

Agenda item 5

For decision: Recommendations from Performing Arts Panel

Authors: Cllr Al O’Kane & Peter Wheelhouse, Economic Development & Regeneration Manager

Summary

A dynamic and diverse series of public panel meetings were held over the period from April to September this year. These meetings brought together stakeholders from across the Performing Arts sector in Frome and the surrounding area. The remit of the Panel was to identify ways that FTC could support the development of the sector in Frome and promote its local, regional and national profile.

This report summarises the issues that emerged from the Panel meetings and sets out some recommendations made by the Panel. The report also considers what can be done practically to respond to the conclusions of the Panel and makes some firm recommendations for Cllrs to consider. These include recruiting a marketing intern to help develop our web-based resources and support the promotion of local arts events and walking and cycling. The report also recommends the installation of two new dedicated events notice boards.

Objectives of the Panel:

The main objectives of the panel were to:

- Identify issues faced by Venues, Performers, Industry Professionals, Performing Arts Charities/Groups and Audiences
- Evaluate feedback whilst looking at what is good, what can be improved, what people and organisations need and what the Town Council might be able to do to help
- Determine potential projects and ways of addressing main issues raised
- Refine projects that have been identified
- Agree a way forward

This format was carried through at each meeting to ensure consistency and ease of participation for attendees and note-taking for those facilitating the table discussion at each event.

Background:

For the purposes of this Panel the term ‘Performing Arts’ was used to encompass all sectors including music, dance, theatre, musical theatre, poetry performances, comedy, community and charity performances and any other live performing arts event.

Frome has an enviable Performing Arts scene with two theatres, a soon to be refurbished cinema, impressive concert venues and a multitude of smaller venues including pubs and cafés. The Performing Arts scene in Frome is vibrant and offers events that attract all sectors of the community. However, there are issues that require attention if all the venues, performers and the events taking place are to get the full benefit of what the town has to

offer. There is also the opportunity to promote the town's art scene to a much wider geographical audience.

Structure:

Unlike some previous panels there was no 'core membership' in place. However various councillors attended and facilitated discussion on each table. Notes were taken and placed on the website after each meeting had taken place.

The panel meetings took place over six months, with specific themes allocated to each.

The themes were:

1. Venues
2. Performers
3. Industry Professionals
4. Performing arts charities, organisations and groups
5. Audiences
6. Round up meeting

The panel meetings all proved constructive with many issues and various topics were fed back to the Chair Cllr Al O'Kane, with recurring themes identified.

A review of all comments and suggestions from meetings 1-5 was conducted and then presented at the 6th 'Round up' meeting. This meeting was attended by representatives of all sectors. These final proposals form a plan for the enhancement and future success of the Performing Arts Scene in Frome and support various stakeholders as aforementioned. It is agreed that the town has a solid base from which we can build on and by putting these new ideas into practice we can help future-proof the Frome arts scene and expand its reach.

Recommendations from the Panel:

- 1. The development of a website - to include an effective town-wide online events calendar - covering the whole of the performing arts scene in Frome; that this website is the go-to-place for all that's happening in Frome and surrounding area.**
 - Either a new website or (and more practically) an extension of the current Discover Frome website managed by Frome Town Council.
 - Accessible at the back end to all venues, promoters and potentially performers; featuring an easy to navigate diary where users can add events and more importantly look for potential clashes before publicly posting.
 - Venues could use this to promote any openings in their diaries which could then be used by bands etc. for rehearsal space (for a minimal fee), thus fulfilling a great need for low-cost band rehearsal space for upcoming bands and young people - which was identified at panel meetings. Discover Frome has this capability.
 - Feature a full list of venues and contact details, industry professionals and local arts / community organisations so it creates an easy to find and easy to update

listings space. This new online facility could be managed from within Frome Town Council or a performing arts steering group. Important and vital potential to link with, and offer, online ticket sales to all related venue websites.

Recommended response:

Further develop the Discover Frome website to include an effective town-wide online events calendar once new resources are in place (see 2 below)

2. The creation of a dedicated Discover Frome website manager and Events Coordinator role within Frome Town Council

- This role will help fulfil the previous recommendation - promote and establish Frome as a destination for events and the arts; producing regular press / blogs / social media / event management / website management / reviews etc.
- Extend promotion to a wider 'outside Frome' audience as well as catering better for current residents.
- Manage online events calendar and online ticket sales

Recommended response:

- a) Over a period of 2 years starting in 2017, employ a marketing intern for 2 six month placements from University of Bath paid for by the Mendip Lodge s.106 agreement contribution and grant monies already secured from Mendip Tourism. The first internship is expected to start in summer 2017. The intern would work on the development of the Discover Frome website and event promotion etc. to support the arts community and the promotion of walking and cycling in the town. The role would complement the roles of Meg Mosley and Rebecca Krzyzosiak***
- b) Delegate authority to Meg Mosley to finalise a job description and arrangements with the University of Bath in consultation with Cllr Al O'Kane***

3. New dedicated events notice boards in two new locations – in plain sight when exiting Railway Station and halfway up Catherine Hill to be managed by FTC.

Recommended response:

- a) Delegate authority to Chris Stringer, Environment Manager to investigate the practicalities of erecting notice boards in these locations and arrange for implementation as soon as possible utilising existing budgets. Boards to be managed by the arts community.***

4. Find or provide more flexible and accessible rehearsal space in Frome – A safe and friendly space available for all types of performers young and old.

- With agreements in place to enable low cost use for younger performers and community groups (incorporating aspects of first recommendation re: online calendar)
- Available to hire at a fair rate to more professional and established performers

- Secure storage for props and other equipment
- Meeting place for like-minded people

N.B. The planned development to the rear of the Cheese & Grain will not be able to cater for everyone, but it IS a positive part of the bigger picture. We still need somewhere for Frome Town Youth Band and numerous other local bands / groups / charities - so the online booking diary for rehearsal space in the first recommendation is vital.

Recommended response:

Review when marketing intern is in post

5. Local performing arts mentorship scheme for young people in the town

- Educational performing arts workshops in local schools
- Scheme to complement and utilise proposed rehearsal space, new Frome Town Hall, local schools and public spaces
- Workshops on Saturdays and during school / college holidays
- Leading up to performances coinciding with the one-off proposed Frome Arts Week (see recommendation 6)
- Local performing artists to mentor young people in the town
- Dancers, musicians, singers, actors, poets, comedians etc. all encouraged to give up some time to help inspire young people

Recommended response:

Review when marketing intern is in post

6. One-off event 'Destination Frome – a Performing Arts Week' in Sept 2018

- Launch Frome as an all-year round arts destination (event title tbc)
- The week of performances would be aimed at showcasing talent in the town and showing off our wonderful venues, pubs, cafés and performance spaces
- FTC to create a dedicated 'Frome performing arts welcome pack' for visitors and residents
- One off Busking Festival - to coincide with and help celebrate Frome Arts Week
- Resident artist scheme (also coinciding) Streets and venues to sponsor resident artists throughout the town
- Promote the one-off Frome Arts Week nationally via TV e.g. The One Show
- Every venue and possible performance space to be involved

Recommended response:

Review when marketing intern is in post

7. Connect the Performing Arts and Wellbeing Panels and create a forum which combines the two topics

- Offering more opportunities for people to engage in the arts

- Create a safer environment and encourage the 'can-do' attitude of people in Frome to promote more interaction within the local community and the arts
- A healthier performing arts scene creates more entertainment and a wider range of audiences / the community are being catered for
- Involve local organisations such as Routes, TMCA, schools and community groups. This involves reaching out to inspired teachers at local schools to work with FTC (as also mentioned in fifth recommendation)
- Encourage venues and local performers / theatre groups to take performances out to other areas (e.g.: pop-up theatre in care homes and hospitals)

Recommended response:

Establish a more permanent Forum that can support the development of the Performing Arts