

Survey and Needs Analysis of Somerset Carnivals, Festivals and Outdoor Cultural Events

Executive Summary

- with Opportunities and Recommendations

This project has been funded by Somerset County Council Arts Service and Somerset Rural Renaissance.

It has been developed in partnership with all six Somerset Local Authorities and a range of support organisations, event, carnival and festival organisers, community groups and individuals

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This Executive Summary should be read in conjunction with the Statistical Analysis of the Somerset ECF Survey, informed by the developed Database of Events and Support Organisations.

1. Background and context

Somerset has a long history of producing high quality and attractive Events, Carnivals and Festivals (ECF) throughout the county. Whilst many are highly acclaimed and have significant profile eg Glastonbury Festival, Somerset Art Weeks and Bridgwater Carnival, a large number of smaller ECF activities have a significant but unrecognised economic impact. It is also acknowledged that many are under resourced and struggling to maintain stability in a challenging economic climate.

The ECF sector is backed up by a plethora of support organisations eg carnival clubs, music-making groups and Morris Men that also need to thrive in order to feed the many county-wide ECF activities.

There is increasing understanding of the wide individual, community and economic benefits of ECF activity and a particular opportunity to promote and develop such activity in the build up to and delivery of the 2012 Games and Cultural Olympiad. Somerset County Council, in partnership with the five Districts of Somerset and other key partners, determined to conduct a thorough evaluation of the sector to build a county-wide database of cultural Events, Carnivals, Festivals and support organisations, to determine strengths and weaknesses, and to identify support needs. It also determined to help sector development by creating an online ECF supporting Toolkit as part of ongoing cultural activity within the county.

The activity was proposed to have three stages:

1. A mapping exercise to build a database of ECF activity with a follow-up questionnaire survey to enable an audit of activity.
2. Production of an online event planner to support ECF organizations in their work and to encourage further growth and new ideas.
3. Dissemination of key findings in a Summary Report, promotion of the toolkit, and indication for other activity that might contribute to further development of the sector.

Artreach (Consultants) Ltd was appointed to deliver the mapping exercise and ECF audit and Tiihee Event Management to deliver the on-line planner.

The project was delivered between the end of December 2008 and the end of March 2009.

2. Summary of the project

This Report focuses on the mapping and audit exercise, and provides a summary analysis of need with initial opportunities/recommendations for future support activity that might be considered.

It was critical to establish a clear definition of what was intended by the terms Events, Carnivals and Festivals and by the concept of a support organisation.

A document was developed, informed by feedback from a range of partners, to clarify definitions in order to establish parameters for the database development. The “definitions” document is attached as Appendix A.

Information to build the database was drawn from:

- Somerset County Council
- Each District Council (through Licensing, Event and Arts Officers)
- Event, carnival and festival organizations
- Tourism data stewards
- Web research

A survey questionnaire was developed, informed by feedback from a range of partners, to provide a single survey for completion by event organisers and support organisations. The survey (attached as Appendix B) included discreet sections to be completed depending on whether participants managed events or participated as a support organisation.

The survey was distributed electronically via e-mail and in hard copy where only postal address could be obtained. The survey was uploaded onto Survey Monkey, a dedicated internet facility that enables online survey completion and analysis. Recipients were encouraged to complete online if possible but were also given the option of returning a hard, printed copy or forwarding an e-mail version. All those for whom contact information was available were contacted by telephone to encourage their involvement. In many instances surveys were completed on the phone by ArtReach personnel in discussion with the event organiser.

In total 92 useable questionnaires were returned and all but 6 that were received late were uploaded onto Survey Monkey to be part of the detailed electronic analysis. The late surveys were also included in the analysis but reviewed by hand. 5 questionnaires were discounted as they were inadequately completed and no further information could be obtained from the organisation concerned.

There were many instances where chasing a survey resulted in new or different contacts being identified for the database. This highlights an issue, that with many voluntary organizations different contacts are appropriate at different times, dependent on the nature of the enquiry.

The detailed statistical analysis of the survey has been used to inform this Executive Summary report and opportunities/recommendations and is available as a separate document.

The survey responses included 74 events that gave detailed figures for attendee numbers. The total attendances were 695,896, an average of 9,404 for each event. Using this average the full database of 193 events will show attendances of 1,815,000. Allowing for Glastonbury Festival, which alone has an annual attendance of nearly 200,000 it is reasonable to highlight an annual attendance at Somerset Events, Carnivals and Festivals of circa 2,000,000 people.

Following analysis of the survey ArtReach also undertook a series of meetings and lengthy follow up telephone/e-mail discussions with key partners and stakeholders in order to explore the information that had emerged, to obtain feedback and comment, and to inform the development of recommendations for other potential future activity. Participants included:

- Bridgwater Arts Centre
- Team Somerset
- Avon and Somerset Police Authority
- Somerset Art Weeks
- SPAEDA
- All District Events/Arts Officers
- District Licensing Officers

The discussions provided strong reinforcement of the picture that had come from the database survey, with participants concurring that they felt the key issues had emerged from the survey. There was some very useful discussion about potential support activity that might address issues raised (to supplement the online event planner that is being developed – www.somerseteventplanner.co.uk). Ideas that emerged for support activity have informed the opportunities for further action indicated below.

In addition reference has been made to the County's draft *Cultural Strategy* and to other relevant documents and papers such as the VAN *Valuing Voluntary Arts* Report of 2004 (with a focus on Somerset and Dorset), the *South West 2012 Events Strategy* produced by the Centre for Event and Sports Research at Bournemouth University, and the *Carnivals and Regeneration* article in *Town and Country Planning* August 2007 by Andrew Tallon.

3. Interpreting support needs

Some broad trends can be identified from the survey analysis. The key issues and challenges that ECF organisations identified were:

- Volunteer recruitment and management
- Income
- Red tape and regulations
- Marketing and promotion
- Accessibility and transport (primarily for support organisations)

Volunteers

The particular concern about volunteer recruitment focuses on the current dependency (for most organisations) on a small core volunteer group that is suffering from coordination "overload". The challenge is not so much recruiting volunteers per se, as recruiting skilled, committed volunteers to play an ongoing and regular role in managing/coordinating the event/group.

This issue is illustrated by an increasing reluctance for people to agree to become formal Directors where an incorporated company is involved. There is a sense that perhaps the 24/7 society is reducing the capacity for people to make the level of required commitment. Andrew Tallon's article indicates that the average club member spends 1000 hours a year working on carnival related activity!

A secondary issue is recruiting more young volunteers. This may reflect a sense that many of the Somerset Events, Carnivals and Festivals are long-established traditions and don't necessarily attract young people's engagement and interest.

Income

The key challenges identified were rising costs, uncertainty of income (especially in the current economic climate), reduction (or potential reduction) in Local Authority support, and challenges of fundraising.

Red tape and regulations

There is a perception that legislation is making life more difficult for voluntary organisations delivering events, especially in relation to health and safety and licensing.

Examples were quoted of increasing rigidity with respect to the style and nature of temporary signs, with Local Authority enforcement officers employed to identify infringements.

There is concern about finding clear and one stop routes for information (which may be eased through the on-line event planner being developed) and about discrepancies between the systems and levels of support from different Districts. The two Tier Local Authority structure can at times prove difficult for event organisers, especially where the activity covers more than one District area (eg Somerset Art Weeks).

As part of the support needs information provided, a large number of organisations also expressed anxiety about equality and disability legislation, and wanted help to ensure they were complying/could comply.

Marketing and promotion

Many organisations express their frustration at an inability to attract media interest. There is also a strong sense that marketing skills and capacity are not adequate to maximise opportunity. The marketing issue may partly reflect the challenge organisations find in successful fundraising.

Given the 2,000,000 attendees and the potential spend this represents, there is clearly a significant economic advantage to be gained from maximising visitor/attendee numbers through improved marketing and press.

Accessibility and transport

This key issue and challenge relates mainly to support organisations who reflect on the difficulty of engaging members from a wide area with the challenges of rural transport.

When addressing the question of future stability/security there was quite a difference between event organisers and support organisations. 22% of event organisers felt their event was insecure and 9% felt it was at serious risk. Most support organisations indicated they felt the organisation to be secure and sustainable.

Whilst not identified as challenges, issues or support needs, there were a number of trends that the survey illustrated that nevertheless should inform potential support actions:

- Status of event organisations
- Identity
- Volunteer reliance
- Track record and longevity of events
- Business support

Status of event organisations

A significant proportion (41%) of the participating organisations indicated they were formal voluntary organisations but only 6 organisations claimed registered charity status.

Only 29% of the cohort is incorporated as companies limited by guarantee or Community Interest Companies. 31% have no formal status. This is backed up by the VAN Report which found the majority of organisations to be unincorporated associations.

The lack of formality of this strong voluntary sector group is not raised as an issue by the organisers, but does nevertheless illustrate a potential issue when it comes to fundraising (lack of established status as a fundraising vehicle) and an element of risk when it comes to liability. The status of the organisations may impact on the ease of getting insurance or on the attraction to skilled volunteers.

Identity

Naturally there is great pride in identity, but a strong sense of anxiety about potential interference (especially from the Local Authority). Event organisers are indicating they have support needs, but are reluctant and fearful to take help in case it changes the way they operate. There is also a cynicism about the intentions of Local Authorities (“they promise help but it never comes”).

This issue also reflects a problem about adapting to change. People recognise a need to adapt to survive but are afraid the event will change as a result.

Volunteer reliance

Organisations clearly acknowledge the challenge of attracting skilled volunteers. It is important to note that 71% of the organisations surveyed depend entirely on volunteers.

Track record and longevity of event

Somerset has an extraordinary and long established tradition of Events, Carnivals and Festivals, but it is salutary to see that the average track record/longevity of the events surveyed is 30 years (the VAN Report also highlights that most voluntary cultural groups in Somerset were formed between 1970 and 1989). This is clearly both a strength and weakness. Whilst the track record means established interest and commitment it also highlights potential problems of:

- Adaptability to change
- Engagement of young people (these are not their Festivals)
- Delegation to new organisers
- Refreshment/reinvigoration of events

A number of events did acknowledge a need for reinvigoration and content development.

Business support

Whilst there is an acknowledgement that organisers fail to attract significant resources from the business community, nevertheless a high proportion of events (45%) do achieve some business support.

The average level of support indicated was £2028. Whilst this is relatively modest it also indicates the significant difference a modest improvement might make. If the other 55% of event organisations surveyed achieved the same average support it would bring an additional £100,000 into the sector. Doubling the level of business support achieved would make a considerable difference to income stability.

When asked about support needs the event organisers and support organisations highlighted the following priority areas for support:

- Volunteer recruitment and management
- Marketing
- Fundraising and income generation
- Equality and Disability advice

This list clearly matches well with challenges and issues raised, though it seems as if people accept that there may be little that can be done to support the challenges they face in terms of red tape and bureaucracy.

4. Opportunities for potential action

The support needs identified, and the feedback discussions with partners, have led to a number of suggestions for potential future actions that might complement and enhance the online Toolkit delivery.

Ultimately there will clearly be a resource issue in terms of what Somerset County Council and District partners may be able to offer. The following proposals include ideas that require financial or personnel investment, or in some cases may be deliverable at little or no cost. Where it is felt the benefits are particularly strong and the need greatest, the proposals have been highlighted as recommendations.

1. Volunteer Recruitment support

Above all else the recruitment of additional volunteer capacity into critical administration, coordination and management of Somerset ECFs is critical to future development. Without additional capacity it will be hard for event organisations to take advantage of other training and mentoring support (marketing, press and fundraising) that might be offered.

Somerset County Council is in a position to support volunteer recruitment through three routes:

- Focusing and encouraging its own personnel volunteer scheme
- Delivering a County wide recruitment and advocacy campaign
- Working with the SWRDA and other regional agencies to ensure an effective structure to support 2012 volunteering from the region, with local events as a stepping stone to engagement in the 2012 Games

SCC might advocate for involvement in the ECF sector through its internal Local Authority scheme, and provide encouragement for group volunteering support (using accumulated hours) to enable intensive input as required. This should be relatively easy to achieve and is a strong recommendation.

A wider County recruitment campaign requires investment in marketing. Such a campaign sits best with the County rather than individual Districts and would seek to raise generic awareness of the needs of the ECF sector – “your event needs you”! If resources allow this could be an extremely effective means of support and one that would be well received by the ECF sector. It is certainly recommended this option be explored in more detail.

The poor coordination of the volunteering process for the 2012 Games means that the third proposed route may be less attractive or effective. Nevertheless it shouldn't be discounted and there may be value in the region driving forward its own approach to Olympiad volunteering with a longer term aspiration to help volunteers engage with the Games.

2. Strategic marketing and promotion support

Strategic marketing and promotional support facilitated by SCC could help by:

- Promoting events across Somerset in a more coordinated way eg through web information and corporate advertising for the sector
- Packaging Somerset's ECF sector under one banner to achieve greater interest from regional, national and international press
- Bringing more marketing investment through sharing resources
- Upgrading and enhancing marketing and promotional knowledge and capacity in the ECF sector

There are three options proposed for direct marketing and promotional support (and suggestions for skills investment made in section 3 below):

- Strategic marketing activity invested in and led by SCC
- Partnership working eg with SWRDA and Tourism South West to facilitate marketing activity
- Identification of existing opportunities for the County and partners to increase ECF promotion and profile without incurring significant additional cost(eg refreshing the Somerset Arts web site)

The scope for SCC led marketing activity is as wide as the resources available. The significance of the sector and the economic benefits it brings suggest that a major campaign promoting ECF activity to the area surrounding Somerset, and perhaps nationally, may bring increased visitor numbers and support. However, it may be more appropriate for the County to play an advocacy role in encouraging other key partners to invest in promotional activity.

Through either route, a coordinated press campaign to increase an overview of the importance and vibrancy of the ECF sector may be a valuable intervention.

Most importantly there are existing routes for enhanced promotion and marketing eg through a publication such as *Your Somerset*, which provides a limited cost opportunity to provide significant additional focus and promotion. It is certainly recommended this opportunity is used on a regular basis.

The establishment of both Into Somerset and Somerset Tourism Partnership as formal bodies may provide routes for increased and effective marketing support.

3. Marketing Skills investment

Both the County and Districts have a potential role to play in providing focused marketing and press relations training and support to individual events.

Whilst the online event planner may provide key information about press release writing and planning marketing campaigns, there will be a value in personal mentoring support that can be provided using the expertise of appropriate Local Authority officers. This might be delivered through the SCC internal volunteering scheme.

The key issue is that event organisers and volunteers need help to practically employ the advice they may draw from a web site and to utilise the support to match their own individual circumstances. They also need help in acquiring and analysing data. A process of mentoring will add value to the online event planner.

There is of course an issue that without increased volunteer capacity, individual events may not be in a position to commit volunteer hours to receive such support. The recruitment campaign to build the volunteer pool needs to happen first.

4. Fundraising training/mentoring

A sea-change is needed in the approach of much of the ECF sector to fundraising activity. There is widespread frustration and disillusion with an apparent lack of success in obtaining funds from public sector and Lottery sources. There is clearly a requirement for focused information and advice/training and the online Toolkit may meet some of this need (as might the proliferation of free voluntary sector funding guides and update e-newsletters).

However, there is a much more individual approach needed that enables event organisers to benefit from specific guidance and support to ensure efficient use of resources and maximise chances of success.

It is proposed that SCC might commission a specific package of sector focused fundraising training that could be delivered locally for event organisers in each District, with small group sessions to enable individual cases to be explored in detail.

Training/seminar sessions would be followed up with one to one advice and support to ensure that participating events use the skills to submit strong applications for support from a range of potential public sector, Lottery and private (eg Charitable Trust) sources, and including private donors.

As part of the process appropriate Local Authority officers engaged in arts and cultural development would be up-skilled, enabling them to continue providing additional support in this area.

This is a strong recommendation as achieving increased resources and new sources of support for the ECF sector is as critical to future success as increasing the volunteer manpower.

ArtReach would be able to develop a detailed package and proposition for provision of this support if required (informed by many years experience of successful fundraising in the cultural sector and delivery of training/mentoring).

New initiatives such as the *SCC Cultural Events Fund* provide a further means for funding support.

5. Business Champions Club

It has been identified that there is a wide spread of low-level business support for the ECF sector.

SCC, working with the Districts, can encourage awareness amongst local businesses and drive additional support through a coordinated campaign to highlight the economic benefits of ECF activity and the opportunities to support the work.

This might involve establishment of a County wide Business Champions Club bringing prestige (annual awards?) and a range of benefits to those who commit increased support to the sector. Initially such an initiative might be promoted through presentations at Chamber of Commerce, Rotary and business breakfast events.

Given the significant potential to increase ECF income with a relatively modest increase in business support, this initiative is strongly recommended.

6. Somerset Events Advisory Group

It seems unlikely that a formal Safety Advisory Group can be established to cover Somerset. However, it may be possible to coordinate an informal group that can provide a more coordinated forum for advice, and help to encourage greater consistency between the Districts in terms of information provision and communication with event organisers. Such a group would need to be driven by committed key personnel from the statutory authorities. This may be linked to the Pioneer Somerset initiative.

7. Event mechanics road show

Either arising from 6) above, or as a separate initiative, there may be value in creating an information road show to provide a one stop shop (and gateway) in each District to share event legislation, advice on health and safety matters and to provide the sought after guidance on equality and disability issues. Once again there would need to be a partnership approach between SCC and the Districts with the commitment to arrive at a consistent approach to sharing information (event planning guide) and requirements, and ultimately a consistency of requirement.

8. "Good as New" Presentations

Whilst the concept of another formal consortium or network forum may be inappropriate (suggesting a requirement for event organisers to commit more time to attend meetings), there may be value in delivering occasional events (perhaps two per annum) which focus on providing stimulus and new inspiration/ideas for events. Organised by SCC these presentations would offer exciting, stimulating and accessible content that may invite new ways of working, propose and share new ideas for activity, and spark innovative practice. The key would be providing presentations that people really want to attend, rather than demanding commitment that is seen as yet another burden. On the back of this the presentation agenda can then also address more mundane, but valuable opportunities for collaboration such as equipment sharing, literature exchange and information swap shop.

This activity does not necessarily require a large budget and should be prioritised as a means to encourage new ideas and ability to adapt to change.

There is a real need for new festival activity to be initiated, not least to create meaningful opportunities for young people.

This proposed activity/event may help to stimulate such initiatives. It is supported by the recent innovation to establish a new collaborative county-wide Carnival Trust for Somerset (supported by Arts Council England) which has a priority delivering carnival activity and training into local schools.

In conclusion, whilst it is understood that the Local Authorities in Somerset will not be able to deliver to all the support needs requested or challenges identified, nevertheless it is in the interests of Somerset as a whole to invest in whatever way possible to maximise its prolific and unique portfolio of Events, Carnivals and Festivals and to ensure successful ongoing development, especially in the light of the 2012 Games opportunity.

Ends

Appendix A

Analysis of Somerset's Events, Carnivals and Festivals

Context

Somerset County Council (SCC) and Somerset Rural Renaissance, working in partnership with District authorities, Team Somerset and many voluntary, third sector and public sector partners, has commissioned a county wide survey of Somerset's events, carnivals and festivals, in order to identify what support needs exist, and to create an on-line tool kit providing a support resource. The project has arisen from the development work on the new Cultural Strategy for Somerset, and is informed by Team Somerset's strategic work to maximise a joined up approach to, and legacy from, the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympics Games and its Cultural Olympiad.

The project involves:

1. Creating a database of relevant cultural events, carnivals and festival (ECF) organisers – including sporting and heritage focused events, and of supporting delivery organisations including carnival clubs and folk dance groups.
2. Undertaking a questionnaire survey to build knowledge of and ascertain strengths, weaknesses and support needs of organisations on the database.
3. Analysing survey information to identify shared weaknesses and common support needs.
4. Creating an on-line toolkit to provide a valuable and accessible support resource to be hosted on the Team Somerset website.

Items 1-3 above will be delivered by specialist cultural consultants, ArtReach (admin@artreach.biz 01628 675800), and item 4 by Tiihee Event Management (tiinataatila@hotmail.com 07880 642894). SCC is keen to include a range of event organisers and supporting delivery organisations in the survey, encompassing local, community-led initiatives as well as major cultural activity.

Project Definitions

There are different views on what constitutes a festival or a cultural event. For the purposes of this project definitions have been agreed in order to enable a cohesive approach, and to establish a consistent set of data.

Events and organisations that meet the definition will be included in the survey, but in the future there may be many other events and activities that SCC and Team Somerset feel appropriate to add to the database.

Not being included on the initial database, or in the survey activity, will NOT prevent an organisation or event from benefiting from the on-line toolkit or from future development support opportunities.

This study will utilise the DCMS definition of culture which includes arts, sports, heritage and tourism activity. For the purposes of this project **carnivals and festivals** (across all cultural disciplines) are self-defining. Any events taking place in the County since January 2007 or planned for 2009 that are called a Carnival or Festival (and have a cultural dimension) should be included. Carnival Clubs will be included as supporting delivery organisations.

For the purposes of this project cultural events are defined to mean **all major outdoor cultural events (including sports, heritage, tourist and arts related activity) and local outdoor cultural events with an arts ingredient**. Events should have taken place in the last two years or be committed for delivery in 2009. Not included for the purposes of the survey will be stand-alone firework displays, craft, antique and Christmas fairs, markets and horticultural shows (only Flower Festival events). Folk dance clubs, including Morris Men will be included as supporting delivery organisations.

Project delivery

1. Local Authorities, Parish Councils and TIC's are invited to identify local cultural events, carnivals and festivals for inclusion in the database and survey (in response to the definitions provided above). All information (comprising name of organisation and contact information as acceptable within the parameters of the Data Protection Act) should be forwarded to admin@artreach.biz (Tel 01628 675800 for any queries). For the purposes of the survey the database will be frozen **on Wed 21 January**.
2. The survey questionnaire will be distributed by e-mail and post from Thursday 15 January. Recipients will be invited to complete by e-mail, on-line, post, or over the telephone via a short interview.
3. The survey will be completed by **Monday 9 February** and thereafter survey data will be analysed to identify common support needs and to inform toolkit development.
4. A comprehensive Report analysing the data achieved will be produced in early March and the findings disseminated at an events, carnivals and festivals seminar.

Appendix B

Survey of Cultural Events, Carnivals and Festivals in Somerset

See attached document.

Ends