- 6.9 There is no doubt that there will be financial challenges for public services going forward and the economic outlook remains uncertain. This is likely to have an impact on the funding available for culture and heritage especially as not all of these services are statutory.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no equality and diversity implications aligned to this report.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 There are no consultation implications aligned to this report.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 There are no financial implications relating to this report.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report. However, it may be useful for Members to be aware that some of these services are statutory.

10.2 The Library Service is a statutory service and Local Authorities are required under S7.1 of the Public Libraries Act 1964 to ensure that they provide 'an efficient and comprehensive' library service. Although this Act does not specify what is meant by 'comprehensive and efficient', in Wales the Welsh Public Library Standards have been introduced to provide more clarity for Local Authorities.

10.3 In relation to Adult Education the responsibility on the Council is to ensure that there are facilities and provision for adults to access learning within the County. It does not have to provide this directly to learners.

10.4 Caring for Council Museum artefacts is a statutory function as is maintaining scheduled Ancient Monuments (the latter responsibility lies with Corporate Estates). War memorials are listed and the Heritage Service deals with enquiries relating to names or proposals to add names to memorials, but it is the Highways team that maintains these.

10.5 There is no statutory requirement for the Council to maintain an Arts Service or theatres.

11 LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES

11.1 Cultural and Heritage services contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan priorities:

- Ensuring people are independent, healthy and successful;
- Creating places where people are proud to live, work and play;
- Creating opportunities for people, and businesses to be innovative; be entrepreneurial; and fulfil their potential and prosper.

11.2 They align closely to Goal 6 of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act - 'A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language,' but also contribute to the following goals:

- A prosperous Wales;
- A more resilient Wales;
- A healthier Wales;
- A more equal Wales;
- A Wales of cohesive communities.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 This report has provided an overview of the cultural facilities that are owned by the Council and a flavour of the provision that is offered by Cultural and Heritage services to

residents and visitors. It will be noted that much of this provision is developed in partnership with a range of organisations and, also with residents.

- 12.2 The Cultural and Heritage sector has been impacted hugely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and it is evident that the effects of the pandemic will continue to be challenging for these services, especially in respect of financial performance, throughout 2021/22. However, the important role of this sector in supporting the health and wellbeing of residents has become more apparent during the challenges of Lockdown and this has strengthened its position by highlighting how engagement with, and participation in arts, culture and heritage can prevent, or delay, reliance on statutory services.
- 12.3 As can be seen from this report there is significant cultural and heritage provision available in Rhondda Cynon Taf and the development of new projects and programmes shows that these services are ambitious and innovative and look forward to the opportunity of collaborating with the National Eisteddfod, partners and residents to showcase Rhondda Cynon Taf to the world in 2024.