



South Somerset District Council

Arts Engagement &
Outreach Strategy
for the Arts &
Entertainment Service
2022 - 2032



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy is to set out a strategic approach for our Arts Engagement & Outreach department within the Arts & Entertainment Service, a discretionary service owned, managed and funded by South Somerset District Council (SSDC).



MIKE BEST

Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing

I am delighted to be sharing with you our Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy for the Arts & Entertainment Service at South Somerset District Council. Our Arts & Entertainment Service makes a significant contribution to SSDC's vision for South Somerset: a place where businesses flourish, communities are safe, vibrant and healthy; where residents enjoy good housing and cultural, leisure and sporting activities.

This Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy explores ways in which our service can embed arts and culture within our communities and support SSDC's mission to build healthy communities that are cohesive, sustainable and enjoy a high quality of life supporting people in improving their own physical and mental health and wellbeing.

We have the opportunity to transform arts and culture within South Somerset alongside the redevelopment of The Octagon Theatre, to create a flourishing creative sector relevant to our communities. This plan understands the contextual issues of the district and seeks to address key challenges facing our residents. The Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy looks to make the creative arts more visible, relevant and accessible to all residents and visitors to South Somerset, to ensure we are activity serving South Somerset's communities and positively contributing to the priorities of our local authority as we transition to the new Somerset Council. It is an ambitious document, the success of which will rely on partnership working and the commitment of the Arts & Entertainment Service.

I am excited to see the direct impact our work will have for our residents and an increased level of activity for our creative sector.



ADAM BURGAN

Arts & Entertainment Manager

The Arts & Entertainment Service we operate from The Octagon Theatre and Westlands Entertainment Venue, on behalf of SSDC, supports access to the arts and culture for all across South Somerset. We believe passionately in the ability for the creative arts to transform the lives of our residents, positively contribute to their health and wellbeing, bring our communities together and make a significant contribution to our local economy.

This Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy takes the Octagon Theatre capital re-development as a catalyst for forward-thinking change, instigating fresh, ambitious and innovative approaches to connecting people across South Somerset with the power of arts and culture. We are seeking to evolve the Arts & Entertainment offer in South Somerset and transform our organisation, to better serve our community and residents and to unleash creativity in the South West.

Over the past year we have carried out an audience and community survey and associated data analysis, as well as gathering together relevant contextual and demographic data, to better understand the needs and challenges of the district. The context of which has shaped the objectives, outcomes and recommendations of this strategy. Thank you to the many artists, arts organisations, local service providers, businesses and members of the public who have contributed to the creation of this strategy. The document will evolve and respond to the local, regional and national contexts as they develop to ensure we are actively serving South Somerset's communities.

WHO IS THE ARTS ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH STRATEGY FOR?

- The Arts & Entertainment Service at SSDC and our Arts Engagement & Outreach department, to shape the vision for our service and embed our core values, with the aim to transform our organisation to better serve our community.
- The creative sector and cultural providers (including venues, arts organisations, touring companies, freelance practitioners, artists and creatives) to understand and respond to the needs and challenges within the district and work towards presenting a cohesive cultural offer.
- The community and voluntary sector, organisations and groups, to understand the approach, methods and opportunities for engagement.
- Local, regional and national funding bodies, trusts and foundations, seeking to verify or validate local need.





OUR PURPOSE

The Arts Engagement & Outreach department is based at our venues, The Octagon Theatre and Westlands Entertainment Venue.

Our purpose is to support the development of our venues as creative hubs, support engagement in the creative arts across our district, and provide resources and support for the creative arts in South Somerset.

The purpose of this strategy is to deliver our integrated vision for Arts & Entertainment Service.



OUR VALUES:

This strategy is underpinned by the Arts and Entertainment Service values:

WE ARE PASSIONATE about the power of the creative and performing arts.

WE ARE DEDICATED to enriching the lives of people living in South Somerset and bringing a diverse range of quality arts experiences to the South West.

WE CREATE OPPORTUNITIES for everyone to enjoy, learn, engage and participate in the arts, and so contribute to their health, well-being and happiness.

WE WORK to ensure that our home venues (Octagon and Westlands), and anywhere else that we present opportunities, are welcoming and accessible to all.

WE RECOGNISE that talent is everywhere but opportunity is not, so we seek out, nurture and celebrate emerging talent within our community as well as supporting professional artists to develop.

WE ENSURE that our actions are ethical, environmentally sustainable, financially sound, offer value for money and contribute to a kinder and fairer society.

In addition, we will support our venues to be:

INCLUSIVE, EXCITING CULTURAL HUBS, ROOTED IN EXCELLENT VENUES, ACTIVELY SERVING COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE DISTRICT.

COMMITMENTS

In the first few years covered by this strategy, our work will be focused in South Somerset; which as well as being the location of our venues, is an area identified as part of the government's levelling-up agenda. The reorganisation of local government in Somerset presents a vital opportunity for embedding culture and the creative arts in the new authority. The themes and approaches set out in this strategy can be replicated in other areas of need across the county, as we move to becoming a unitary authority, drawing on and merging with other cultural strategies in other districts as appropriate.

High-Quality: This Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy encompasses a mix of artform working and thinking to include music, theatre, dance, film and visual arts. We are committed to producing, delivering and presenting high-quality activity across the creative arts, programming flagship arts companies, artists and world-class opportunities for engagement within South Somerset. The quality of our work will be measured by the number of beneficiaries engaged in world-class creative art who have a positive experience, where the activity positively contributes to key contextual factors within South Somerset.

Inclusion & Accessibility: Ensuring full social, physical and cultural accessibility will be vital to the success of the vision, and so we will work closely with local communities, and those with lived experience of specific barriers, to plan and promote our opportunities in order to achieve maximum inclusivity and best possible welcome. As part of SSDC our decisions are guided and governed by the Somerset Equality and Diversity Policy as adopted by SSDC. We recognise that we have a great responsibility to ensure the diversity of our region is represented on our stage, within our participatory programme, workforce and volunteers.

Environment Responsibility: To respond to the climate emergency this plan ensures sustainability is at the heart of decision-making and embedded within our everyday operations through training and localising our activity across the district. As part of SSDC, decisions are guided and governed by the South Somerset Environment Strategy which states SSDC's commitment to acting on the climate and ecological emergency, aiming to be net zero carbon by 2030. We seek to use our position to educate and inspire positive change throughout our organisation, audiences, visitors and artists.

Digital Focus: In response to the global shift to online and digital engagement and developments in technology, we are committed to the development of digital creative programmes, utilizing online platforms and digital marketing as a creative tool to reach global audiences. The development of digital engagement with culture will contribute to achieving our ambitions of accessibility, inclusivity and in response to the climate emergency.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Somerset:

South Somerset District Council are leading the project to develop a Somerset Cultural Strategy working in partnership with all the existing authorities. This project sets out to create and develop a cultural strategy for the county of Somerset, with the ambition that the new Somerset Unitary Authority, coming into being on 1 April 2023, adopts the strategy. This project seeks to unite the existing five local authorities in Somerset and to present an exciting vision for the role of culture within our county and the communities the council serves.

The vision for Somerset, as discussed by the Cultural Leads from each authority, is to raise the profile of Somerset as a cultural destination. The cultural strategy will encourage the council to work in new ways by taking a strategic approach to how the arts and culture can support existing economic, social and environmental strategies in place as we transition towards one unitary authority.

Somerset's Cultural Strategy will be developed to align with the new Somerset Council's priorities. These priorities will inform the long-term ambitions for culture in Somerset, areas of development and strategic ambitions, with details of how the cultural identity of Somerset is promoted to ensure arts and culture is embedded at the heart of the new authority's strategic plans.

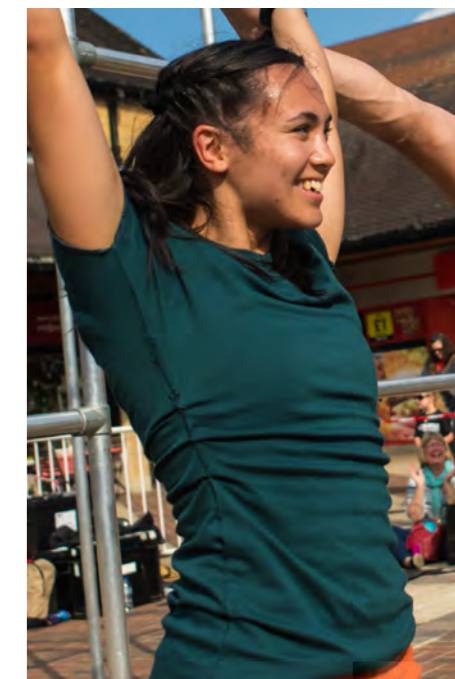
The project will consider how to raise awareness and promote the role that culture and creativity can play in enriching communities and improving the quality of life, health, wellbeing and the local economy for Somerset residents, local businesses and visitors. It will also help to create new employment opportunities and raise the profile of the county's vibrant creative sector.

The Somerset Cultural Strategy will be developed through 2022 and is expected to be completed in early 2023 when it will be presented to Councilors for them to decide whether to adopt the strategy.

South Somerset:

South Somerset District Council is a committed champion and supporter of the arts. The priority of our Arts and Entertainment Service, a discretionary service provided by SSDC, is to support access to arts and culture for all. The Arts and Entertainment Service operates from The Octagon Theatre and Westlands Entertainment Venue, with a diverse programme that will entertain, educate and inspire multiple generations across South Somerset. When it comes to making South Somerset a better place to live, work and visit we recognise the arts have a vital role to play in achieving an improved standard of wellbeing.

We are proud of the diverse range of artists who come to perform in South Somerset, and offer multiple opportunities for people to get creative, make new friends, learn new skills and improve their quality of life. Both venues present a programme of professional and community shows, and support a well-established participation programme with activity on offer for all ages and abilities. Our programme of Arts Engagement activity feeds our participatory and professional programme of shows, screenings and events, with projects running across the district to inspire creativity, connect communities and enrich the lives of residents.



Our Venues:

Our venues are central community hubs, offering access to arts, culture and film for residents across the South West.

The Octagon is the second largest theatre in Somerset opening in 1974. In recent years, Octagon has staged around 260 performances per year in an intimate auditorium that seats 622, with an average attendance of 83%. The Octagon offers a space for watching a vast variety of touring and community productions, as well as room for taking part in participation classes - hosting over 630 classes per year - and rehearsals and gallery exhibition space.

Westlands Entertainment Venue re-opened in March 2017, after SSDC secured the future of the building and redeveloped the venue. Westlands offers a flexible environment for cinema screenings, standing gigs, touring productions, festivals, conferences and meetings. Westlands stages over 55 performances, 275 screenings and 1,800 classes and meetings per year, with a versatile ballroom that can be transformed to a cosy cinema setting or a seated capacity of 821.

Our programme:

The programme of events and performances aims to offer 'something for everyone' with a diverse range of quality arts and entertainment. The performance programme at the venues supports a mix of musicals, plays, opera, ballet, contemporary dance, dance, children's shows, pantomime, classical music, tribute shows, comedy, standing music gigs, community shows, literary talks, variety shows and outdoor theatre. The film programme offers the best of mainstream films alongside foreign language, independent, locally made films, film festivals and events.

Arts Engagement & Outreach Programme:

Our Arts Engagement and Outreach Officer, based at the venues, successfully leads multiple development projects across the district, provides annual funding for arts organisations (currently Take Art, Somerset Art Works, Somerset Film and Actiontrack), and offers support to community arts projects each year. Outreach projects have shared a vision to introduce the arts to young people, take cultural performances into public spaces, grow an audience for a particular art form and improve access to participate and engage in the creative arts for all. We have developed, commissioned and delivered projects across the district that reach residents where they live, bring communities together and support cultural employment. Projects have been developed in response to demographic challenges, aiming to reduce geographical, economic and social barriers to attendance and participation for audiences, participants, volunteers, staff and visitors.



Octagon Theatre Redevelopment:

The plans in place to redevelop the Octagon Theatre will see the theatre transformed into a flagship venue for the arts and entertainment in Somerset. The development will transform the accessibility of the venue, improve the environmental impact of the building, significantly improve the venue's facilities, and expand the cultural offer.

The proposed Octagon Theatre will include:

- An increased seating capacity in the main auditorium from 622 to 900.
- Two new smaller cinema/studio spaces predominately for film screenings but also able to host smaller scale live performances.
- A dance studio equipped with fully sprung floor that will be a rehearsal space where local dancers of all ages learn new skills, develop their talents and prepare for performances on stage.
- A community studio offering space for classes and rehearsals including our popular choir, theatre groups, and arts and craft workshops.
- Expansion to the café bar area to be open throughout the day to the public.
- Improvements made backstage and front of house to make the venue more inviting, a hub for creative arts and accessible for staff, visitors and performers with disabilities.
- A Changing Places Toilet for those with additional needs that we hope will make our venue, the town centre and Yeovil Country Park more accessible.
- The redevelopment of the Octagon will directly and indirectly benefit the local community by creating new engagement opportunities for residents that will help raise aspirations. The development will also attract new businesses and investment to the area, drive new job creation and re-build the local economy following the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEY CONSULTATION FINDINGS

An analysis of demographic data for South Somerset yields four key contextual factors that have informed the design of this Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy.

i) Rurality and rural isolation are significant. 48% of Somerset's population live in rural areas with limited services and transport, and with reduced access to arts and cultural opportunities. In order to serve these communities equitably, the Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy must deliver meaningful, high-quality participation opportunities and performance events throughout the district. Of course, building appetite for arts engagement at the local level may also stimulate motivation to attend events or participation opportunities at The Octagon and Westlands, and this potential outcome should certainly inform planning; but the core focus of work created and delivered by the Arts and Entertainment Service throughout the district should be to enrich lives and improve access to arts and culture within local communities.

ii) Deprivation - encompassing low-income households and disadvantaged children with limited opportunities and career prospects - is a priority. Six neighbourhoods (LSOAs) in South Somerset fall within the top 20% most deprived nationally, with 1 (Yeovil Westfield) in the top 10%. 25% of children in South Somerset lived in poverty in 2017/18, South Somerset is ranked 229 out of 324 English district areas for social mobility when comparing chances for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the progression rate for Free School Meal pupils to Higher Education by age 19 was 15% in Somerset compared to 27% nationally in 2019/20; rising to 37% for non-free school meal pupils in Somerset. We believe that the arts have a role to play in improving confidence, self-esteem and life chances and our Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy must ensure that those living in deprivation, and in particular children and young people, are well catered for.



Octagon Theatre Redevelopment Visualisations

iii) Poor Mental Health is a growing issue in South Somerset. Hospital admissions for self-harm in 16-24 year olds in 2018/19 were roughly double the national average, with indications that this was further exacerbated during COVID-19 pandemic (2020). Adult suicide rates in Somerset in 2018/19 were 3% above the national average, and 'low-level' mental health problems such as anxiety and depression increased during the pandemic, with Mindline in Somerset taking 500-700 calls per week. Developing arts engagement opportunities to contribute to building positive mental health in South Somerset is therefore an important component of the Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy.

iv) Ageing Population is generating increased pressure on local services in South Somerset. This ageing population is in part due to net migration back to the region for retirement, and an increase of life expectancy. Around 25% of the population is aged 65 or over, and this is projected to increase significantly over the next 10 years. Sustaining healthy life expectancy is a key challenge, with a high number of older residents living alone, increasing hospital admissions relating to falls and dementia, and pressure on adult social care and health systems. 4,310 older people in the district are thought to experience chronic loneliness at any given time. Accessible, carefully targeted arts and cultural provision can play a valuable role in helping to combat these challenges.

Unsurprisingly, these significant challenges align clearly with South Somerset District Council's main areas of concern.

The consultation processes carried out to inform this Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy yielded useful insights about perception of the arts, experience of participation / attendance, opinions and preferences, barriers to engagement, and aspirations. The findings align with the analysis of key issues derived from the population data, underlining the importance of ensuring equity of access and opportunity for all. This calls for pro-active planning, ensuring that barriers to participation and attendance - be they cultural, physical, social or economic - are identified and addressed from the inception of all activities.

Against a positive background, there are clear opportunities for growth, improvement and development. People who have connected with the Arts and Entertainment Service in some way expressed generally warm perception of it and cite a range of different experiences that they have enjoyed. The most common issues raised by those who are less enthusiastic cluster around ticket pricing, and not being interested in the events or opportunities on offer. Some individuals and communities are not served or are under-served by the current offer; for reasons of geography, economic circumstance and social, cultural or physical access barriers.



There is active interest in partnership working from voluntary sector partners in the district. Those consulted during this research period included ABRI Housing Association, Mind in Somerset, Yeovil4Family, The Hub and W.A.T.C.H. We can see great potential to work together to contribute to addressing the key social issues identified earlier - mental health, employability, rural isolation, ageing population, cultural inclusion - and some illustrative examples of potential creative projects are touched on in section 6 below. Key arts partners consulted - Somerset Film, Take Art, Actiontrack, Somerset Art Works and Wassail Theatre Company - expressed enthusiasm for establishing new approaches to meeting jointly identified goals for boosting arts engagement in the district. Arts organisations from further afield who are interested in long-term partnership include Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Stuff & Nonsense, Russell Maliphant Dance and Armonico Consort.

Conversations with voluntary sector, education and cultural partners highlighted the value of extending, diversifying and promoting opportunities for work experience, training and volunteering; as routes to positive mental health, as pathways to arts/cultural employment, and as part of a wider talent development eco-system. More targeted work with and for schools and young people would be welcome as part of this expansion. There is a lack of opportunity in the district for young people to progress to apprenticeships, further or higher education which results in high rates of young people leaving the county. The high rates of local deprivation, and of self-harm amongst young people noted earlier also point to the importance of developing positive, fulfilling routes to employment.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Taking account of all the consultation feedback, SSDC's priority commitments and experiences of the Octagon Theatre and Westlands to date, we have determined our Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy goals and objectives as follows.

Our Goals

1. To establish Arts Engagement, as an integral part of the Arts & Entertainment Service, connecting meaningfully and consistently with communities across South Somerset and sustaining The Octagon and Westlands as a regional cultural hubs.
2. To offer high-quality engagement opportunities to all members of our communities, responding to identified needs, providing support for arts access in rural, educational and care settings, and helping to deliver on local authority priorities.
3. To develop and sustain a high quality, diverse cultural offer in South Somerset and the wider South West, that celebrates the heritage of our communities.
4. To nurture and provide support for arts organisations across the region, local emerging artists, professional creatives and creative arts students.



OUR OBJECTIVES

Based on the findings from the consultation process outlined above, our work over this decade will be organised around three key objectives. We will use these objectives as points of reference to guide our Arts Engagement programming decisions and focus our resources.

1: Inspiring Creativity

- Presenting a vibrant and exciting programme of work across a range of artforms in our venues - both daytimes and evenings - that surprises and delights our guests.
- Developing an extensive, constantly renewing range of opportunities for people to engage with high-level professional artists from across the South West, the UK and beyond; through classes, workshops, residencies and special projects, in our venues and throughout the district.
- Developing a diverse, exciting year-round programme of learning and participation opportunities for young people 0-18, in and out of school.
- Developing a diverse, exciting year-round programme of learning and participation opportunities for adults in our venues and in our creative hubs.
- Utilising digital technologies both as artistic media and as tools to improve accessibility.

2: Community Connections

- Working actively with a range of voluntary sector partners across South Somerset to co-create and contribute to local communities over the long-term.
- Developing and delivering a range of performance and participation opportunities with and for specific communities: geographic and cultural.
- Pro-actively co-creating opportunities with, and supporting access by, vulnerable members of our communities.
- Establishing a dynamic, exemplary arts for health and wellbeing programme that improves the lives of residents in our district.
- Celebrating local heritage and the multiple cultures and nationalities of all of South Somerset's residents through creative projects including artistic commissions.

3: Inclusive Ambition

- Ensuring that all opportunities are fairly priced, and that economic barriers to participation are actively addressed.
- Ensuring that social, physical and cultural barriers to participation are identified and actively addressed, taking our lead from those with lived experience.
- Delivering a multi-stranded talent and workforce development programme that benefits young people, emerging and professional artists, staff and volunteers.
- Nurturing and supporting established and new arts organisations in South Somerset as relevant through networking, opportunities for professional development and strategic commissioning.

DELIVERING THE ARTS ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH STRATEGY

Delivery of this Strategy is subject to the achievement of our fundraising aims. Fundraising plans will be developed and reviewed alongside the activity plans on an annual basis.

To support a delivery model across the district we will identify and establish firm relationships with residents and organisations in four areas where we can add value. The four identified areas will be located based on location, need, appetite and existing voluntary sector partnerships within those areas, these areas will become known as 'Creative Hubs' where we will pilot and deliver each element of our activity. In each Creative Hub we will form a group of community advisors who will act as promoters within that area, assisting us to establish links with the wider community, promote opportunities and work with us to programme shows and workshops where they live. The locations of these Creative Hubs will enable us to reach rural and urban communities and spread opportunities across the district. Activity delivered from these four Creative Hubs will feed into our Arts & Entertainment Service and support our established artistic and participatory programmes at The Octagon and Westlands.



2022/2023 will be a key foundation year for the delivery of this strategy. We will establish our local partnerships and Creative Hubs, design our pilot Arts for Health & Wellbeing, Creative Learning & Education, Talent & Workforce Development, Access & Inclusion and Participatory initiatives, as well as start building the new artistic commissioning and participatory plans for the redeveloped Octagon Theatre. Whilst The Octagon is closed, we will be able to concentrate our attention on work across the district, establishing firm relationships with residents and organisations that we can build on when the Octagon Theatre re-opens. From 2023-2026 we will deliver the above programmes across the district as well as in the re-opened Theatre, testing new ways of connecting and inspiring our communities.

We will take an integrated approach to planning across the venues and throughout the district. We will expand on our successful programmes of participation to create a consistent offer that connects The Octagon & Westlands and local Creative Hubs through long-term partnership working. Performance and participation opportunities will be designed to complement each other, maximising resources, and ensuring that whatever point of connection people have the Octagon and Westlands offers them the chance to go deeper and experience more.

We will think carefully about balancing the provision of opportunity across the district with promoting the unique experiences available at the Octagon through, for example, structuring our artist residency programmes to have a touring as well as a venue based component; creating workshop and participation activities at local level with local residents as co-curators and involving some of the same teachers and artists that deliver in the Octagon and Westlands; commissioning participatory performance projects that focus on the heritage, culture and lived experience of local residents throughout the district, creating large scale celebratory events at the Octagon that bring together and showcase the work of residents from across the district, such as our Urban Jams.

In order to ensure the equity of provision required to meet local needs, we will develop strong partnerships with voluntary sector, education and arts partners working across the district. In this way, we can make the best use of our skills, knowledge and resources alongside those who have deep connections with and expertise in working at a local level. We will identify and work with specific geographic, demographic and cultural communities through partners such as ABRI Housing Association, Mind in Somerset, W.A.T.C.H, Somerset Diverse Communities, Yeovil4Family as well as schools, early years providers, and community and public health providers.

We will explore co-production in our pilot local arts participation programmes, starting by working with trusted partners in our Creative Hub areas to develop local groups with whom we will co-design workshop activities, and small-scale creative performance projects. Co-production in arts and culture is an increasingly respected, empowering approach to working with local residents and communities that builds skills and knowledge, as well as stimulating an appetite for arts and cultural participation, particularly with people who have little experience of arts and culture or have felt excluded. From these pilot activities we will build pathways of ambition that inspire local residents to engage in our volunteering, work experience and talent development programmes as well in arts participation and performance opportunities, and to attend The Octagon and Westlands shows and events.

We will develop a proactive approach to access and inclusion through the establishment of our Access Group and Community Advisory Group. These will ensure that diverse voices and lived experience inform our planning, staff training and artistic ambition. This intentional inclusive practice will help us to achieve more diverse representation on our stages as well as in the artists we commission to make participatory work, the teachers we employ and the volunteers we engage.

The Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy and the redevelopment of The Octagon Theatre will catalyse new ways of working with our key arts partners. We will share this strategy with them to clarify common goals and create shared innovations - these might be, for example, in relation to small-scale touring across the district, development of film as part of our community performance project or building community progression pathways in music engagement.



OUTCOMES

The impact of this Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy will be felt across South Somerset, with success measured on the following outcomes:

Inspiring Creativity

- More world-class culture brought to audiences and participants in South Somerset.
- Creative opportunities delivered within our venues and across South Somerset, that support engagement with professional creatives for people at all stages of their lives.
- More residents and visitors to the area engaged and involved in creative activities.
- Increased number of children and young people have access to and able to take part in creative activities inside and outside schools.
- Increased support for teaching of creative arts in schools.
- Increased number of high quality early-years activities that reaches families from a wide range of backgrounds.
- New types of creative practice and forms of cultural content supported to reach new and existing audiences.
- Increased appetite for engagement.
- Communities, residents, existing audiences and participants trying something new.
- Residents of all ages and abilities supported to develop their creative skills and potential.

Community Connections

- Our programme of work better reflects the population of Somerset.
- The voice and opinions of residents is valued, heard and enabled, to better understand and respond to the needs and interests of communities, resulting in increased cultural engagement and the wide range of social benefits it brings.
- Residents have the ability to create, develop, host and increase their participation and attendance to high quality creative activities at all stages of their lives.
- Residents and visitors to South Somerset supported at all stages of their lives to design, develop and increase their participation in high quality creative activities.
- Community cohesion through connecting people and places.
- Improved access to a full range of cultural opportunities where people live.
- More place-based partnerships to support and involve communities in high quality culture, improve creative and cultural education for children and young people, improve health and wellbeing through creative and cultural activity, build skills and capacity in the cultural sector and grow its economic impact.
- A better sense of place and local identity.



Inclusive Ambition

- Improved access to a full range of cultural opportunities, especially those who are currently under-represented or with limited access.
- More opportunities for people to start a professional career in the creative industries, especially those who are currently under-represented.
- Opportunities to sustain their careers and fulfil their potential in the creative industries, especially those who are currently under-represented.
- Improved pathways towards careers in the creative industries.
- More artists, creatives and practitioners attracted to live, work and contribute to culture in South Somerset.
- Strengthened connections with cultural organisations and creative practitioners.

How will we measure success?

We will design and implement different methodologies for collecting information and evaluating our progress, but will consistently capture specific data throughout the life of the strategy including:

- Feedback from visitors, audiences, participants, volunteers, artists and staff
- Discussions with our Access and Community Steering Groups
- Opportunities for engagement across the district
- Levels of participation, audience reach and engagement
- Equality & Diversity monitoring data of staff, volunteers, artists, participants and audience members
- Number of artists, creatives and practitioners supported
- Number of jobs created, apprenticeships, internships, mentorships and voluntary positions
- Press coverage, marketing and publicity
- Levels of investment



MILESTONES: 2022 – 2024

- Arts and Entertainment Service Community Advisory Group and Access Group established by September 2022, to support ongoing innovations in access, inclusion and community connection.
- Specific locations and partnerships agreed for Creative Hubs by September 2022.
- Creative Hub activities commence by April 2023.
- Specific shared initiatives agreed as appropriate with key arts partners (Somerset Film, Take Art, Actiontrack and Somerset Art Works) for launch in April 2023.
- Staff training plans in place to support re-opening of Octagon as well as district-wide programme.
- Long-term fundraising strategy in place and starting to yield results
- New Learning and Education Programme planned for launch in September 2023.
- Targeted accessible pricing scheme/s in place by January 2024.
- Talent and Workforce Development programme pilot completed and evaluated (2022-24) and three-year plan ready to launch in Spring 2024.
- Arts for Health and Wellbeing pilot project delivered and evaluated (2023-24) and three-year plan ready to launch in Spring 2024.

MILESTONES: 2022 – 2024

- Planning and development begins for large-scale community show to be created across the district for presentation in summer 2026.
- New and innovative companies programmed into The Octagon Theatre in line with enhanced facilities and increased capacity, supported by new audience development strategies.
- Residency programmes (working with our four Creative Hubs as well as in Octagon and Westlands) planned and agreed with key artistic partners for period up to 2026.
- Commissioning plans created and launched, with first works complete in time for the re-opening of Octagon.
- Octagon redevelopment complete and building re-opened with full programme.
- Re-imagined Octagon participation programme launched within redeveloped building.



MILESTONES 2025 – 2027

- Large scale community show developed with participants from across the district through multiple workshop and small-scale performances; full work presented in summer 2026.
- Key voluntary sector and arts organisation partnerships embedded as part of ongoing planning and programme.
- Creative Hub programmes extended and developed including regular links to Octagon and Westlands.
- Learning and Education programme running according to plans.
- Small-scale touring arts performance programme in partnership with key arts and voluntary sector partners running across the district.
- Second wave of residency programmes in place.
- Continuation of commissioning programme.
- Octagon Participation programme developing in line with plans.
- Arts for Health and Wellbeing programme running across the district.
- Talent and Workforce Development programme running across the district.
- Annual access and inclusion audit of venues and district-wide provision in place to ensure continuous improvement.
- Five-year review of this strategy covering alignment to overall objectives and long-term goals; achievement of impact, and effectiveness of methods.

MILESTONES 2028 – 2032

These will be set in response to the above five-year strategy review, however they are likely to include:

- Identification of specific geographic and / or demographic communities as partners in specific programmes and projects.
- Continuation and development of artistic and voluntary sector partnerships as a key planning and delivery mechanism.
- Ambitious commissioning of participation and performance work.
- An evolved Talent and Workforce Development plan.
- An evolved Arts for Health and Wellbeing plan.
- An evolved Learning & Education programme.



INDICATIVE ARTS ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY PLANS

Detailed Arts Engagement Activity Plans for the period 2023-2026 were developed as part of the Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation submission. Our activities are designed to deliver the strategy as set out above. This means that we will be seeking to ensure a good level of provision across the district alongside our year-round programmes of performance and participation at The Octagon and Westlands. We will work with artistic partners to extend and enrich opportunities, and are in discussion with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Stuff and Nonsense and Russell Maliphant Dance to design our first wave of residency proposals.



SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- Arts Engagement & Outreach Activity Plan 2022-2026
- Arts Engagement & Outreach Outcomes 2022-2026
- Arts Engagement & Outreach Strategy
- Methodology & Consultees (2022)
- Access & Inclusion Report by Michèle Taylor
- Diversity & Cultural Inclusion Report By Somerset Diverse Communities
- Participation Report by Katey Leader

Thanks to support from
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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**





BOSWELLS

CAFÉ & TAKEAWAY

QUEDAM SHOPPING CENTRE

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SOFT DRINKS

E

Witlads