

## **RCTCBC Response to National Assembly for Wales' Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's consultation into how publicly funded bodies can use culture to tackle poverty and social exclusion in Wales.**

RCTCBC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's consultation into how publicly funded bodies can use culture to tackle poverty and social exclusion in Wales.

Applying the wider definition of culture adopted by the Wellbeing of Future Generations Office<sup>9</sup> the Council's cultural offer includes the Arts Service, Leisure, Parks and Countryside Service, Events and Tourism Service, Regeneration and Planning Service, Libraries Service, Heritage Service, and the Welsh Language Service.

### **1. How effective has the Welsh Government (WG) been in improving participation in and access to culture for people in poverty?**

There is evidence that WG recognises that cultural provision is key to tackling poverty within Wales, with the publication of 'An independent report for the Welsh Government into Arts in Education in the Schools of Wales' (September, 2013), undertaken by Professor Dai Smith, and the complementary report that builds on this work - 'Culture and Poverty: Harnessing the power of the arts, culture and heritage to promote social justice in Wales' (March, 2014), undertaken by Baroness Kay Andrews on behalf of the Welsh Government.

As a result, the WG and the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) have collaborated on the 5 year (2015-2020) 'Creative Learning through the Arts' programme to enhance the quality of creative learning in Wales' schools.

The WG also established 'Fusion: Creating Opportunities through Culture' as a result of the recommendations in the Baroness Kay Andrews report.

Furthermore, the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 indicates that 'a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language' contributes to the well-being of the nation, through its inclusion as one of the seven Well-being Goals.

Following the publication of the WG's 'Light Springs through the Dark: A Vision for Culture in Wales' (December, 2016) RCTCBC welcomed the commitments of WG as outlined in Annex 1 of the document. Many of these were in relation to improving participation in and access to culture for people in poverty.

'Fusion' and 'Creative Learning through the Arts' have shown WG's commitment for cultural programmes that focus on tackling poverty and education, and there was also a commitment to cultural programmes focused on health and economic development. Evaluations of 'Fusion' and 'Creative Learning through the Arts' have

<sup>9</sup> A Wales Of Vibrant Culture & Thriving Welsh Language: "A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, sports and recreation" (<https://futuregenerations.wales/aotp/culture/>)

been published, and their effectiveness in tackling poverty and social exclusion seen in the reporting of outcome measures; however, there has been no evaluation of health or economic development programmes on improving participation in and access to culture for people in poverty.

Going forward with the themed years' idea, we welcome the announcement that 2019 will be designated the 'Year of Discovery', with its seasonal themes including 'Discover Culture'. This affords opportunity for WG to support Wales in marketing its cultural offer nationally, regionally and locally. It would be useful to see a report outlining the aims and objectives of these designated years and how WG has measured against these in order to understand their effectiveness. In addition, a focus more locally rather than nationally, through the provision of targeted campaigns and offers, could encourage those living in poverty and that are socially excluded to participate in and access culture. For example, 'Discover Your Culture' as a campaign to highlight the cultural offer locally, encouraging people to experience, possibly for the first time, what is on their doorstep.

We have yet to see the effectiveness of 'Creative Wales', its potential to promote the Creative Industries in Wales, and its connectedness to the arts and cultural sector to promote the economic objectives of the Creative Industries. It is evident that this industry is thriving within Wales and the UK<sup>10</sup> and is a real opportunity tackling poverty through investment in creative industries education, employment and training opportunities. Furthermore, there is also WG's commitment to the successful Creative Industries Clusters Programme, part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)'s multi-million pound research investment into the UK's creative economy. As Professor Jonothan Neelands of the University of Warwick observed in the NESTA report commissioned by the Arts Council of England- 'Experimental Culture: a horizon scan': "for the first time there is a congruence across economic, social, cultural, artistic, digital, and creative agendas that we've never seen before".<sup>11</sup>

There are other commitments that would support improving participation in and access to culture for people in poverty; however there is lack of information available on progress, and therefore, it is difficult to comment on how effective WG have been. These include:

- Work to develop and exploit virtual, off-site and digital audiences for major events and establishing 'Made in Wales' events.
- Facilitating an appropriate contribution by the culture sector to the regeneration of the Cardiff Capital City Region
- The creation of a minimum of 100,000 high quality all age apprenticeships
- Setting new conditions of funding for sports and cultural organisations that receive public monies to support young people from deprived backgrounds
- Extending the WG's programme of open access to arts and cultural opportunities for young people

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<sup>10</sup> 'Industrial Strategy: Creative Industries Sector Deal', (HM Government, 2018)

<sup>11</sup> [https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/experimental\\_culture\\_report\\_2018.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/experimental_culture_report_2018.pdf)

- Increase investment in the arts by creating a Challenge Fund
- The creation of 'Historic Wales'
- Investment of more than £1 million a year in the continued transformation of libraries and local museums
- The feasibility studies on establishing a National Art Gallery and a Football Museum
- Support for community crowdfunding projects
- Support for online and print media
- The development of the updated Museums Strategy for Wales (2010-2015)
- Implementation of a 'Museums Charter' to set expectations for public museums in Wales and the requirement to measure standards achieved as recommended in the Expert Review of Local Museums Provision in Wales (2015)

In addition, we reported in our response to 'Light Springs through the Dark: A Vision for Culture in Wales', that our cultural provision has benefited widely from EU funds, and that we support the WG in their pressing of the UK Government for a full replacement of EU funds beyond 2020. Without this investment the regeneration of our vibrant town centres and the National Lido for Wales would not have been possible. We await an update on this.

We also noted that to ensure that cultural providers can contribute effectively to the achievement of the WG's vision we welcomed the introduction of three-year funding settlements. However, Arts Council of Wales Lottery funding for projects remains to be an annual allocation, which is difficult for longer-term project development and continued progression e.g. the SONIG Youth Music Industry programmes Forte project<sup>12</sup>.

Through our involvement in GwylGrai/RawFfest – the national youth arts festival in Wales for young people by young people – we know that the WG's Major Events Unit has contributed three years tapered funding (totalling £80,000) alongside ACW funding. The Festival was established following a feasibility study commissioned by ACW in 2015<sup>13</sup>. The Major Events Unit were able to offer a three-year funding agreement, whereas each year an application has been made to ACW for funding resulting in insecurity for a festival that aims to reach young people across Wales to participate in and access cultural opportunities. Now in its third year, the festival will take place from April 25<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> 2019 after a fallow year in 2018. At present, there is only funding secured for this festival, with a Legacy Group established to discuss its future.

We also stated that with Wales having over 250 local libraries and over 90 museums according to Welsh Government data, £1 million seemed insufficient to enable effective contribution. We also await an update on this.

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<sup>12</sup> The Forte Project is funded by Arts Council of Wales and the PRS Foundation to support and develop new music across the South Wales region (<http://www.forteproject.co.uk/>)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.arts.wales/arts-in-wales/youth-arts-festival>

The various funding streams provided by WG have enabled the creation of opportunities to participate in and access to culture for people in poverty. These include:

- The Community Learning Grant
- Communities for Work Plus funding
- Families First funding

We applaud WG's for recognising that culture supports the delivery of the objectives within these programmes. For example, funding provided through the Community Learning Grant supports on the delivery of adult community learning in community venues. It is focussed on the delivery of essential skills, employability skills and digital literacy skills. However, informal learning that improves the well-being and social engagement of older learners can be supported and there is some flexibility to develop softer engagement type provision. In particular, activities and 'hook' courses to broaden the horizons of participants and to engage them in learning. Cultural activities have been found to be a good way of achieving this.

There is good evidence that these activities increase the well-being of participants and develop a range of skills as well as offering a route back into learning for those who have previously been affected by ill-health or have been made redundant and have lost confidence in their abilities to re—engage with the workplace.

Culture and heritage are also used to improve essential skills of participants, for example, there is a strong emphasis in the programme on independent living skills (designed to improve the skills of learners who have moderate or severe learning disabilities) on Welsh culture and heritage. In this latter provision units on castles and participation in *dawnsio gwerin* underpin the development of skills for life.

## **2. How effective have the efforts of Welsh Government sponsored bodies (namely Arts Council, National Museum, National Library and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales) and local government been in using culture to tackle poverty?**

In respect to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales they are a consultee on applications for Listed Building Consent (LBC), provide comments on Conservation Area Consents and on planning applications that affect Historic Parks and Gardens. Some regeneration projects will thus have had input from this body in respect to planning consents.

We are pleased to see that the new Arts Council of Wales Corporate Plan 'For the benefit of all...' acknowledges that there are still too many cultural, social and economic barriers that exist, and that it highlights broadening access to the arts as one of its two priorities. There appears to be a greater emphasis on equality and diversity within this plan compared to 'Imagine...: Our Vision for the Arts in Wales, 2013 to 2018', with a commitment to "enabling a greater number, and a wider diversity, of people to enjoy, take part and work in the publicly funded arts".<sup>14</sup> There

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<sup>14</sup> 'For the benefit of all...', Corporate Plan 2018-2023, Arts Council of Wales, p.10

is recognition of wanting to reach those that are economically or socially disadvantaged, and we wait to see how the ACW propose to 'narrow the gap' between those in the most and the least affluent social sectors as audiences and participants.

Evaluation of the 'Creative Learning through the Arts' programme highlights the work undertaken across schools to widen participation in and access to culture. Many of the schools in RCTCBC have benefitted. On the other hand, we believe that further value could be brought to the programme if its Lead Creative Schools would engage with the local Arts Services (if applicable).

Evaluation of the four year arts-led regeneration project *Ideas People & Places* (IPP), one of the seven being undertaken in RCT, will also contribute to the approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion through developing behaviour change and joined up thinking as per the Wellbeing of the Future Generations Act, both in communities and the organisations that serve them.

RCTCBC recognises the value of culture in tackling poverty and social exclusion. The cultural offer within Rhondda Cynon Taf is rich and vibrant, and it is supported to thrive by key services within the local authority.

The Arts Service works with other Council services and organisations to ensure that those living in poverty and those that are socially excluded have access to the arts. The Arts & Creative Industries Team are commissioned by the Council's Resilient Families Service utilising WG Families First funding to deliver a youth arts and youth music programme that improves emotional and mental wellbeing, changes to lifestyle and behaviour, and improves resilience. This work is undertaken through partnership working, such as with the Council's Looked After Children and Young Carers, Barnardos, Job Centre Plus and Llamau.

RCT Theatres (the Coliseum Theatre, Aberdare and the Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy) are an ACW Arts Portfolio Wales client, and offer targeted workshops by visiting companies; an affordable Take pART participatory programme; relaxed performances and screenings; Kids Club arts & craft sessions; and a Daytime Delights programme. There is also support to schools and the voluntary sector to perform within the professional settings of the theatres, from our staffs knowledge and expertise, through to subsidised hire based on a criteria of supporting the service to meet its objectives. Furthermore, our Artistic Business Plan, recently reviewed in line with the ACW Arts Portfolio Wales agreement, states the plan to engage with our communities to 'narrow the gap' in cultural engagement. The service, alongside the Council's Leisure Services, has been exploring using MOSAIC<sup>15</sup> to better understand our audiences and to understand how to engage with non-attendees and participants.

RCT Theatres are also signed up to the national access scheme, HYNT<sup>16</sup>, providing a consistent offer for visitors with an impairment or specific access requirements, and their Carers or Personal Assistants.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.experian.co.uk/marketing-services/products/mosaic-uk.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.hynt.co.uk/en/>

The Heritage Service is dedicated to widening access and participation in cultural heritage and seeks to provide opportunities for our communities to engage directly with their heritage. The service's community led projects provide advice on grant funding applications and support project delivery. Examples include: Maerdy Archives Group, Penrhys Pilgrimage Working Group, and the John Hopla Local History School Awards.

We ensure that affordable educational provision for schools is provided, with particular focus on those operating in areas of high deprivation (WIMD index 2014). We also provide free, innovating and accessible experiences throughout RCT by coordinating activities for Kids in Museums, Welsh Museum Festival, and the National Sporting Heritage Day.

Through the coordination of an active lending programme for the historic collections and Blue Plaque Scheme to make heritage we ensure that our cultural heritage is accessible within the community. Furthermore, we co-ordinate targeted cultural opportunities, such as for community groups that offer relief services for people with dementia.

The inspirational Welsh Mining Experience (WME) at Trehafod offers an array of opportunities to engage in our cultural heritage, and is attended by local schools, residents, groups and international visitors. A successful Welsh Museum Festival Grant (administered by the Welsh Museums Federation on behalf of WG) in 2017 enabled the service to provide Mini Miners – an early years and family-led learning experience within the setting.

The Heritage Service provides collection care and professional support to the WME and the Cynon Valley Museum making heritage accessible to the community in free museum galleries. What's more, delivery of the WME's temporary exhibition programme seeks to provide opportunities for co-curation with the community.

The Adult Learning Service provides opportunities within our communities, with culture recognised as a key tool for engaging people in learning opportunities. Examples of this include the delivery of the following through the Community Learning Grant:

- Provide craft workshops
- Facilitate music workshops (ukulele etc)
- Support classes aimed at developing the bank of Welsh language articles on Wikipedia
- Work with groups to develop exhibitions linked to national events e.g. First World War
- Facilitate self-directed learning groups and community groups such as photography groups, local history and family history activities

Furthermore, the Communities for Work Plus (CfW+) also creates opportunities for cultural engagement: 'Art with Literacy' (improving English through artistic activity) and Men's Lifestyle groups where a variety of activities are facilitated by CfW+ staff (dependent on the needs identified).

Previously, Communities First funding enabled the engagement of parents/carers and their children through the PETRA project (established by Caerphilly County Borough Council), aiming to improve essential skills and produce a story developed by the children themselves (which was then published and distributed across RCT Libraries). This project proved very successful and had a positive impact on literacy. Due to its success it has continued to receive funding through the Families First grants in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Garth Olwg Lifelong Learning Centre is funded through a combination of core Council funding and commercial income generation. It has a programme of events, performances and exhibitions that is designed to engage residents in a broad range of activities related to culture as this has proved to be an excellent way to attract residents from all backgrounds to engage in learning. The majority of events, and all exhibitions, are free although performances and some courses are charged for. The centre is recognised in the area for its delivery of courses through the medium of Welsh – for example, Welsh-medium classes on Welsh literature and history are very popular, while provision of theatre performances include Welsh-medium dramas and concerts as well as English-medium provision. A large number of Welsh language classes are delivered at the Centre by the University of South Wales and a Welsh Learners Eisteddfod is hosted on a regular basis.

Learners who are engaged on craft and photography workshops – pottery, art etc – are afforded an opportunity to exhibit and sell their produce and, for some this offers an opportunity to develop new-found skills into a route to employment or further learning.

The Libraries Service plays an important role in promoting culture and facilitating cultural activities while providing a safe space for people to spend time in. Opening up the local studies collections through digitisation is an on-going process. Currently historical photographs of the county (approximately 20,000 of them) can be seen online free of charge.

The informal settings of libraries make access to cultural activities easier for all sections of the community but they are particularly important for those living in poverty and those that are socially excluded. For many people it is the first place they experience and participate in arts and cultural activities whether it is a rhyme time session, an arts and crafts session or a creative coding session.

Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) Libraries not only create their own arts and cultural activities but work closely with a wide range of organisations, voluntary groups, community groups and other Council departments to provide cultural services. These include craft sessions, reading groups, creative writing groups, poetry groups, local exhibitions and even music or dance performances. Importantly the majority of these activities are free of charge.

Libraries also act as a gateway to the area's wider cultural offer, including museums, galleries, theatres and heritage projects. This may simply take the form of displaying promotional materials for these cultural organisations or providing a location for

these organisations to reach local communities and people who are less likely to access the arts.

RCT Libraries encourage communities to explore their own culture, self expression and creative abilities by providing:

- Cultural space
- Cultural resources
- Cultural activities
- Cultural programmes
- Cultural events

RCT Libraries provide a network of community spaces reaching into communities across the County Borough to provide cultural activities and experiences to people who do not normally participate in arts and culture. They perform this role in a cost effective and inclusive manner and continuing reductions in expenditure on library services may put this vital role at risk.

As with Garth Olwg, a wide range of activities are organised and facilitated by the Library Service – in particular, creative writing groups are held, poetry groups meet at libraries, and community historians use the facilities to research and have support to develop and promote their publications. The service produces an anthology of poetry and prose created by local people every year. More widely, knitting and craft groups meet at venues and, while this reduces social isolation there are also other benefits for the community, for example, Knitting Nannas provide local hospitals with head wear for premature babies, send blankets to charities, and raise money for local charities.

The National Library of Wales's programme of activities around *Cymru'n Cofio* has had the impact of raising awareness of the First World War in Wales and encouraging individuals and groups to undertake research, organise events and participate in projects associated with the centenary. There is evidence to suggest, certainly in Rhondda Cynon Taf, that these projects have resulted in a wider range of people of all backgrounds engaging in activities that have developed their skills and improved their confidence, as well as their knowledge of the period e.g. the Poppy projects undertaken at Ynysangharad Park. Interest in the Library Service's collections has been boosted by the marketing undertaken by the National Library of Wales and a number of local exhibitions and events have been developed around key themes of the centenary that have involved a wide range of organisations.

The work on digitising Welsh newspapers and journals has made the collections more widely accessible while projects such as Cynefin offer valuable opportunities for volunteering which can help to boost employability among those who are looking for work and who need to improve their CVs or to be able to show some recent work experience on an application form.

The People's Collection has been embraced in communities and has helped to democratise history giving, as it does, an opportunity for people to upload family stories as well as items relating to clubs and societies across the country. As with other programmes developed by the National Library these support personal



development and include the acquisition of new skills for those who take part in them.

Culture is used effectively as an engagement tool for further learning and as a means of tackling poverty of aspiration by broadening horizons and opening people's eyes to opportunities and interests they may not have previously considered. It is difficult to place a number on the amount of people who have engaged in learning or participated in work-related provision as a result of these engagement activities as no record is kept of the referral routes onto our learning programmes. However, feedback from frontline staff indicates that using cultural activities gets more people through the door (which is the first barrier that needs to be overcome).

For some, it appears to be the start of a route back into employment but it is difficult to provide data to support this. The impact of reductions in funding over the last 4 years has meant that administrative and managerial roles have been significantly reduced so that there is insufficient capacity to track the destination of participants. The Tourism, Events and Marketing Service provide a range of activities to attract people into the county in the expectation that they will increase footfall and expenditure in local towns and villages so that the economy will grow and more opportunities will be available for employment for local people. These events often have cultural themes or connections:

- **Armed Forces Day events** over the past 4 years have linked in with the commemoration of the First World War. This year a programme of activities focussing on the Poppy was developed in partnership with the British Legion, community groups and primary schools whereby volunteers and residents of all ages produced ceramic poppies to decorate the memorial in Ynysangharad Park in readiness for the Remembrance Day event.
- Support provided for **Parti Ponty** (led by Menter Iaith RCT)
- **Nos Galan races**

Both built, natural environment and intangible heritage which form part of the overall rich and diverse cultural heritage landscape have been utilised as part of RCT CBC's regeneration agenda. The regeneration team have supported, developed and delivered a number of projects which have included cultural and heritage facets, tangible and intangible, which have stimulated positive social and economic impact.

Two key examples are the Aberdare Townscape Heritage Initiative and the Lido, impacts were broad and included the creation of jobs, increase of footfall within the locales, improvement in the physical environment and stimulation of inward investment. As well as ensuring the protection, physical longevity and economic functionality of assets and landscapes the inclusion of engagement, up skilling and education as part of such projects ensured that impacts were widely felt amongst the community. There are two case studies below which provide details of the type of impact that these regeneration and cultural heritage projects have had on the poverty agenda in the area.

#### a) Lido Ponty, National Lido of Wales

The Lido dates back to 1927 when it was built in the arts and crafts style, funded by the miner's welfare fund, which derived funds from a levy placed upon coal

extraction. Despite many decades of popularity, the site was closed in 1991 due to decrease in users and physical fabric condition. The Lido owned by the LA was Grade II listed in 2001, and is the only listed Lido in Wales. It is situated in a Grade II Registered Historic Park & Garden, Ynysangharad Park and in a Conservation Area in close proximity to the town. The project's key objective was to restore the site following a conservation led approach that respected the outlined statutory designations combined with producing a modern facility fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The HLF Heritage Grants and ERDF programmes offered the scale of funding that would make the Lido project viable.

### **Social Impact**

The community action plan, had a raft of community and educational activities, some of which are ongoing and target an expansive cross section of beneficiaries. The educational, learning and self-esteem merits of the project was highlighted in the project evaluation. The project has provided a high-class facility and focal point for all the family that can be accessed by the surrounding disadvantaged communities. In addition, it has provided many opportunities for people to share their memories of the Lido and life in the area at the time.

### **Economic Impact**

Indirect and direct impact is driven by the Lido's ability to attract visitor spend and to provide local employment; it is estimated that it supports 21 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs within the local economy. Over three-quarters (76%) of construction spend for the Lido went to suppliers based within South East Wales and collectively, construction-related activity provided 38 jobs during the build programme. Over half (53%) of traders in the town centre described a positive impact on trade since the Lido's opening, with a similar proportion expecting this to continue. Over two-thirds (69%) of traders felt that there has been a positive impact on trade for businesses generally. It has stimulated footfall in the town centre and park.

During the first quarter of 2018 the vacancy rate was 7.7% , which is a considerable reduction to the baseline 10.7% vacancy rate recorded in 2012. The Welsh average vacancy rate for early 2018 stands at 13%.

### **Environmental**

From an environmental aesthetic view point the project has removed a visible eyesore and brought a derelict asset back into productive use. The re-landscaped surrounding areas have also been improved and enhanced, creating an inspiring environment. The conservation approach, reuse and the recycling of unviable tiles for construction purposes furthered this notion, as well as monitoring the carbon footprint of workers on site and the introduction of bio diversity measures such as bat boxes.

The visitor centre tells the story of the Lido and the restoration, and it has a number of interesting artefacts and interactive and traditional interpretation features. This engaging elements brings to life the past of the lido and celebrates some of its key people and events.

## **b) Case Study Aberdare THI**

Aberdare which completed in 2016 was approved £1.4 million, for a £1.9 million project, from the HLF via the Townscape Heritage Initiative Programme. The town is rich in Victorian Architecture and has a considerable amount of notable buildings. Testament to this is the fact there are 33 listed buildings and a Central Aberdare Conservation Area. Due to deindustrialisation, as with many historic towns and cities, there have been issues with depopulation, deterioration of the historic fabric and a more functional centric approach to urban development eroding original character. The THI allowed for significant investment for large scale renovations to be undertaken, which brought up to date important buildings which has improved the historical town.

£450,000 HLF monies were designated to employ a THI officer and for complementary community and educational activities. The common fund was overseen by a THI partnership that includes representatives from the local community. The buildings have been brought back into use whilst improving the aesthetics of the area and complementing other schemes, such as the Regeneration scheme

### **Social Impact**

Most of the complementary initiatives had an educational focus, ranging from school heritage and art projects to training skills for contractors. There was much positivity from those that attended training and educational sessions and engagement.

### **Economic Impact**

By uplifting properties a number of outputs were achieved that related predominantly within the realms of economic impact:

- 830 sqm of retail space created
- 9 full time (FTE) jobs (which may rise to 13 FTE jobs over time)
- 42 FTE jobs have been accommodated
- Accommodation of 10 enterprises.

Footfall has remained steady at around 23-24,000 for the past 5 years. Vacancies increased to 11.6%, this is much better than the expected rate of between 18% and 25% according to the historic trends. The Aberdare vacancy rate for the first quarter of 2018 is slightly lower at 11.3%, which is healthier than the current 13% average Welsh vacancy rate.

### **Environmental Impact**

THI efforts have changed the physical environment of the town very much for the better. Huge heritage benefits have been reaped, individual historical buildings, the majority vacant and listed, which are original features of Aberdare town centre, have been repaired. The wealth of skills training and education already highlighted has increased heritage knowledge within a wide audience. The operation of the THI via a partnership mechanism went to some way in giving decision-making back to the community and therefore challenging the often prevailing Authorised Heritage Discourse.

The services creating opportunities to engage with our cultural heritage and participate in cultural activity also provide pathways into employment that support the tackling poverty agenda.

The Arts Service provides work experience and volunteering opportunities for school pupils and individuals interested in developing skills for a career within the sector. The service have also provided Technical Theatre Apprenticeships at RCT Theatres for the past few years, with each gaining employment within the sector following completion of the scheme. In addition, the service aims to offer opportunities for graduates across its production and co-production developments, providing many with their first professional role.

The Heritage Service provides volunteering opportunities as a route to work. Over the past 18 months 4 volunteers have gone on to full time employment, 3 of those are working in the cultural sector. Most recently, the service has created a 2 year apprenticeship opportunity that will lead to a recognised Level 3 qualification in Cultural Heritage.

We continue to invest in our cultural assets and opportunities for residents and visitors to participate in and access culture. This includes our two traditional, highly-valued theatres (Coliseum Theatre, Aberdare and the Park and Dare Theatre, Treorchy), recognised as RCT Theatres and an Arts Council of Wales Arts Portfolio Wales client; The Welsh Mining Experience at Rhondda Heritage Park; the National Lido for Wales, Pontypridd; Ynysangharad War Memorial Park; Dare Valley Country Park, named as one of the six Discovery Gateway sites for the Valleys Regional Park; Gartholwg Lifelong Learning Centre; libraries and our vibrant town centres.

As a local authority, we are represented at the Chief Culture and Leisure Officers of Wales network for local authorities, providing an opportunity for improving the cultural offer, through the sharing of best practise, exploring collaboration, shared learning and knowledge, and a strategic dialogue with key bodies such as Sports Wales, Welsh Local Government Association, Arts Council of Wales, and WG's Arts Policy and Museum and Libraries Division. Furthermore, the network is exploring its connection to the Chief Leisure Officers Association<sup>17</sup> as a further network for engagement and learning.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.cloa.org.uk/>

### **3. What impact has the Welsh Government's Fusion programme had on using culture to tackle poverty?**

Although RCT is not a Fusion pioneer area, we are aware that our colleagues in neighbouring authorities have Fusion networks and have engaged with them as relevant.

We understand the impact of the programme to be positive, in that it underpins the value WG puts upon culture. This in turn has provided heritage services specifically (although cultural services more generally too) with a platform to communicate more effectively the positive impact of their work both financially, for example by improving the employability of people, and socially, by providing opportunities that benefit health and wellbeing.

With cultural services deemed as non-statutory and often seen as non-essential public services, WG's programmes specific to culture support in advocating for their value as social, economic, cultural and environmental drivers.

### **4. How effective have the Fusion pioneer programmes been in stimulating local collaboration?**

RCT is not a pioneer area and therefore, it is difficult to comment on this. However, it would benefit the cultural sector as a whole to learn from the Fusion pioneer programmes and explore the benefits of regional collaboration, particularly in relation to the City Deal Region, supporting to raise the profile of culture.