



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC CULTURE AND ARTS STEERING GROUP

13TH JULY 2023

**REPORT ON THE PRODUCTION AND CO-PRODUCTION PROGRAMME
OF THE ARTS SERVICE**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER
FOR PUBLIC HEALTH & COMMUNITIES, COUNCILLOR BOB HARRIS**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update members of the Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group on the production and co-production programme of the Arts Service

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- 2.1 Consider the contents of the report and comment on the information provided.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 This report provides an opportunity for the Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group to consider the production and co-production programme of the Arts Service.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 RCT Arts Service incorporates RCT Theatres, comprising of the Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy and the Coliseum, Aberdare; Gartholwg Lifelong Learning Centre; and an arts and creative industries team that use Families First funding to develop targeted arts interventions with young people, supporting them to improve their personal resilience and make positive lifestyle choices through engaging in arts projects.

4.2 The Arts Service Business Plan 2024 – 2027 outlines the following which we are preparing for in 2023:

Vision: “We imagine a thriving Rhodda Cynon Taf where the arts have the power to make us happy, confident, and proud of the place we call home.”

Mission: As a local authority Arts Service investment in the arts inspires and connects our communities; unlocks, nurtures, and celebrates latent creative talent; and ignites pride in and a sense of belonging to Rhondda Cynon Taf.

4.3 Our aims and specific objectives are:

Aim 1: To support a thriving cultural democracy, where our communities flourish, taking the lead in shaping and co-creating opportunities to engage with the arts

Objective 1: Our communities, including our communities of artists, are at the heart of our organisation, with whom we work in partnership to make, co-create, and engage with the arts and culture on their own terms, ensuring equity of access to all

Objective 2: We will create a community engagement plan that builds on the learning from our programme of community conversations, our work as part of the Designing Public Value with purpose programme.

Objective 3: People within our communities prosper, fulfilling their creative potential no matter what their background or lived experience including their socio-economic circumstances

Objective 4: An imaginative artistic programme, developed with our communities as audiences and participants ignites joy, hope and compassion, improves well-being, navigates today’s challenges, and shapes a better future by celebrating the place we call home

Objective 5: The arts are valued by all for the difference they make to people’s lives through their ability to promote healthy lifestyles, build social capital, and create more cohesive communities where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

Aim 2: To treasure the Welsh Language for the importance it holds to our shared identity, our shared heritage, and our shared culture in creative and imaginative ways.

Objective 1: Welsh Language events and activities form an integral part of our artistic programme, promoting the use of the language and enabling our communities to celebrate the language in ways that are relevant to them.

Objective 2: Our creative partners make use of the Welsh language in different contexts and community settings capitalising on the visit of and the legacy from the National Eisteddfod to RCT in 2024.

Aim 3: To respond to the climate and nature emergencies using creativity and the arts to support the Council, county borough and arts sector to be carbon neutral by 2030.

Objective 1: An arts programme that engages the community in the on-going Climate Change conversation developed in partnership with the community and the Council.

Objective 2: Manage our theatres and activities in a socially, environmentally, and ethically sustainable way.

Aim 4: To embed principles of good governance, equitable thinking, behaviours, and practice into everything we do.

Objective 1: Our governance arrangements, our artistic programmes, and our workforce, are representative of and are knowledgeable about our communities.

Objective 2: Our board, workforce, creative partners, and freelancers are paid fairly, offered training and development opportunities and supported to adopt healthy lifestyles.

4.4 Our values were developed in partnership with our communities:

Creativity	nurture creative talent; enable creative activation; inspire creative expression; discover hidden talent; provide new experiences; challenge; take risks
Rootedness	celebrating place; altering perspectives; listening and sharing voices; acknowledging RCT's place today; developing pride in place and developing future ambitions
Calon	open-minded; non judgemental; accessible; welcoming to all; listening; sense of hospitality; fairness
Connectedness	civic agent and change maker; strengthening community; involving people; co-creation; connecting people (generosity); networks; partnerships
Joy	provider of entertainment; place for release and escapism; fun; celebration

4.5 The Arts Service's theatres are a portfolio client of the Arts Council Wales and receive an annual grant of £153,000 to support its productions and co-productions.

4.6 This financial year, the Arts Service will use the Arts Council Wales revenue funding to support the delivery of its objectives through a programme of productions and co-productions:

- Turning the Wheel – in co-production with local writer and producer, Keiran Bailey
- Knuckles – in co-production with Merthyr Tydfil-based company, Gurnwah Productions
- Ink'd – in co-production with Merthyr Tydfil-based company, Gurnwah Productions
- Sue (the Hippopotamus who doesn't Identify as a Hippopotamus) – produced by RCT Theatres' and developed with local creatives, Menna Rogers and Jemima Nicholas
- RCT Pantomime – produced by RCT Theatres' and directed by Richard Tunley

- Carwyn – in co-production with Cardiff-based writers and producers, Gareth Bale and Owen Thomas
- No Man’s Land – in co-production with local producer, Kyle Stead
- Gen Z Fest – in co-production with local producer, Kyle Stead

5. Production & Co-production Programme

5.1 Turning the Wheel – a co-production between RCT Theatres and the writer and producer, Keiran Bailey

5.1.1 An original musical based on the history of the Italian cafés in the Rhondda between 1890-1910, born out of an initial research and development phase in 2019 (pre-Pandemic). We realised that the wonderful Italian cafes on our high street were slowly closing and felt that there were stories worth sharing, especially once we had spoken with that community.

5.1.2 Kieran Bailey was fortunate to receive an Arts Council Wales Create grant during the pandemic with support from Theatr Na nog, a theatre company based in Neath. He put pen to paper writing songs and a script as part of an ideas and investigation concept.

5.1.3 A script-sharing took place over Zoom during July 2021 and Kieron approached RCT Theatres to support him to further develop the piece so that it could be shared further with the community.

5.1.4 Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund awarded Kieron a small grant and the Arts Service supported him to successfully apply for his first production grant from Arts Council Wales.

5.1.5 Following the successful Arts Council Wales application and community sharings in a variety of settings, including Cwm Farm shop, Hot Gossip, and Treorchy Rugby Club, a team of creatives were contracted to bring this next phase to life. This included four actors, a designer, a photographer, a videographer, costume and props, and choreographers.

5.1.6 A sharing of the work followed nine days of rehearsal at the Park & Dare Theatre within its Stiwdio Un space, and 86 community members came to experience a sharing of what could potentially be a full scale production.

5.1.7 70% of the audience completed a feedback form following the sharing and the majority felt that this was a story worth telling in RCT and beyond. Feedback included, “excellent ideas and storytelling”; “the bilingual element really worked as it wasn’t just translated, it was an

integral part to the storytelling”; “People could understand “Tipping back”; “This fledgling production evoked the feeling of a Willy Russell production - an emotional rollercoaster, and an important slice of valleys’ social history in action.”

5.1.8 We plan to move towards a full production of “Turning the Wheel” in spring 2024, dependent on successful Arts Council Wales and other external grant applications being made by Keiran Bailey.

5.2 Knuckles – an RCT Theatres’ co-production with Gurnwah Productions

5.2.1 Knuckles is a one-man show starring an older, emerging artist, Paul Black as Victor “The Knuckles” Norman which follows the character on his last day. It is a disturbing story, based loosely on true events, of one man’s rise and fall and all the chaos that ensued in-between.

5.2.2 This co-production has had a seven-date tour in Wales to mid-scale venues, and will visit Dublin’s Smock Alley Theatre, and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival at the Greenside venue during Summer 2023.

5.2.2 The writer, Anthony Bunko describes the play as a rollercoaster ride of emotions rammed into 55 minutes. It is a story about how someone can choose the wrong road at the wrong time in life. Sometimes it’s that person’s choice which road they take; other times, sadly the road can be decided for them by others.

5.2.3 The co-production has received funding from RCT Theatres, Arts Council Wales and Wellbeing Merthyr.

5.3 Ink’d – an RCT Theatres’ co-production with Gurnwah Productions

5.3.1 Ink’d is a new first phase research and development project that grew out of an RCT Theatres’ social-media call out for the hidden stories behind people’s tattoos. This created a real buzz of excitement and over fifteen stories were received from the RCT community.

5.3.2 Face-to-face interviews took place in and around Treorchy, and Rhondda Radio conducted an interview and encouraged people to call in with their stories.

5.3.3 The Merthyr Tydfil-based production company, Gurnwah Productions, are investigating funding opportunities to develop the project further.

5.4 Sue (the Hippopotamus Who Doesn't Identify as a Hippopotomus) – an RCT Theatres' production developed with local creatives, Menna Rogers and Jemima Nicholas

5.4.1 Started during the pandemic, this is a children's show that explores identity and how confusing life can be for young children, , working with local writer, Menna Rogers and actor, Jemima Nicholas.

5.4.2 The production is now entering its second research and development stage, with a plan to work alongside the innovative and accessible Cardiff-based Taking Flight Theatre Company and a small audience to explore the ways in which access and inclusion can become an integral part of the production.

5.4.3 Taking Flight Theatre Company have established a reputation for making bold, inclusive theatre and have worked with us on a number of co-productions, including last year's show 'Road' at Stwdio Un in the Park and Dare Theatre.

5.4.4 The show is intended to be available in both Welsh and English with elements of BSL and integrated audio description. Our aim is to tour this work locally and trial it with local schools in Winter 2024.

5.5 RCT Pantomime – an RCT Theatres' production directed by Richard Tunley

5.5.1 This year's pantomime, Cinderella, will be the twelfth RCT produced pantomime, offered at the same ticket price as last year's production.

5.5.2 We are only too aware of the difficulties faced by families on a daily basis due to rising costs and RCT Theatres' continue to strive to make the RCT pantomime a high-quality, affordable production that rivals those in Cardiff and Swansea in terms of value-for-money, storytelling and family entertainment.

5.5.3 RCT Theatres' continue to develop relationships with local creatives and will once again be partnering with students of Coleg y Cymoedd on their costume and prop-making degree courses. Employment opportunities will be offered to three graduates who will receive their first professional credit for their CVs.

5.5.4 The Arts ervice is always looking for ways to make its productions more environmentally sustainable, and for this year's pantomime, we will be reusing as much as we can from previous pantomime productions, reducing the amount of one-off items we purchase, and recycling anything that can't be reused.

5.6 Carwyn – in co-production with Cardiff-based writers and producers, Gareth Bale and Owen Thomas

5.6.1 The Arts Service has been supporting Gareth Bale and Owen Thomas with an Arts Council Wales grant application and booking for an 18 date performance tour across Wales during Autumn 2023 with their one-man show, Carwyn. Venues include Sherman Theatre, Cardiff; Theatr Felinfach, Ciliau Aeron; Borough Theatre, Abergavenny; and the Park & Dare Theatre.

5.6.2 'Carwyn' explores the enigma of a multi-layered man. A man ahead of his time. A man who was alone in a crowd. A man uncomfortable in his own skin. A man of whom it is said very few truly knew him, knew what made his heart beat and his mind tick. In his 53 years, Carwyn James made an incredible, indelible impact on his homeland, and yet is somewhat forgotten. A man who adored sport, culture and politics, a man who adored Wales. A man who beat the mighty All Blacks with three different teams. 'Carwyn' explores the life of a man whose career comprised teaching, broadcasting, coaching, and even espionage.

5.6.3 The service is delighted to be working with the BAFTA winning duo following the success of their previous work 'Grav', and will also be working with them to support the development of their 'Rebel Rebel' Comedy Club in Stiwdio Un, building on the success they have experienced in Cardiff at the Tiny Rebel pub.

5.7 No Man's Land – an RCT Theatres' co-production with local producer, Kyle Stead

5.7.1 Kyle Stead has recently completed his employment with the service as part of a Weston Jerwood Creative Bursary Fellowship, and this will be an exciting first phase research and development of his project entitled, 'No Man's Land'.

5.7.2 Kyle's project has been awarded an Arts Council Wales grant to further develop the production, a gritty drama being written by local playwright Rachle Tresize and employing three local emerging artists to work alongside other professionals during its residency at the Park & Dare Theatre in June 2023.

5.7.3 Kyle is looking to develop the project further and is investigating additional sources of funding.

5.8 Gen Z Fest – produced by Kyle Stead, supported by RCT Theatres

5.8.1 As a local freelance artist, Kyle Stead has been contracted to produce our young emerging artist showcase scheduled as part of International Youth Day on Saturday 12th of August.

5.8.2 During 2022, the service worked with the Youth Engagement and Participation Service to pilot activities for young people as part of the International Youth Day, and this year's programme builds on the lessons learnt to support performances by eight emerging artists in and around Treorchy's high street.

5.8.3 In addition to the Gen Z fest programme, the service has also secured four paid support slots for emerging artists as part of our Stiwdio Un programme this Autumn.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

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

7. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

7.1 No consultation exercise has been required.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

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

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

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

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

10.1 As the projects are funded by Arts Council Wales and the Council, we contribute to the delivery of Welsh Government priorities and the Council's corporate priorities, 'Economy', 'People' and 'Place'.

10.2 The Arts Service contributes 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.

11.3 The programme and our involvement is consistent with the sustainable approach promoted by the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act through the five ways of working:

- Long-term – enabling us to co-create work, engage with our communities and build partnerships that seek to achieve a more resilient 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, participation and performance opportunities that address the early intervention and prevention agenda;
- Integrated – through community engagement work with key partners and contributing more effectively to a range of local, regional and national strategic priorities in an integrated and coherent way;
- Collaboration – through creating and working with our communities in collaboration with key artists and arts organisations whose values align with ours and with whom we can work in partnership to achieve our goals;
- Involvement – developing our creativity and community engagement through consultation, feedback, advisory groups and professional networks.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 This report informs members of the Strategic Culture and Arts Steering Group of the production and co-production programme of the Arts Service during 2023-2024 and how it supports the delivery of national, local and service aims and objectives, whilst aligning with service values developed with the community.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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