

Briefing note on Awen Cultural Trust for Members of Partnership Scrutiny

Submitted by Jo Sims, Service manager- Young People and Partnerships

Date: 20/3/23

Background

On 24th February 2021, the then Executive Committee approved the proposal to award Awen Cultural Trust (Awen) as the preferred provider for the Metropole Theatre (The Met), following a full and thorough procurement process being held, in line with the corporate procurement policy. Awen's core business is arts and cultural related, with a range of expertise and connections to a broader span of theatres and venues across South Wales. In April 2021, The Met Theatre and associated staff transferred to Awen. The contract is supported by the following agreements:

- Funding and Management Agreement (FMA) - that includes a 5 yearly review process for the management fee to be paid to the Awen Trust going forward
- Business Transfer Agreement (BTA) – that dealt with tupe arrangements and other related staffing matters
- 30 year Lease Agreement – this is a shared arrangement and runs alongside the FMA. This is a separate lease to Awen and the Museum arrangements remains as it currently stands with the Council.

Awen, as part of the tender process, submitted a detailed 5 year business plan for both the building and staffing structure, supported by detailed organisational accounts.

At the time of approval, this alternative service delivery option contributed to savings required for the Council's five-year Medium Term Financial plan, in line with the Bridging the Gap proposals. This project makes a key contribution to the Council's ten-year Leisure and Cultural Strategy, which supports the health and wellbeing of residents. The Awen Cultural Trust business case has resulted in a tapered reducing cost pressure. This project was funded from a reduction in the management fee paid previously to Aneurin Leisure Trust for the operation of the Metropole which for 20/21 was £221,908. The management fee required since April 2021 is summarised below:

Financial years	Year 1 (2021-22)	Year 2 (2022-23)	Year 3 (2023-24)	Year 4 (2024-25)	Year 5 (2025-26)
Management Fee Agreement	205,000	195,000	190,000	180,000	180,000

Monitoring and Governance arrangements

The Education Directorate has the lead role for the Client function for this contract, and the Service Manager for Young People and Partnerships is the link officer. Similar governance arrangements are in place between the Council and Awen as that for

Aneurin Leisure Trust – monthly meetings with link officer, regular meetings with Tech Services and quarterly updates on progress to the Council.

Quarter 3 performance highlights:

- Significant increases in attendance and participation on the same period last year as the venue continues to recover from the after effects of the pandemic. Nearly 4000 people attended events at The Met in this quarter with a further 1000 participating in some form of creative activity in the venue.
- 130th concert for The Met's anniversary
- Over 100 people attended family offerings including The Smartest Giant in Town, the Halloween Disco, Roald Dahl and the Imagination Seekers and The Moomins.
- The theatre programme included a successful performance of The Invisible Man, which exceeded expected audience attendance, and the lunchtime theatre programme which has attracted small but consistent numbers throughout the quarter.
- In conjunction with Frozen Light Theatre a specialist production was provided aimed at individuals with profound and multiple learning disabilities and their carers. This sensory performance is designed for small groups of individuals. 24 individuals accessed the performance over the four performances
- Performances from community performing arts groups including Little Shop of Horrors by AADMS, Showstoppers with A Dream is a Wish, Abertillery Town Band, LRS with Musicals Through the Years, and a collaborative concert from The Hermon Trust with over 100 -150 people at most performances.
- The December highlight was the return of Pantomime from Owen Money's Rainbow Productions which this year featured Welsh film and TV star Julian Lewis Jones. Six schools' performances were held for 867 pupils from Ebbw Vale, Six Bells, Abertillery and Pontypool. 840 people attended the 5 public performances for the panto with a total panto audience number of 1707.
- Head 4 Arts continued their Golden Melodies sing-along sessions for those living with dementia and their carers, along with the inclusive dance programme. Open Mic music sessions restarted and a new Open Mic poetry session in the bar.
- The Warm Welcome programme at The Met, developed to support local people through the cost of living crisis, included Free Music Fridays and Workplace Wednesdays. The former attracted between 10 and 30 people each week for some high-quality free entertainment and complimentary hot drinks. The latter supported local people with free access to quiet work space, high-speed wifi and complimentary free drinks. The programme has enabled us to test new opportunities and build new relationships with those who otherwise may not engage with The Met as a venue.

Attachment 1

Performance measures:	Quarter 3	% difference on same period last year:
The Met Ticketed Attendances Professional Performances	2468	24% increase
The Met Ticketed Participations Professional Performance	161	33% increase
The Met Ticketed Attendances Community Performances	1420	40% increase
The Met Tickets Participations Community Performances	882	45% increase
The Met - Total Visitor number	11203	35% increase
The Met % venue capacity	84%	20% increase
Number of volunteers	6	N/A
Number of volunteering sessions (1 session = 2- 4 hrs)	30	N/A