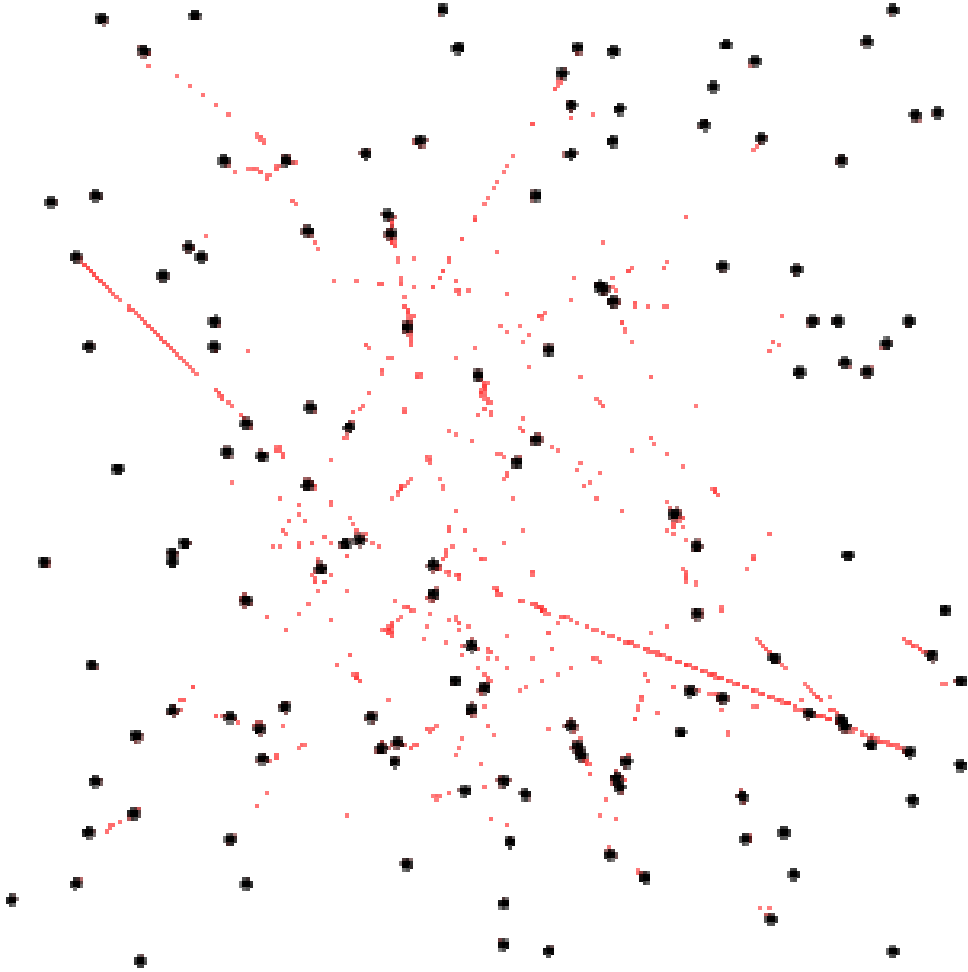


The Performing Arts for Slough

# Community, arts, funding: Squaring the circle – the business case



Report from **RedQuadrant**

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## Summary and key recommendations

Slough finds itself in a very challenging position as regards the arts. The socio-demographic profile of the town suggests that participation in, and awareness, of the arts is likely to be very low. In fact, participation and awareness are even lower than this profile would suggest. This low level of engagement creates a feedback loop with the lack of a night-time economy in the town. Given the accessibility of London and other towns with significantly more developed arts scenes, that proportion of the population who actively seek events and involvement are more likely to find it outside the town than inside. Resources for supporting the arts, as in all areas of local and central government activity, are increasingly scarce.

There is, in fact, a significant level of community arts activity in Slough, and the community arts team has a track record of providing holistic support for the development of artists from the community which has given it a national profile and helped to maintain an arts community focused in the area and on provision which meets the interests of their community. This has also attracted significant national funding into the area, and means that council-supported art can be targeted more effectively to help the community address and solve their own problems and issues.

### Strategic approach

Arts activity can be focused either on deep engagement, or on mass participation, or on some combination of the two:

- **Deep engagement**, where a relatively smaller number of participants are likely to be much more involved in activity (for example, learning new skills, participating in workshops, or staging a performance) builds strong links between a few individuals, often within existing communities; and
- **Mass participation**, where relatively large numbers of people attend arts events more as 'passive observers' (for example, an 'evening out') builds weak links between many individuals, sometimes from different communities.

These are not mutually exclusive and the right strategy needs to find the right mixture of the two. The key challenges identified in this report are:

- That the community arts team has a track record and a proven method for successfully developing deep engagement, but that this risks being focused within those communities already involved, and does not clearly address some of the council's target outcomes; and
- That significant resources have been devoted to the West Wing in recent years, becoming the main operational focus of the council's contribution to the arts, and while this has had some positive effects on deep engagement, through providing a regular home and 'creative hub' type location for some major providers, resource has largely been focused on attempts to build mass participation which have not, as yet, been successful nor sustainable, rather than the community-led approach which has been shown to have been more successful in Slough

### Outcomes sought

The council seeks to achieve a number of outcomes through its support for the arts through community arts development:

- **Participation and access** – extending opportunities for people to take part in a diverse range arts activities and removing barriers to participation;
- **Infrastructure, continuity, and sustainability for the arts in Slough** – through support for fundraising, talent and skill development, venues and facilities;

- **Raising aspirations** – developing opportunities for people to be inspired and express themselves; and
- **Integration** – weaving the arts into the fabric of Slough ensuring that it is at the heart of multiple agendas.

### Community analysis

As noted above, most of the community in Slough are not particularly interested in mass participation in arts activities; those who are, are well served by traditional arts provision elsewhere in the sub-region. The contribution of the creative economy is marginal both to the needs of low skilled and over 25s and to the growth areas in Slough's economy which focus around the type of activity found on the SEGRO estate. While targeted support for community arts activity makes sense, it is important to continue to build opportunities through this work to open up cross-community engagement, and to improve on how it helps to deliver council priorities.

### Vision

We recommend that to make the best use of arts development to deliver council outcomes, the strategic focus should be on a community-centric approach:

- Use deep engagement to deliver specific council agendas through commissioning and supporting work to address issues such as community cohesion, health, wellbeing, and community safety. Community-based artists and community organisations can generate innovative and artistic responses to the targeted issues; and
- That mass participation, which can help to deliver high-level council priorities including Pride in Slough, be supported through placing a premium on opening up deep engagement activities for broader participation by encouraging and supporting them to work across different communities and offer more performances.

This strategic approach helps to determine what activities are required, and in turn to identify the infrastructure needed, including venues, buildings, and support for arts organisations. Sustainability and infrastructure should be supported through continued focused development of skills and talent in artists and arts organisations, maximising the use of existing and planned venues, and, most importantly, through improving the communication of arts activity within Slough. The latter needs to extend the reach of current marketing activity, which tends to be word of mouth or 'local'.

### Implications

The key priorities for Slough's Community Arts should be:

- To make better strategic impact and use resources better through embedding arts and culture in the agendas of the community and of the council;
- To provide more active community leadership through supporting arts activities that provide cross-cultural opportunities; and
- To undertake targeted audience development, without attempting to generate significant mass audience provision (which is both unfeasible due to financial and practical barriers to a sustainable night-time economy in Slough, and unnecessary because of nearby provision).
- To support marketing of existing and new community-led provision to open it up to new audiences and encourage cross-community participation

This means that, by 2012:

- The West Wing should be self-financing and run outside of the council;

- A combination of the Learning Curve and community venues should provide a wider and better-marketed range of spaces for community arts activity open to all;
- The Learning Curve should function mainly as a community showcase, with a relatively low number of well-chosen mass appeal events (such as comedy and music in studio format) rather than a high level of programming as a performance space;
- The benefits of the Learning Curve and Slough Town FC developments should be facilitated through sensitive relocation of arts organisation currently occupying the West Wing; and
- The Creative Academy and Dance Academy should be self-financing or no longer be supported, since they are not major contributors to either strategic aims or economic development strategy priorities.

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## 1. Background

RedQuadrant have been commissioned 'to work with Slough Borough council to create a business case for the future of the Performing Arts in Slough for the next 5+ years that will meet local demand and is practical to implement and fund.' This report aims to:

- Support clear and sustainable decision-making by Members which can be justified financially and to stakeholders;
- Set out a clear, sustainable and financially justified strategy going forward which identifies opportunities to build capacity; and
- Support and build the reputation of the community arts team with stakeholders including internal council stakeholders, arts bodies and individuals in the borough, and arts funding organisations.

A brand new consultancy for the public sector, RedQuadrant uses a new 'lean' business model to deliver higher quality consulting at better value. We have only three employees, the three partners, who are all deeply experienced public sector consultants, sharing over fifty years' experience. We have an extensive network of experienced, dedicated independent consultants and create bespoke project teams to meet the needs of our clients. RedQuadrant is part of a new generation of consulting firms who have redesigned their model to be able to provide excellent quality at better value.

The partners focus on personally leading key projects, client management, and quality assurance for our clients. Our consultants are all deeply experienced in their fields, are involved designing the methodology in our proposals, and make a personal and contractual commitment to project success. This model allows us to provide the highest quality full consultancy service while preserving the benefits and avoiding the weaknesses of a number of other approaches.

In parallel with our work, artservice have been commissioned to assess the potential for the West Wing to remain open and become viable after 2010/11 and to prepare a business case in support of a preferred option. That study has looked at future options in the context of the council's plans to include a new performance space in the planned Learning Curve library development in Slough Town Centre and the plans for the Arbour Vale site re-development.

Together the two studies must clarify for the council how it can best use its resources to deliver an arts programme that adds significant value to the people and communities of Slough within available resources. They will inform and focus the development of a new Community Arts Strategy for the period 2010-2015, currently in draft form. This will reaffirm and potentially realign the work of the community arts team in the context of the council's Community Strategy priorities.

## 2. The performing arts in Slough

### 2.1 Why the performing arts matter

The performing arts in Slough play an important role in the lives of everyone who lives there, contributing to improving the health and wellbeing of people, to Slough's Sustainable Community Strategy. In particular they support:

- community cohesion
- health and wellbeing
- economy and skills
- environment

The vision is articulated in the council's draft Community Arts Strategy:

***Cultural services bring people together, celebrating the diversity and richness of Slough's community, raising people's aspirations, creating opportunities and nurturing skills and creativity. Cultural Services will be a force for change, making Slough an exciting and vibrant place to work and live.***

This vision is a simple one, but it assumes an understanding of the benefits of such participation which not all residents will have. It is our contention that large numbers of the population of Slough will not relate to the traditional British middle-class definition of culture. They will not see arts as a career, nor as a hobby, but as part of the fabric of their lives. They don't label their participation as 'arts' necessarily, but it meets any broad definition of that term. Many residents would have an aversion to that label yet do engage with arts such as music, comedy and cinema.

### 2.2 Slough's Community Arts Strategy

The Community Arts Strategy 2010-2015, to which this report forms an appendix, sets out the vision, and articulates the values and role of the community arts team. This document has been developed in partnership with RedQuadrant and underpins our work on this report.

### 2.3 Current provision in Slough

As we said in our original tender for this work:

'Slough is in something of a ticklish situation. Reduced funds are not being matched by reduced public expectations, and you are quite explicit that some of the work around sustainability in the establishment of the West Wing was not completely up to the desired standard, which stored up problems for the present. There has not been the surge of commitment, activity, support, and funds to make existing community leadership options healthy and viable, and yet there is likely to be strong opposition to any rationalisation. In this sense, Slough's exemplary track record on use and development of the arts, and community engagement, is a decidedly double-edged sword since expectations are raised as a result.'

Notwithstanding this, there is a good track-record of community-focused and usually (although not always) community-led arts provision in the borough. A dedicated community arts team is committed to supporting local artists and ensuring that there are opportunities in Slough for people to take part in a wide range of high quality arts activities. The emphasis is on local needs, with 'the arts reflecting the interests and aspirations of the local community'<sup>1</sup>. The focus is on equipping community members and groups with the skills to deliver arts projects including helping them to identify

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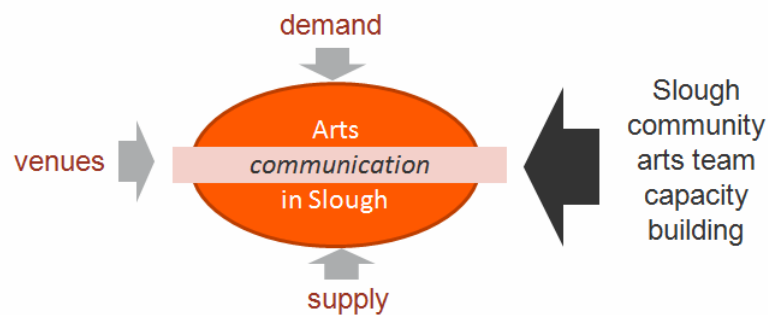
<sup>1</sup> Strategy for Arts development in Slough, 2009 – 2014

resources and equipping local artists to work with communities to develop offers that respond to local cultures and community needs.

However this admirable strategy has been subverted by the operational need of running a challenging venue, the West Wing, and furthermore has been shown to only engage (and therefore only benefit) a relatively small number of residents (reflecting a deliberate emphasis on deep engagement at the expense of mass participation).

### 3. Methodology

Our overall approach used a simple conceptual model which is based on understanding that the level of arts activity and participation in Slough, and the outcomes, will be a product of audience demand, arts organisation supply, and the availability of suitable venues. Communication is the vital central ingredient which brings these three together, with demand stimulated by knowledge of the availability of events. The community arts team have the opportunity to direct their resources to build capacity in any of these areas: stimulating demand through audience development; supporting venues; developing supply; and improving communications.



Our baseline sought to identify the demand (audience), supply, and venues for performing arts in Slough, the communications mechanisms and approaches that bring them together, and identify how the community arts team add to this picture.

#### 3.1 Desk research

It seems that there is no shortage of reports and strategies that have been produced in consideration of the performing arts in Slough. Those that have come to our attention include:

- External:
  - Audit Commission Inspection report 2004
  - ArtReach report 2009
  - Thinking Outside the Box – An exploration of ways to enhance long term support for the arts across Berkshire 2009
- Internal:
  - Art at the Strategic Centre – evidence gathering matrix (undated)
  - CPA Learning Outcomes and Response Strategy 2004
  - Annual Report on Arts Development in Slough 2008-2009
  - Community Arts team reports from consultation sessions on new strategy 2008 - 2009
  - A strategy for Arts development in Slough, 2009 – 2014

#### 3.2 Consultation

A consultation meeting with local arts and community organisations was attended by eight representatives from local organisations. The meeting focused on performing arts provision and development and the future of the West Wing. A discussion about audiences and how to engage them, communication and marketing was followed by consideration of the West Wing and future options for the venue. An online survey aimed to garner responses around strengths, weaknesses, and development opportunities. We also reviewed significant amounts of earlier research commissioned by Slough and by regional and national organisation including consultation the community arts team carried out in 2008 and 2009 with local residents, artists and voluntary groups.

## 4. Baseline and gap analysis

See Appendix 2 for full details of our baseline and gap analysis. Key points for the strategy and business case are set out below.

### 4.1 Community and expectations

Participation in the arts in Slough, as measured by National Indicator 11 (NI11, the key national local government indicator), would be expected to be low given the demographics of the area. In fact, it is even lower than the average for the nation or the region would predict, partly due to the very low levels of night-time economy activity in the town. Overall, NI11 is weighted towards a traditional model of arts participation, and also depends (by definition) on self-identification of activity as 'arts'. Therefore, while it can be a very useful driver if the strategic decision is to pursue wide-scale participation and awareness of participation, particularly for more 'passive' participation, it is a less useful measure when the strategic objective is focused on deeper engagement by the few, or when, as in Slough's case, communities don't engage in the arts in traditional ways.

In the 2006 Slough Annual survey, the services least likely to be used by Slough residents were art facilities or museums (3%). This rose to ten per cent in the Cippenham area, but here the socio-economic profile is atypical of Slough. Just three per cent of residents identified these facilities as important in comparison to a range of other services. Usage levels for community centres are twice that of local arts and museum facilities. In the same year, the Slough Branding and Perception survey showed that almost three in ten (28%) of residents had heard of the West Wing and about one in five (21%) had heard of the Arts at the Centre. Marketing communications are vitally important in engaging the public with the arts. Our analysis has identified that key audience segments are not being engaged to expected levels with the arts, and we expect that communications will have a role in these lower levels of engagement.

The picture we have gathered of the Slough community is of relatively low interest in what they would define as 'arts', although relatively high active participation within particular communities in art-related cultural activities. Those who do seek relatively passive participation (as audience members for drama, music, comedy, dance, and other forms, or visitors to museums or galleries) expect to have to leave Slough to enjoy this. Of those who do not currently seek such participation, few are likely to change their perspective significantly through better promotion and programming alone.

Though 40,000 people travel into Slough to work, there is little evidence to suggest that they are supporting a thriving cultural night time economy. Currently, Slough is much more a business hub than a cultural hub. Any evaluation of the potential for a local venue should focus heavily on encouraging Slough residents to use the venue. This said, appropriate high profile professional performances in the right venue would draw in people from outside Slough, if not available elsewhere locally. RedQuadrant would advise that using travel time analysis to examine venue viability is likely to overstate the potential for an arts venue in Slough because of the significant numbers of people from higher socio-economic groups just outside Slough. We would further advise that all these factors are important considerations in the development of the future strategy for the performing arts and critical to this is how the Heart of Slough and the night economy offer are connected together.

The opportunity to use the limited capacity of the community arts team most effectively is therefore to build on existing community arts activity to develop more activity, to steer activity to that which supports council goals, and to help them to engage more broadly and share with other communities. Active marketing and communications by the council, and helping those undertaking community arts to

communicate better, can therefore be an important part of developing these existing strengths of the arts in Slough.

There is clearly a small but active minority who want to participate in the arts and their needs would appear to be being met by current provision. However our gap analysis indicates that some groups within the community are under-provided for in this respect. More could perhaps be done to draw in these other groups and engage with them to ensure that they have a voice and are able not only to participate but also to lead provision.

#### 4.1 Venues and practitioners

Art practitioners expressed the view that if a venue is to be successful it should have regular performances. No such venue is currently operating in this way in Slough for the wider performing arts. The idea of something happening regularly has the important benefit of raising awareness of the venue which creates a virtuous circle of people using the venue, enabling more events at the venue, bringing more people to the venue and so on. In the e-survey, about half the practitioners felt that a better venue would increase audience sizes.

The venue also needs to be 'cool' and a place where everyone across the whole of Slough feels welcome. Art practitioners also pointed out that it needed to be somewhere that fulfils the night economy requirements of being able to eat, drink, socialise and relax. Arts practitioners also emphasised good transport links and a long-term commitment to the venue.

The West Wing does not appear to be a sustainable venue either as a performance venue or financially. Lettings figures for April to December 2009 (as at September 9, taken from the ArtService report) show that the auditorium usage "remains relatively low at an average of around seven lettings a month... representing around 20% of potential evening capacity available and under 7% of overall capacity when possible daytime usage is taken into account". Furthermore, non-arts groups account for 40% of total bookings for all spaces at the West Wing. In 2008/9 there was very significant council and Arts Council subsidy, and total subsidy from the council in 2009/10 was an estimated £125K once staff time is included. The key question here is why? Can Slough actually sustain such a venue? The evidence suggests that it cannot. The same ArtService report welcomes the recent emphasis on a new role for the building as a centre for creative and community activity, with spaces in which to create work; workspace for small creative businesses; but with a lower emphasis on live professional performance.

All of the above are important messages for the council as they plan the development of the Learning Curve and develop a strategy for its use as a venue – the Learning Curve is likely to be able to deliver only part of this ambition due to size and programming constraints, but can be part of a mix of restaurants, bars and pubs that in a regenerated town centre could start to build an attractive offer to residents, on a modest but sustainable scale.

The e-survey with practitioners found that the top three barriers to larger audiences for performing arts were 'poor quality marketing and communications' (69%), the level of interest amongst residents (54%) and better performing arts provided outside Slough (46%). While marketing communications certainly can and should be addressed in a cost-effective manner, the latter two points further demonstrate the impracticality of seeking to address large-scale passive involvement given the barriers to such a strategy and the lack of direct strategic return.

RedQuadrant propose that given current levels of engagement in arts in Slough, the only way an arts centre for the public will work is if 'everything is right':

- central venue embracing the whole community;
- appropriate programming for the community;
- strong marketing;
- excellent catering offer with drinks license and competitive pricing; and
- run by an organisation that has successfully run arts venues.

The success of large-scale performing arts in a diverse community requires strong programming and an overall strategy for engagement. In order to achieve a pattern of appropriate programming, a local authority like Slough would need to undertake detailed analysis of customer segmentation, including ACE Audience Profile, Gender, Age, Social & ethnic background etc. This simply underscores the fact that the gap that would need to be overcome to generate a really significant commercial arts scene around night-time economy activities and large-scale passive participation is very large. Existing levels of council investment, however directed, are not close to being sufficient to bridge this gap, and the investment required would not generate sufficient return on the council's priorities or on Slough's economy. Given that available resources are being squeezed, the focus therefore needs to change if best use is to be made of them. The Council will need to take a decision on whether this is something they wish to prioritise and fund in the future but the indications for now are that lower levels of deep engagement will better support deliver of the Council's strategic objectives.

## 5. Existing priorities

To move forwards a decision needs to be made as to what is the priority for the performing arts in Slough.

- What is the priority for existing and potential arts providers?
- What do the people of Slough want?
- What do the council want to achieve? and
- Do all three of these groups want the same thing?

### 5.1 Providers' priorities

Our research suggests that providers are not focused first and foremost on developing larger audiences. Indeed, they shy away from the complexities involved in organising large-scale events. They are clearly driven by their own belief in the benefits of participation and a desire to enthuse and engage others, especially young people. They are rooted in communities and have a strong sense what their community wants, but lack an awareness perhaps of what other communities might also gain from participation in their art form. This is completely understandable given that only RIFCO within Slough is from a large audience background.

The main emphasis is on workshop-style provision, and while performances can and do often result from this workshop activity, these tend to attract only those from the same community, i.e. the family and friends of the performers. Performances are not advertised in such a way as to promote inclusiveness (if they are advertised at all). People come, not because they want to see the performance itself, but because they want to see the people they know **in** the performance. The challenge lies in building on one-off attendance to create an on-going interest in the arts, and this appears not to be a challenge that providers currently see as a priority for themselves. Most of the groups are voluntary led and whilst they may wish to open up activities to a wide audience, it is not their primary focus. Their marketing largely depends on word of mouth and local community connections, so rarely reaches new audiences. This indicates that the most strategically important role for the Council's Arts Team is to champion and broker links between organisations and communities, using all the channels available to promote arts activities across the Borough as a whole.

The ArtService report on the West Wing also refers to practitioners concerns about 'poor marketing and promotion and the general lack of community engagement with the building'.

When asked about the future of performing arts, practitioners emphasised the importance of a 'creative hub' where artists could work, meet, exchange ideas and collaborate.

*'Creative Hub... Multi-functional space... More performance opportunities... More opportunity to collaborate... Really good performance... Keeping tradition... Decent rent & space'*

There is a desire to work together and to work with the community and this is the great legacy of community arts: that the future is conceived in the traditions of bringing communities of people and communities of artists together. In the future, artists would like more opportunities to perform and that this future is sustainable through reasonable rates for office space, workshop and performance space. This is strongly reflected in the ArtService report.

## 5.2 Audience and community priorities

What do the people of Slough want? There is clearly a small but active minority who want to participate in the arts and their needs would appear to be being met by current provision. However our gap analysis above indicates that some groups within the community are under-provided for in this respect. More could perhaps be done to draw in these other groups and engage with them to ensure that they have a voice and are able not only to participate but also to lead provision. More also needs to be done to widen the appeal of existing activity, and (crucially) where appropriate market it in such a way that it is better understood as being intended to be inclusive of all communities rather than targeted at a single group within the broader community.

And to what extent do local people as a whole want to 'have a night out in Slough'? Currently they appear relatively happy to travel to Windsor, Maidenhead or even London to see a performance, so if audience growth and the night economy are to be the drivers behind a revised strategy for the performing arts here, something needs to be done to convince them that a night out closer to home is an attractive alternative.

Thus, while it is a realistic priority for the community arts team to increase participation through better marketing, brokering of links to reduce perceived exclusivity, and effective use of community centres, and in future the Learning Curve, the development of large-scale passive participation and its necessary concomitant, a night time economy is not realistic given available resources and priorities of the Arts Team. Any change to the strategy in this respect would need to be considered as part of wider strategy development for the Borough Council. The Learning Curve has the potential to form part of the solution to developing such a night-time economy for the town, should the Council so wish, and its development as opportunity to bring together all the stakeholders in the debate.

## 5.3 Slough Borough council priorities

The key message from our research and consultation is that there is an apparent dichotomy between active and passive involvement, as illustrated by a mismatch between two existing Slough Borough council strategies: the 'Community Arts in Slough strategy, 2010-2015' (currently in draft form) and the Heart of Slough Policy.

The former indicates that the priority is on high level and high-quality engagement for relatively few people within the community (with the concomitant broader passive engagement of the larger numbers attending resultant performances, albeit sometimes as a one-off engagement). The vision describes opportunities for everyone in Slough to take part in the arts, and the arts are seen as contributing to Slough's Sustainable Community Strategy by encouraging social inclusion, forging links between communities and helping to celebrate diversity. The approach is to encourage participation by the (relative) many by supporting an individual or group to develop a project targeted at a local community; thus one project or intervention can reach hundreds of people for a one off event and, potentially for some of these at least, lead to long term sustainable participation.

The focus is on community arts which are developed by local people for their communities. The community arts team's ethos is that local communities are the experts when it comes to knowing what local residents want for the arts, that they are best placed to deliver many arts activities. The role of the council is perceived to be not imposing a view of what the arts should be but facilitating the ideas of local practitioners through providing the support they need to make these ideas real. There have been two key challenges to this admirable strategy – first, the tendency of many community activities to be exclusive rather than inclusive (since they often focus around reinforcing rather than developing community identity, and because the marketing capacity of the practitioners involved is limited by time and budgets);

and second the operational challenges of running the West Wing. The latter point has meant that the majority of the resources of the community arts team have been focused on support for direct provision of a venue rather than on facilitating and shaping the development of community arts activity.

So despite the intended focus on community-led activity which might be interpreted as 'by the community for the community', there remains a challenge for some groups and activities in meeting the aim of 'encouraging social inclusion , forging links between communities, tackling extremism and preventing isolation'. While many projects do deliver outcomes that support this implicitly or explicitly, our consultation indicates that that largely communities participate in the performing arts on a 'single community' basis, and not as a homogenous Slough community. The existing offers are not communicated to anyone one outside the immediate circle, and even when you **could** get a wider audience, groups do not always regard this as a priority or lack the time or expertise to communicate their offer to a wider potential market.

Taken in total, the relatively limited inclusivity of community arts activity, the resource drain of supporting the West Wing, and the failure of the West Wing as a mass-participation venue have mean that the resources deployed by the community arts team have only been able to engage (and therefore benefit) a relatively small number of residents and have not been able to make as strong an impact on broader council and community outcomes (e.g. cohesion) as they might

Meanwhile the 'Heart of Slough' strategy talks aspirationally about the night economy:

*The 'Heart of Slough' will be a hive of commerce, leisure, living and learning. By day, business men and women will be drawn to Slough's range of high-tech businesses and its opportunities. By night, Slough's bars and cafés will buzz with the voices of residents as they enjoy the relaxed, attractive and safe surroundings.*

It aims to support the vision set out in the Slough Community Strategy, Proud to be Slough, of a great place to live, work and play. As part of this the existing library site would be sold and a new library, learning and cultural facility would be built – the Learning Curve.

To help resolve some of these conflicting ambitions, we undertook a scenario planning session with officers from the community arts team to explore the tensions between these two strategic aims. Our joint conclusion is that given the above, the challenge is therefore to open up and multiply the impact of existing arts engagement. This will increase demand, involvement, and impact but will generate organic growth of activity which can be met by existing community venues in the foreseeable future, and would provide a much more sustainable approach which would shape infrastructure requirements in due course. The implication of this is that the community arts team should continue to focus on strategic support and building links between existing community arts activity rather than direct provision. The exercise also highlighted the need to align community arts team priorities to meet council priorities, and to assess the current activities against them, stripping out those that don't deliver.

## 6. Options appraisal and outline business case

### 6.1 Scenario planning

Options for future action were initially developed through a mini-scenario planning exercise, details of which can be found in Appendix 3. This exercise not only led to some strategic insight into the current situation, reflected both in this document and the new strategy, but also informed the vision for the future.

Four options were identified for evaluation:

- 1) **Mass audience focus** – while reducing total spend, explicitly move the existing focus to the effective use of venues and seek to develop mass audience activities and night-time economy through effective programming and marketing;
- 2) **'Art for arts' sake'** – focus on developing a sustainable and thriving arts scene, on the assumption that this will benefit the community;
- 3) **Targeted deep engagement** – use a core of deep engagement activity focused around council goals, and where possible generate cross-cultural participation through good marketing and influencing; and
- 4) **Minimal activity** – withdraw from all existing funded activity, retain one sole strategic role to link council teams and artists / community organisations.

Each option was defined as realistically as possible, though it was quickly identified that some of these potential directions were either not affordable or not relevant, or both; nevertheless, the exercise helped to clarify why the selected option was chosen.

#### Mass audience focus

Transition out of existing sustainability/development work, putting the focus instead on the effective use of the West Wing and development of other venues, linking the activities with strong branding, theme, and marketing/communications to achieve a night-time economy in Slough, 'pride in Slough', and build community cohesion through participation.

#### Art for arts' sake

Support for sustainability/development and limited support for venues (including the West Wing), little focus on council priorities *per se* but an approach which assumes that community problems will be solved through community arts and explicitly takes providers down that route; focus on deep engagement and activity within communities to develop the potential of individuals.

#### Minimal activity

Withdraw almost entirely from council support for the Arts; no support to West Wing, Creative Academy, Dance Academy, ongoing skills/sustainability training. Have one single officer acting across council teams to identify opportunities for the arts to contribute to problem-solving / projects, who maintains a network of artists and organisations, and does *ad hoc* support for bids for particular projects.

#### Targeted deep engagement (preferred option)

A foundation of deep engagement and sustainability targeted specifically around council priorities, building on this to focus on maximising opportunities for mass participation (or rather, cross-cultural opportunities) and use of existing venues through effective communications (and linking themes, potentially with high profile projects).

This gives three clear priorities for activity – baseline sustainability and development (you need artists to be here and be capable), project focus (projects to deliver council outcomes), and overarching promotion and marketing, linking existing venues. The West Wing, Dance Academy, Creative Academy all useful contributors if they can self-sustain (and indeed could be supported indirectly where projects directly delivering council priorities can use their services).

This option is preferred because it allows for:

- A significant focus on cross-cultural participation
- The development of a clear vision and strategy, albeit with some risk of strategic confusion over the goal to build a foundation of priority-led deep engagement (with sustainability as a requirement), and then to use this activity to develop cross-cultural/mass participation;
- Good prospects of achievable savings as West Wing, Dance Academy and Creative Academy would not be strategically necessary;
- The potential to Integrate the arts into broader council activities; and
- A major opportunity to focus on the contribution of the arts to wider council agendas.

## 7. Strategy

A clear decision on strategy for the arts in Slough will determine the focus of both activity to deliver the strategy, and investment in development and infrastructure. The development of the revised strategy has been a collaborative exercise between the community arts team and RedQuadrant. It is underpinned by an awareness of a number of 'non-negotiables' – the need to:

- Achieve greater cross-cultural participation;
- Have a clear vision and strategy; and
- Find efficiencies.

And some agreed goals:

- Integrating arts into broader council activities; and
- Through that integration, making a real contribution to broader agendas

### 7.1 Strategic approach

Based on the above, and on the baseline research, consultation and gap analysis, we recommend that the most effective approach would be to continue to support community-based deep engagement which achieves council goals, rather than strive to develop a mass audience focus. This should build on current strategies by

- Improving how it delivers on the current objective of inclusion and cohesion; and
- Deliver on the objective of further integrating the arts into wider community agendas.

To achieve this, the community arts team needs to continue to do, and to develop further, what it is good at, namely supporting and equipping local artists and community groups to work with communities to develop offers that respond to local cultures in order to ensure that there are opportunities in Slough for people to take part in a wide range of high quality arts activities. The team needs to:

- Identify what is genuinely good among current provision;
- Articulate and demonstrate how arts can be part of the delivery chain to reduce crime, improve health, increase community cohesion etc;
- Work with providers to broaden the appeal of their offer and make it more relevant to broader community and council agendas;
- Encourage providers to **tell** people about their offer; and
- Strengthen a more inclusive approach focused on the delivery of these key community objectives, working with groups to encourage developing and expanding their audiences.

The first bullet point above begs the question of how 'good' is defined. This should be evaluated against council goals from the high level (community strategy goals, including pride in Slough) to the specific (e.g. increased recycling rates, reducing violent crime).

This is not to dismiss outright the aim of increasing general attendance at arts events, as this in itself is a route into greater in-depth involvement. Current levels of engagement are understandable given the target audience and the fact that there is no professionally programmed venue driving audience numbers. However, given the community-led nature of the activity undertaken, a strong strategic steer to broaden and deepen audience numbers could achieve more in terms of impact of spend and community cohesion and integration.

Given that the parallel report to this identifies that the West Wing will not be a performance space, in future, there is still significant potential to increase attendance, by facilitating the use of a greater variety of venues, such as community centres, libraries (as above) and, when built, the Learning Curve

The aim would be to get people to do new things in the places they usually go to, or to go to new places to do the things they usually do.

Council to focus support on providers who are contributing to the broader council and community strategic objectives prioritised by the community arts team. Examples might include widening their marketing to target different communities; designing workshops around themes that facilitate inter-community learning; evaluating their activities in terms of their contribution to the identified community objectives. The council would have to look strategically at how to get groups to contribute to targets through its capacity-building and holistic support for arts development, building on and extending existing good practice, and articulating this more explicitly .

## 7.2 Strategic benefits

The benefits of the approach outlined above will be

- Improved perceptions of Slough as a place to live;
- Raised profile for the role of the arts in contributing to key community agendas; and
- Widened interest among residents in on-going engagement with the arts.

This needs however to be underpinned by an effective marketing strategy with a whole-Slough focus. The strategy should segment audiences, identify what each audience group wants, plan to provide it, and to identify the communications tools needed to promote attendance.

## 7.3 Three-year vision

In 2012, the community arts team is well known within the council as a creative partner able to mobilise the community behind all kinds of priority projects. Residents have a high level of awareness of 'celebrating Slough' and can identify specific projects which they have participated in or experienced. They report that this has contributed to their feeling a greater sense of pride in Slough, and having a deeper understanding of the other communities that contribute to Slough's diversity, and that they have been inspired or expressed themselves in ways they wouldn't otherwise have done.

There are more community arts activities, they engage more people in the delivery (cross-community). Those providing arts report that they are able to fundraise and market themselves effectively, and have good access to appropriate community venues and broad marketing opportunities through the council. A number of providers and community groups have had positive experiences of being engaged to support different council priorities.

The focus of activity and capacity is as follows:

- A small community arts team provide holistic support, an effective basic marketing platform, and access to community venues, and play a brokering role identifying ways in which arts can support council targets;
- The West Wing is self-financing and run outside of the council;
- A combination of the Learning Curve and community venues provide a wider and better-marketed range of spaces for community arts activity open to all;

- The Learning Curve functions mainly as a community showcase, with a limited amount of mass appeal activity (such as comedy and music in studio format) rather than a high level of programming as a performance space;
- The benefits of the Learning Curve and Slough Town FC developments are facilitated following sensitive relocation of arts organisation currently occupying the West Wing; and
- The Creative Academy and Dance Academy are self-financing or no longer supported, since they are not major contributors to either strategic aims or economic development strategy priorities.

#### 7.4 The future of the West Wing and support for venues in Slough

To deliver the new strategy, it is important to be able to let go of the past. The West Wing was an experiment on 'populist' lines which has not proved successful or, as yet, sustainable. The parallel report by ArtService recommends that the venue might have a future if management of the building could be transferred to an independent operator, and, should this not prove viable, the West Wing should be closed. The broader Performing Arts Strategy needs therefore to be sustainable with or without the West Wing. It is also not yet a given that the Learning Curve will provide a viable alternative venue, so again the strategy must be deliverable without such a venue.

In short, the West Wing could be a useful part of the infrastructure going forward, but is not an essential part - and not so useful that it justifies additional investment by the council. If an external provider can be found to take on the management of the West Wing, it would be retained as just one of the delivery options for the refreshed strategy. The Artservice options appraisal suggests that a 'new role is being defined for the building as a centre for creative and community activity, with spaces in which to create work; workspace for small creative businesses; but with a lower emphasis on live professional performance.' The emphasis should therefore be on space for creative activity rather than performance. Workshops and similar events have been shown to work well here, and with no front of house or box office costs it would be less of a liability and more of an asset for the council's provider partners. The auditorium can play its part in this new set-up, used to stage 'end of project' performances and managed entirely by the providers themselves.

However it should be stressed that the delivery of this strategy does not **require** that the West Wing remain open. It should be possible to use other existing council venues, such as libraries and community centres, to demonstrate that there is an audience for music gigs, comedy etc in Slough, in order to stimulate commercial provision. But this would be dependent on success for the Heart of Slough strategy and an improved night-time economy, much of which is outside the control of the community arts team.

#### 7.5 The future of the Creative Academy and Dance Academy

Serious consideration must also be given to ongoing council support for other direct provision of arts-related activity. The Creative Academy and Dance Academy clearly have a positive effect on sustainability and development of arts in Slough, but do not provide a good strategic fit either with a strategy to deliver arts activity which closely matches the council's strategic goals, or with the economic development priorities of the area. Consideration should therefore be given to a planned transition which would see both running at zero net cost to the council within a reasonable timescale (likely to be 2012), with independent funding and new governance arrangements, or a planned exit strategy.

#### 7.6 Transition to achieve the three year vision outlined above

The selected approach recognises that community arts development is not a separate activity but a key part of the council's commissioning and place shaping role, which can be hugely effectively in delivering council priorities. While reducing resources, community arts development priorities should be (in order):

- First, **to embed arts and culture in the agendas of the community and the council**, to make and measure a more effective strategic impact for both – therefore as well as a brokering and linking role, the strategic community arts role should focus on establishing effective impact evaluation;
- Second, to focus on supporting arts activities that provide **cross-cultural activities**, through providing a strategic steer;

- Third, to undertake **targeted audience development** by having a strong understanding of the desires of the different segments of Slough's community and effective marketing routes to them; and
- Fourth, to identify ways to leverage all this activity to continue to provide some elements of holistic support for artists and community groups to ensure **sustainability** and bring in funding to maximise impact.

The transition timetable over the next few years is likely to look like this:

- **Remainder of 2009/10:**
  - establish transition path for Creative Academy and Dance Academy
  - decision on future of West Wing
  - adoption of new strategy
  - define clear prioritised action plan based on strategic approach and council requirements;
- **2010/11:**
  - develop with relevant council staff key projects and activities with evaluation frameworks to deliver their required outcomes,
  - maintain an overview of community facilities for community arts,
  - develop insight into marketing approach for community segments
  - begin to transition Creative Academy and Arts Academy; and West Wing
- **2011/12:**
  - deliver on key strategic projects through arts activity
  - focus on continuing this outcome focus and developing and measuring cross-community activity, in preparation for opening of the Learning Curve
  - Creative Academy, Arts Academy and West Wing to have implemented and identified alternative funding routes, governance approaches and/or exit strategies;
- **2012/13:**
  - West Wing, Creative Academy, and Arts Academy self-financing and run outside of the council
  - West Wing occupants to be relocated if appropriate as Slough Town FC and Learning Curve developments come on-stream
  - Learning Curve functions as a community showcase with limited mass-appeal activity, drawing on activities delivering council outcomes across communities which largely operate from community venues.

## Appendix 1 – team members

### **Ben Taylor**

*Project management, business case*

Ben is an experienced local government transformation and efficiency practitioner with a strong interest in cultural services and community engagement. In the past he has been a presenter and DJ on two restricted service licence community radio stations, hosted open mike music events, and co-ordinated Hammersmith & Fulham festival for the first three years, using a 'zero budget' to build the event into a significant attraction in the borough during the period.

He is a PRINCE2 Practitioner, PwC Lean Six Sigma Black Belt and has significant experience over a number of years of conducting options appraisal, business case development communications and stakeholder engagement, and change management for a wide range of efficiency and performance improvement service, usually working across two or more organisations. This includes Better Stock, Better Libraries and the Community Libraries Programme baseline review for the MLA, shared services work for Team Hackney, three Lincolnshire authorities, Staffordshire Moorlands and High Peak, and strategy work for a number of London authorities

### **Sarah Wilkie**

*Fieldwork, stakeholder management*

Sarah Wilkie is a strategic planner, with many years' experience in interpreting and implementing public library policies and priorities. Her extensive experience working in national bodies and in local government ensures that she has a strong understanding of the challenges faced by local library authorities from both a policy and a practical delivery perspective. She has particular expertise in areas such as workforce and efficiency, and a strong track record in building partnerships and in stimulating and supporting cultural change within organisations. Her collaborative approach to the latter ensures that change programmes can be directed towards delivering realistic and achievable improvements for customers and communities.

### **Russell Pask**

*Research, fieldwork, business case*

Russell Pask is Managing Director of The Research Unit and has over ten years experience in social research. He is a statistician and expert in both quantitative and qualitative research, analysis and insight. Educated at Bristol and Cambridge, he majored in organisational development and organisational economics.

Russell has been instrumental in the research for three cultural strategies for the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, Waltham Forest and Bedfordshire. His approach and insights were feedback to DCMS. These projects have included face-to-face surveys with the public, interviews and 'vox pops' with arts providers and mapping interest and usage of arts facilities as well as cultural uptake resident segmentation.

Russell has also undertaken work for DCMS, MLA and National Lottery on using libraries as community hubs and methods to generate community engagement in libraries. Russell is an advisor to the Local Government Communications Board for local government and will be working with DCLG on planning consultation and engagement. Before setting up The Research Unit, he worked for the research company MORI and as a corporate consultation manager for the London Boroughs of Westminster and Hammersmith & Fulham.

Russell has also worked extensively in Slough on budget setting research which include arts spending, Slough perceptions survey, migration research and work with local children's centres. Please see his detailed CV for further experience. Russell has conducted a number of CIPFA surveys for libraries, as well as projects for Hertfordshire and Westminster examining why people do not engage with libraries and looking at

ways to engage the Arabic community with libraries. Russell has also worked with councils in Waltham Forest and Bedfordshire to help them develop their cultural strategies.

## Appendix 2 – baseline and gap analysis: further detail

### The people of Slough: who are they, and what do they want of the arts?

Slough has an estimated population of between 120,000 and 130,000 residents. Significantly, 60 per cent of Slough's residents are aged under 40 with more than a third (36%) of Slough's residents being from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. Indian and Pakistani communities are the largest of these groups, each accounting for approximately fifteen per cent, with the remainder predominantly from the black community.

The majority of Slough's resident workforce is concentrated in semi-skilled and low skilled work. The majority of Slough's electoral wards figure in the 30% most deprived wards in the country with a smaller number in 10% most deprived wards.

Over a third (35%) of Slough residents are aged under 16. Black and minority ethnic groups account for approximately 40% of Slough's pre-school and school population and about a third (34%) of Slough's school pupils have English as a second language.

### Participation in the arts

The key national local government indicator for the arts is National Indicator 11. This indicator measures the percentage of the adult population having either attended an arts event or participated in an arts activity at least three times in the past 12 months. All arts activities and events are included, not just those funded by local authorities. Participation only includes activities undertaken for leisure purposes, informal education/learning and studying or research for personal interests. Activities as part of paid work, formal education or volunteering are outside the scope of the indicator.

In Slough, about a third of residents (34%) fulfil the indicator criteria. NI 11 highlights a number of challenges with regard to arts in Slough. On all these demographic measures Slough has lower scores than at a regional or national level. With regard to gender and age, in comparison to the South-East these measures run consistently at -15/-17% and at a national level -10/-12%.

**Figure: National Indicator 11 comparisons: Slough, South East, National**

	Slough	South East	National	Diff Slough vs SE	Diff Slough vs National
<b>Male</b>	30%	45%	42%	<b>-16%</b>	<b>-12%</b>
<b>Female</b>	39%	54%	49%	<b>-15%</b>	<b>-10%</b>
<b>16 to 34</b>	32%	46%	44%	<b>-15%</b>	<b>-12%</b>
<b>35 to 54</b>	36%	51%	46%	<b>-16%</b>	<b>-10%</b>
<b>55 and over</b>	35%	51%	46%	<b>-16%</b>	<b>-11%</b>
<b>White</b>	42%	51%	61%	<b>-9%</b>	<b>-19%</b>
<b>BME</b>	24%	34%	44%	<b>-10%</b>	<b>-20%</b>
<b>Limiting disability</b>	35%	46%	41%	<b>-11%</b>	<b>-5%</b>
<b>No limiting disability</b>	34%	51%	46%	<b>-17%</b>	<b>-12%</b>
<b>Higher socio-economic group (NS-SEC 1-4)</b>	40%	56%	54%	<b>-16%</b>	<b>-14%</b>
<b>Lower socio-economic group (NS-SEC 5-8)</b>	28%	37%	32%	<b>-9%</b>	<b>-4%</b>

Here, the outliers are revealing. Outcomes with regard to ethnicity show that in comparison to the national indicators White and BME groups in Slough perform

considerably worse (-19%/-20% respectively). However, by comparison to the South-East, it is these ethnicity measures where Slough performs best (-9%/-10% respectively).

Slough compares relatively well to other very ethnically mixed and relatively deprived urban unitary authorities, with Slough 37.4% slightly below Luton at 37.9%, and slightly above Leicester at 34.7% - see overleaf for a fuller table.

Figure: **comparator local authorities for National Indicator 11**

Local authority	Participation (NI 11)
Watford	28.9
Leicester	34.7
Bradford	35.5
Salford	36.2
Slough	37.4
Luton	37.9
Wolverhampton	39.2
Hounslow	41.1
Hillingdon	41.2

Comparable London boroughs such as Tower Hamlets (43.8%) benefit from much greater accessibility to central London artistic activity.

Socio-economic group is the best predictor of involvement in arts activities. At a national level, those in higher socio-economic groups are more than one and a half times as likely to fulfil NI 11 as those in lower socio-economic groups, and are the driving force for sustainable arts provision. In Slough, significantly, only forty per cent of higher socio-economic groups are engaging with the arts. This is a key group to build profile with because they are the most likely to engage with arts given appropriate programming.

One positive point to note is that engagement with those in lower socio-economic groups is much closer to the performance at a national level. This is an important result given that the majority of Slough residents fall into these lower socio-economic groups. However, there may be something to learn from other local authorities in the region, as the overall performance in the South-East for this group is 37%, nine percentage points higher.

Overall, NI11 is weighted towards a traditional model of arts participation, and also depends (by definition) on self-identification of activity as 'arts'. Therefore, while it can be a very useful driver if the strategic decision is to pursue wide-scale participation and awareness of participation, particularly for more 'passive' participation, it is a less useful measure when the strategic objective is focused on deeper engagement by the few, or when, as in Slough's case, communities don't engage in the arts in traditional ways.

#### Awareness of the arts offer

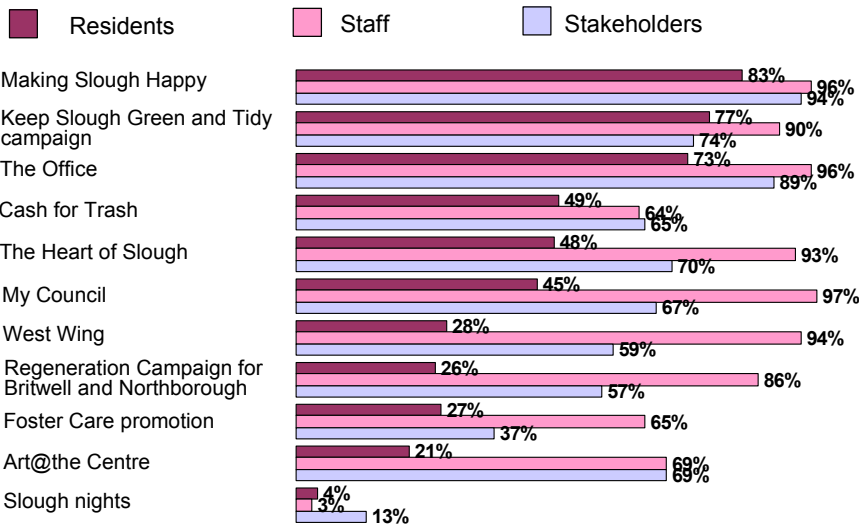
In the 2006 Slough Annual survey, the services least likely to be used by Slough residents were art facilities or museums (3%). This rose to ten per cent in the Cippenham area, but here the socio-economic profile is atypical of Slough. Just three per cent of residents identified these facilities as important in comparison to a range of other services.

In the same year, the Slough Branding and Perception survey showed that almost three in ten (28%) of residents had heard of the West Wing and about one in five (21%) had heard of the Arts at the Centre.

Figure: awareness of Slough arts-related activities

## Awareness of Slough related activities

Q Have you heard of any of the following?



Base: 400 residents, 100 staff, 54 stakeholders

Source: WCC

It is possible that awareness of the West Wing and Arts at the Centre have improved since 2006 because it only opened in 2005 but there only is limited primary research information about what the public are looking for from the performing arts.

One aspect of this review is to consider the potential for alternative performance spaces or making greater use of community facilities for the arts. In 2006, seven per cent of residents said that they or a member of their family had used a community centre in the last year. Usage varies from area to area and is highest in Upton and Colnbrook with Poyle (13%) and lowest in Langley and Cippenham Green (3%). However, it is worth stating that usage levels for community centres are twice that of local arts and museum facilities.

RedQuadrant would advise that using travel time analysis to examine venue viability is likely to overstate the potential for an arts venue in Slough because of the significant numbers of people from higher socio-economic groups just outside Slough.

Though 40,000 people travel into Slough to work, there is little evidence to suggest that they are supporting a thriving cultural night time economy. Currently, Slough is much more a business hub than a cultural hub. Any evaluation of the potential for a local venue should focus heavily on encouraging Slough residents to use the venue. This said, appropriate high profile professional performances in the right venue would draw in people from outside Slough, if not available elsewhere locally.

RedQuadrant would advise that all these factors are important considerations in the development of the future strategy for the performing arts and critical to this is how the heart of Slough and the night economy offer are connected together.

### Perceptions of the arts offer

There is limited primary research information about what the public are looking for from the performing arts.

In 2004, a survey about cultural activities was undertaken with Slough's Citizens Panel. Significantly, just 265 residents took part including fewer than 40 BME residents. A Citizens Panel tends to include those who display greater levels of interest in community activities and therefore their views are likely overstate demand for cultural services.

Cinema was the most common cultural activity for residents with 85% saying they had been to the cinema in the last twelve months. More than a quarter had been to the theatre (28%), more than one in five (22%) had been to a live music event, and one in seven (14%) had been to a gallery. Perhaps reflecting the age profile of the citizens' panel, just 15% had been to a children's show and one in fourteen had seen live comedy in the last year.

Two-thirds of respondents had not visited any local venues in Slough and the surrounding area including the Windsor Theatre, The Swan in High Wycombe, The Beck in Hayes and the Reading Hexagon.

The Citizens Panel members were also asked what events residents would like to attend. They identified theatre (73%), comedy (59%), variety shows (54%), popular entertainment (51%) and popular music (51%). In this small-scale research, there does appear to be a focus on light entertainment and music.

In addition to this research, ACE Audience Development have made available research about predicted attendance activity using TGI and MOSAIC data. This data provides insights at both a borough wide and local post code sector attendance in the last twelve months. This again illustrates the importance of cinema and pop and rock music. There is also good interest in plays and art galleries that could be built upon.

**Figure: ACE Audience Development predicted attendance data**

	Slough (%)
Plays	33.4
Opera	9.8
Ballet	10.6
Dance	10.5
Classical Music	16.0
Jazz	11.7
Art Gallery	28.1
Any performance in a Theatre	46.7
Cinema	66.4
Pop/Rock	37.2

#### Audience development – the providers' views

A discussion group- was held with eight practitioners. When asked what they felt audiences wanted from the performing arts, the art practitioners first focused on price: 'pricing is important'. There was a sense that often their services were providing in the context of being 'free', no or low-cost. The arts practitioners drew two different but possibly connected conclusions from this. One was that if people are willing to pay for something they tend to value it more; it is seen as more important, more 'worthy'. The second conclusion was that today because of the internet so much performing arts is downloadable for free especially films and music.

These conclusions set a key challenge for the sustainability of future performing arts in Slough, especially where a significant proportion of residents are on lower incomes. What performing arts are Slough residents willing to pay for? The arts practitioners did not appear able to give a rounded response to this question. However, later in the session, the practitioners did identify local people's willingness to pay to see films.

Art practitioners then focused on audiences wanting to develop skills: performing arts as an activity the public are engaged in. The success of the community arts model in Slough means that practitioners automatically point to development and enjoyment

through involvement in the arts. They also said that the public wanted a 'secure, safe, permanent venue' for the arts.

Interestingly, the arts practitioners did not highlight the different kinds of performing arts and the different challenges they face in generating and sustaining audiences. Instead, we would characterise the role of arts in Slough as 'deep engagement' with smaller numbers of residents and working intensively with them for some very rewarding outcomes. In the e-survey, about two-thirds of practitioners felt it was more important to ensure that local people were participating in the arts than that there were larger audiences.

Overall however, from the art practitioners present, we did not get a strong sense of understanding audience development especially in relation to paid performance. This is understandable as three of the eight organisations represented focus specifically on working with young people, and as many community arts organisations are able to reach all of their key audience directly by word of mouth. It does however demonstrate growth of involvement is not being sought through bringing in broader audiences, particularly those to whom performances may be novel or outside their own community.

Exploring this line in a slightly different manner, we asked what was there to do in Slough in the evening:

*'You have to go to London for an evening out'*

*'There's karaoke!'*

*'Nothing to do in Slough - in the past there used to be lots of things to do in Slough music and theatre venues. It used to be the first stop for bands after Hammersmith Palais.'*

*'The shops all close at 5 – after that the place is dead.'*

Arts practitioners were unanimous about the lack of a night economy in Slough. Significantly, this is expressed in terms of being able to have a night out. This means being able to go somewhere for a good meal, possibly a drink and then to watch some entertainment that is of a dependable quality. This evening offer, it is suggested, is not currently available in Slough. Until it is, it will remain difficult to sustain a successful performing arts space. This underscores our conclusion that for a performance space to work in Slough it has to fulfil a number of these functions: food, drink, community space and entertainment.

### **Audience development – what do the people of Slough want?**

There is clearly a small but active minority who want to participate in the arts and their needs would appear to be being met by current provision. However our gap analysis indicates that some groups within the community are under-provided for in this respect. More could perhaps be done to draw in these other groups and engage with them to ensure that they have a voice and are able not only to participate but also to lead provision.

It is also unclear to what extent local people as a whole want to 'have a night out in Slough'. Currently those that seek a night out appear relatively happy to travel to Windsor, Maidenhead or even London to see a performance. Given the challenges inherent in reversing that trend it may not be a priority for the council to do so. Instead the council should 'play to its strengths', i.e. focus on community-based deep engagement rather than mass audience development. This is perhaps the major focus of our findings and is reflected in all the strategic discussion in this report.

## Marketing communications

Marketing communications are vitally important in engaging the public with the arts. Our analysis has identified that key audience segments are not being engaged to expected levels with the arts, and we expect that communications will have a role in these lower levels of engagement.

*'It's a small town, word gets round. Word of mouth.'*

The clear message from art practitioners is that 'word of mouth' is the primary mechanism for marketing performing arts in Slough. The feedback from the survey on audience development identifies the communications methodologies used as:

- word of mouth (4)
- web-based social marketing (4)
- flyers (2)
- outreach work (2)

This is understandable given the target audience and the fact that there is no professionally programmed venue driving audience numbers. However, given the community-led nature of the activity undertaken, a strong strategic steer to broaden and deepen audience numbers could achieve more in terms of impact of spend and community cohesion and integration.

Art practitioners are more positive about the levels and opportunities to communicate with resident under 25 (and perhaps this is because many of them worked with this age group). Perhaps the perception of weaker communications with those aged over 25 is that there is less in the performing arts offer aimed at them locally, for whatever reason. This outcome also fits with the way performing arts tend to engage very intensively with smaller groups of residents.

In the e-survey, almost three-quarters (73%) of arts practitioners felt that they promoted their performing arts well. Interestingly, when asked how well they felt performing arts were promoted in Slough over seventy per cent said 'not very well'. In addition, when asked what were the top three barriers to gaining larger audiences in Slough the most common answer (69%) was poor quality marketing and communications.

There is a lack of developed and co-ordinated strategy here. This is reflected in a lack of organised programming and the lack of events on key media opportunities like Slough Observer and Slough Express.

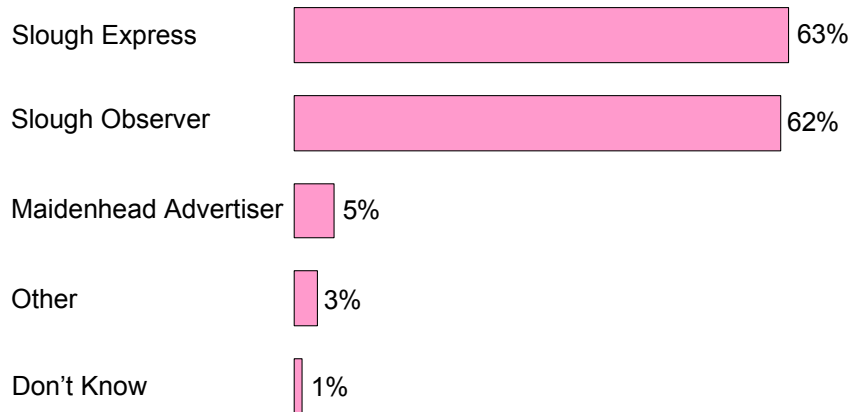
## Print-based communications

Local newspapers are key sources of information for local residents. In 2007, the Slough Annual Survey shows that over half (55%) find out about local council services from local newspapers compared to forty-five per cent through the council magazine, the Slough Citizen. Survey data from 2006 shows that more than six in ten local residents read the local Slough Express and Slough Observer papers. In focus group work undertaken by The Research Unit, these papers have been shown to be respected sources for local news and information. Good relationships with these newspapers are vitally important to the promotion of arts in Slough.

Figure: favourite local newspapers in Slough

## Favourite Local Newspapers

Q Which local newspapers did you read in the last month...?



Base: All respondents who have read local newspapers in the last month (591)

Source: SMSR

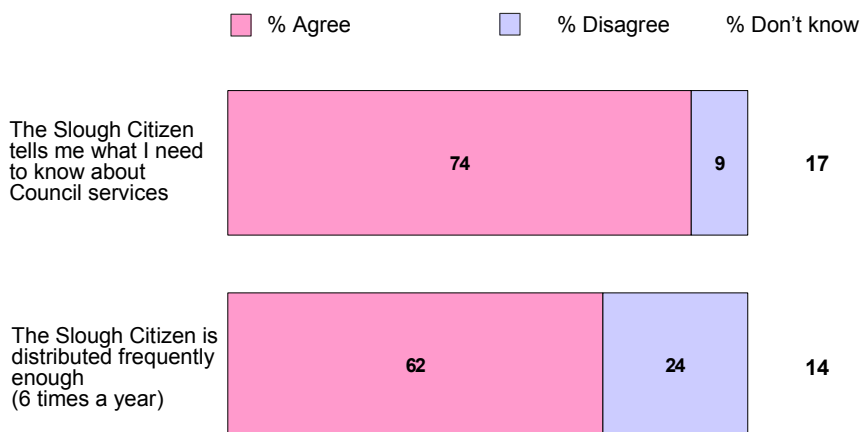
### The Slough Citizen

In 2007, two-thirds of residents said that the Slough Citizen was 'useful' in terms of finding out about council services. In the Slough Media Habits Survey (2006), just under half of residents (46%) have received a copy of the Slough Citizen, Slough Borough council's newspaper for residents in the last six months. In the same year, MORI recorded this figure as 45%. We estimate that the same number of people read the *Slough Express* on a weekly basis as read the *Slough Citizen*, reinforcing the importance of local newspapers. This said, we would still emphasise that the Slough Citizen is an important media channel for the performing arts even if its less frequent circulation means that it can only include performing arts events programmed well in advance of performances.

Figure: impressions of the Slough Citizen

## 'Slough Citizen'

Q Do you agree or disagree with the following statements...?



Base: All (813)

Source: SMSR

We would also expect that residents who read the Slough Citizen are more likely to share the profile of those who are interested in attending performing arts events.

Significantly, only 33% of black and minority ethnic residents received the Slough citizen compared to 52% of white residents. We would suggest particular attention to channels to engage BME groups is necessary.

### Communications: online

An increasingly important part of local journalism is an on-line presence for local newspapers. We have examined the on-line information available through the two main newspapers for Slough.

In the leisure section of the Slough Express website, in the film tab, the Empire cinema is in a lead position and listed first. In the band section, approximately forty bands are listed; clicking on a sample of ten we found that none of them came from Slough. Under the theatre tab, there are no listings for theatre performances or reviews in Slough. However, the West Wing is listed as a local theatre, clicking on it reveals a link to the SBC website which says that 'We are currently exploring new ways in which the West Wing can operate for the benefit and entertainment of the community within our reduced resources' but with no local listings.

In the community events calendar for October, with 85 events in the newspaper's area, only 2 events are listed for Slough – a Caribbean food afternoon in Cippenham library and Slough Bonfire and Firework Spectacular. There are no performing arts events listed for Slough.

By contrast, the Slough Observer has a less developed 'What's on' section called the Guide. In the Guide section of the Slough Observer, the 'Going Out' is the same as the 'Staying in' and leads with a video game to play at home. In fact, this section is mainly about video games. There is also an events calendar which leads with all the cinema listings.

In addition, listings are shown for Gallery 435, Slough Libraries, The Langley Academy and the West Wing. The West Wing link goes through to the same page as above on the Slough Borough website. The search function is not as user-friendly on this website as the Slough Observer. However, it does show music gigs taking place at the Rising Sun and multi-cultural story reading in Slough Library for the next three weeks. However, again, there is a lack of information about performing arts and community arts events.

### Searching online

In the Slough Annual Survey 2007, 83% of those aged 20-54 said that they would use the internet and the council website to find out about local services. One option available to them would be a search using a popular search engine. Using 'What's on Slough' in Google is illuminating with regard to the web presence of arts and entertainment information in Slough:

- The top site Skiddle.com has no events happening in Slough.
- The next two entries link to Slough Borough council's website. On the 'Coming Soon' element of the site there is a link to Youth Theatre and the 'Bonfire and Fireworks Spectacular'. There are no performing arts events included that a Slough resident could attend (as indeed there is no professional performing arts venue).
- Next there is the site wherecanwego.com, and none of the listings that follow under this site are for Slough.
- The following site asks 'What is a slough?'

- This is followed by an aboutbritain.com listing. If clicked on, a heading for Slough Tourist Information appears, with a dotted photo space with the insert 'Can you help?'
- The 'Arts in Slough' website does not appear until half into the second Google page. Local residents would be unlikely to locate this by free web search.

If 'Slough Arts' is searched under then 'Arts in Slough' and the 'West Wing' feature strongly. However, we would propose that residents when looking for something to do are unlikely to search under 'Slough Arts'. Moreover, only one event is listed on the site: 'Flowers for Kids in Slough'.

This web search shows that there is an important gap in information about performing arts information in Slough. Discussions with arts practitioners emphasised that knowledge of local community performing arts events depends heavily on 'word of mouth'. The lack of formal information about performing arts underscores this conclusion.

#### Slough Borough council website

In Slough's Annual Survey 2007, the internet is the preferred source of information about council services for nineteen per cent of Slough residents. As has already been highlighted by clicks through from other sites, the information here extends to details of youth theatre and fireworks.

#### Venues for the arts in Slough

##### The West Wing

The West Wing was set up to be the main performing arts venue in Slough, but as the artservice report notes, "Our consultation with arts and community organisations has found that the West Wing is considered a valuable facility for the arts in Slough even though it has not succeeded in its original aspirations to become a venue for live professional arts events." The role of the West Wing as a creative hub for local creative talent including Creative Junction, RIFCO, the Creative Academy and Music for Slough is clearly more valued. It has a 250 seat theatre, backstage accommodation, a dance studio, exhibition space, a café bar, meeting and training rooms.

The table overleaf outlines the predicted and actual use of the West Wing for events in 2008/9

**Figure: West Wing predicated and actual use 2008/9**

Art-form	Predicted number	Actual number	Estimated weekend & evening performances
Theatre	40 shows	73 (46 children's shows, 27 shows)	27
Music	24 shows	16 shows	16
Dance	13 shows	7 shows	7
Literature	10 events	0	0
Film	7 screenings	12	0
Exhibitions	7 exhibitions	6	0
Workshops	45 events	135 (100 children's & 35 adults)	0
Conferences	6	-	0
Community	0	12 events	0
Comedy	0	9 events	9
<b>Total events</b>	<b>152 events</b>	<b>270 events</b>	<b>59 events</b>

An extensive analysis of the West Wing is being undertaken by ArtService but we would make the following observation in terms of performance space. A key part of the potential success of the West Wing would be to develop audience attendances at weekend evening events if it had continued as a professional arts venue. We estimate that the West Wing is having weekend audiences only 50 per cent of the time and on average at 50 per cent capacity. The artservice report demonstrates that the West Wing does not appear to be a sustainable venue either as a performance venue or financially. Lettings figures for April to December 2009 (as at September 9) show that the auditorium usage "remains relatively low at an average of around seven lettings a month... representing around 20% of potential evening capacity available and under 7% of overall capacity when possible daytime usage is taken into account". Furthermore, non-arts groups account for 40% of total bookings for all spaces at the West Wing. In 2008/9 there was very significant council and Arts Council subsidy, and total subsidy from the council in 2009/10 was an estimated £125K once staff time is include. The key question here is why? Can Slough actually sustain such a venue? The evidence suggests that it cannot.

The evidence demonstrates that the West Wing's attempt to function as a 'mass appeal' venue has not succeeded. RedQuadrant propose that given current levels of engagement in arts in Slough, the only way an arts centre for the public will work is if 'everything is right':

- central venue embracing the whole community;
- appropriate programming for the community;
- strong marketing;
- excellent catering offer with drinks license and competitive pricing; and
- run by an organisation that has successfully run arts venues.

### The Centre

The Centre on Farnham Road as a venue has the following elements:

- A large hall seating up to seven hundred for theatre style events and banquets;
- A small hall with a shuttered opening to the main space and seating for 200;

- A single height flexible hall seating 180 banquet style;
- Meeting rooms; Offices; and Café bar

The Centre is much more centrally located than the West Wing, has good adjacent parking and is on main bus routes. The Centre is primarily a business conference and private hire venue for weddings. Anecdotally, we would suggest more residents know about The Centre than the West Wing.

There have been cultural events like performances by the Slough Philharmonic and a 24 hour Asian radio station based at the Centre. Significantly, the building is not perceived as an 'arts venue'.

The occupancy rates of The Centre in 2007 showed that the main and small halls as running at 85% occupancy in October, with 50% as the average occupancy level across the year. There are currently 80 major wedding events planned each year with increasing demand for weddings in December.

It is anticipated that there would be a significant opportunity cost (and cost) in switching The Centre to any large degree into an arts venue. This is in addition to the associated capital costs to make The Centre more amenable to regular arts usage. Therefore, The Centre could potentially offer a larger auditorium for one-off arts events which do not require substantial modifications without any grand-scale rethinking which would be required for permanent use. A concert has been successfully held at The Centre in the past.

### Community facilities

As well as The Centre, there are a large number of other community facilities in Slough. However, some of these venues are more appropriate for the performing arts than others or have a history of performing arts in them:

- Slough Young People's Centre
- SWIPE Music at The Orchard Centre
- Haymill Youth and Community Centre
- St Mary's Church
- The Polish Association Hall
- Colnbrook Village Hall
- St Joseph's Catholic School and Baylis Court School

The e-mail survey with practitioners shows that a significant proportion of them are already using these community facilities to practice and they are generally satisfied with the facilities. The cost of these venues is normally £10 per hour. Fewer practitioners use these facilities for their main performances, though some do. The development of community centres could fulfil many of the rehearsal and workshop requirements of local practitioners, and to a lesser extent, performance space.

### Venues: the providers' view

*'Regular...somewhere things are happening every week'*

*'Cool place to be'*

*'Embedded in the community'*

*'A place where you can make a night of it'*

Art practitioners want a venue where regular performances happen. No such venue is currently operating in this way in Slough for the wider performing arts. The idea of

something happening regularly has the important benefit of raising awareness of the venue which creates a virtuous circle of people using the venue, enabling more events at the venue, bringing more people to the venue and so on. In the e-survey, about half the practitioners felt that a better venue would increase audience sizes.

The venue also needs to be 'cool' and a place where everyone across the whole of Slough feels welcome. Art practitioners also pointed out that it needed to be somewhere that fulfils the night economy requirements of being able to eat, drink, socialise and relax. Arts practitioners also emphasised good transport links and a long-term commitment to the venue.

All of the above are important messages for the council as they plan the development of the Learning Curve and develop a strategy for its use as a venue – the Learning Curve is likely to be able to deliver only part of this ambition due to size and programming constraints, but can be part of a mix of restaurants, bars and pubs that in a regenerated town centre could start to build an attractive offer to residents, on a modest but sustainable scale.

### Gap analysis: provision

The history of Slough's success to date comes out of community arts as reflected in the 'Strategy for Arts Development', and feedback from our consultation indicates that current provision and the ambitions of those providing it reflect this strategy to a large extent. Activity is focused more on community involvement than actual performances. The emphasis is not so much on, 'what can I go and see this evening?' but, 'join our club and get involved'. There are plenty of people in the town who want to engage in delivering arts but no mass market or audience for them. By 'plenty', we mean sufficient to provide a range of interesting community-led events and activities, but this is naturally not a large percentage of the population as a whole.

Existing provision through the West Wing also supports this picture. As the brief for this work stated, 'The West Wing Arts Centre is currently being run as a community arts venue, with a community led programme of arts activity. It is used by Slough based artists, arts groups and community arts groups to run their own programme of events and activities, including performances, exhibitions, clubs and societies, classes, workshops and film screenings.'

The e-survey showed that arts practitioners felt that dance was well catered for in Slough with a range of 'dance' opportunities available. Film was also considered well catered for by minority of practitioners.

In contrast, the three key areas which were considered not well catered for are drama (7), music (6), and comedy (3). Interestingly, these are the three areas which all the available audience attendance information suggest would be the most well attended.

### Gap analysis: programming

The success of large-scale performing arts in a diverse community requires strong programming and an overall strategy for engagement. In order to achieve a pattern of appropriate programming, a local authority like Slough would need to undertake detailed analysis of customer segmentation, including ACE Audience Profile, Gender, Age, Social & ethnic background etc. This simply underscores the fact that the gap that would need to be overcome to generate a really significant commercial arts scene around night-time economy activities and large-scale passive participation is very large. Existing levels of council investment, however directed, are not close to being sufficient to bridge this gap, and the investment required would not generate sufficient return on the council's priorities or on Slough's economy. Given that

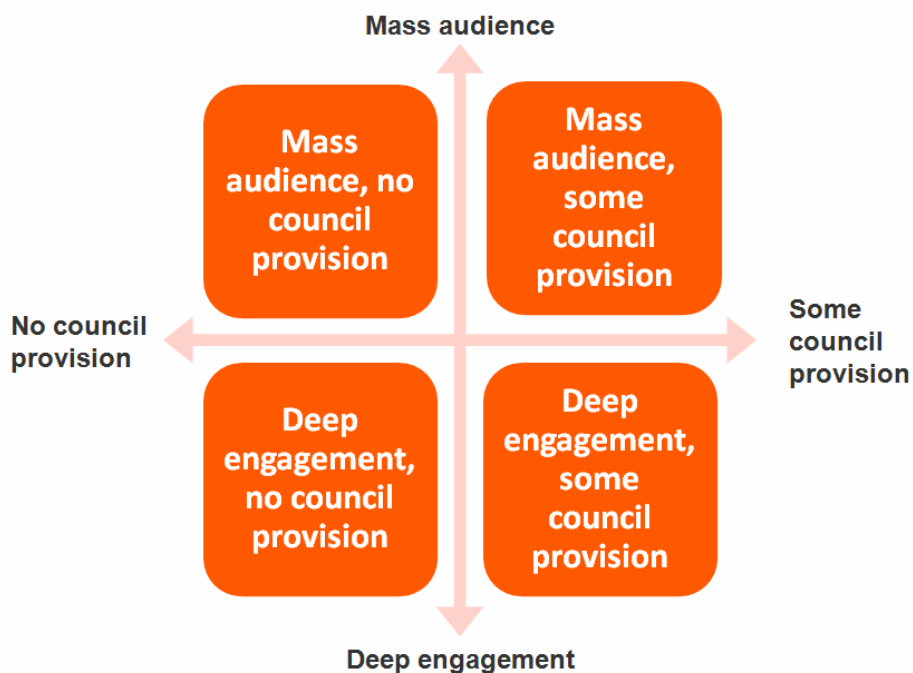
available resources are being squeezed, the focus therefore needs to change if best use is to be made of them.

The e-survey with practitioners found that the top three barriers to larger audiences for performing arts were 'poor quality marketing and communications' (69%), the level of interest amongst residents (54%) and better performing arts provided outside Slough (46%). While marketing communications certainly can and should be addressed in a cost-effective manner, the latter two points further demonstrate the impracticality of seeking to address large-scale passive involvement given the barriers to such a strategy and the lack of direct strategic return.

## Appendix 3 – Options appraisal details

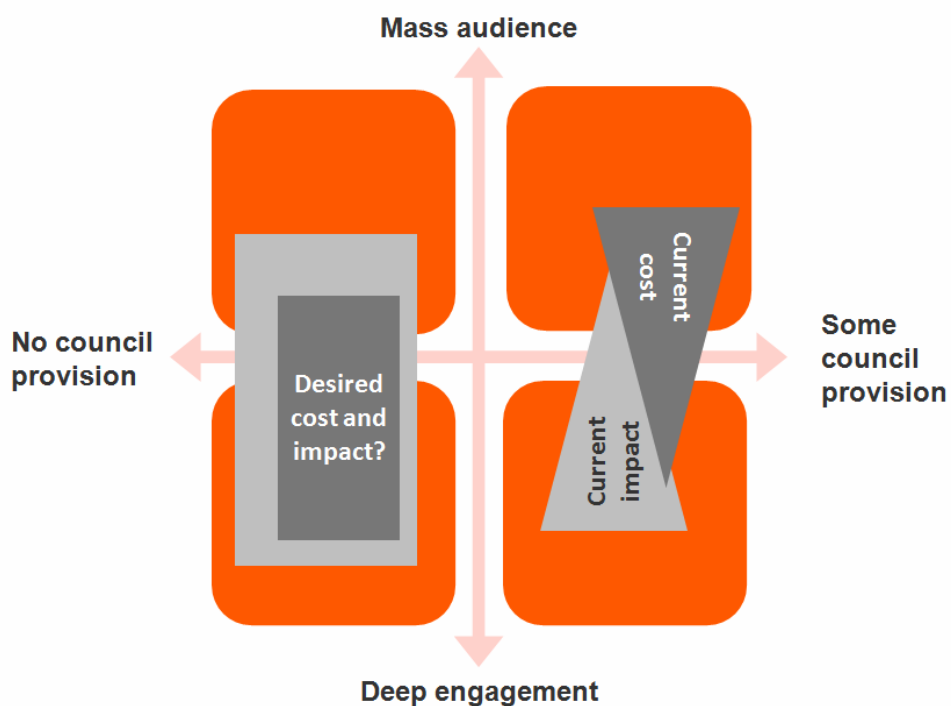
Options for future action were initially developed through a mini-scenario planning exercise, details of which can be found in Appendix 3. This looked at two axes: from 'no council provision' to 'some council provision' of support for the arts (based on an assumption that in the current financial climate, the level of support has to decrease), and from 'deep engagement' to 'mass audience' as detailed above.

**Figure: scenarios considered**



This exercise not only led to some strategic insight into the current situation, reflected both in this document and the new strategy, but also informed the vision for the future. The diagram below attempts to illustrate the current balance of cost and impact against that sought in the future.

**Figure: potential spend and impact areas now/future**



## Options appraisal approach

Four options were identified for evaluation:

**Mass audience focus** – while reducing total spend, explicitly move the existing focus to the effective use of venues and seek to develop mass audience activities and night-time economy through effective programming and marketing;

- 1) **'Art for arts' sake'** – focus on developing a sustainable and thriving arts scene, on the assumption that this will benefit the community;
- 2) **Targeted deep engagement** – use a core of deep engagement activity focused around council goals, and where possible generate cross-cultural participation through good marketing and influencing; and
- 3) **Minimal activity** – withdraw from all existing funded activity, retain one sole strategic role to link council teams and artists / community organisations.

The evaluation criteria identified were the strategic prerequisites and goals:

- A. Achieve greater cross-cultural participation;
- B. Have a clear vision and strategy;
- C. Find efficiencies;
- D. Integrating arts into broader council activities; and
- E. Through that integration, making a real contribution to broader agendas

## Detail of options

Each option was defined as realistically as possible, though it was quickly identified that some of these potential directions were either not affordable or not relevant, or both; nevertheless, the exercise helped to clarify why the selected option was chosen.

### Mass audience focus

Transition out of existing sustainability/development work (i.e. the core expertise of the community arts team), put focus on the effective use of the West Wing (with or without some ongoing funding) and development of other venues, linking the activities with strong branding, theme, and marketing/communications. Focus would be on achieving a night-time economy in Slough, 'pride in Slough', and building community cohesion through participation and the establishment of 'weak links' across communities. Creative Academy and Dance Academy would be superfluous but helpful if self-sustaining.

- Cross-cultural participation – opportunities for weak social ties to develop;
- Have a clear vision and strategy – vision relatively clear but ability of the council to have strategic impact doubtful;
- Find efficiencies – even with use of the existing development capacity, unlikely to provide opportunities for savings, risks of additional costs;
- Integrate arts into broader council activities – unlikely to achieve significant integration if genuinely focusing on achieving mass participation; and
- Contribute to wider council agenda – similarly unlikely to contribute to agenda other than in the broadest sense.

### Art for arts' sake

Support for sustainability/development (including continuation of the Dance Academy and Creative Academy) and limited support for venues (including the West Wing), little focus on council priorities *per se* but an approach which assumes that community problems will be solved through community arts and explicitly takes

providers down that route; focus on deep engagement and activity within communities to develop the potential of individuals. This approach can only be justified by a general belief that artists with strong community routes and community groups engaging in arts activities will necessarily and automatically produce positive outcomes in line with the council's aims. Were it achievable, this would be most likely to be the most popular model amongst practitioners.

- Cross-cultural participation – effort could be made in this regard, but without a strong steer this is likely to focus on activity within communities;
- Have a clear vision and strategy – clarity and ability to have a significant impact in achieving the vision;
- Find efficiencies – financially unsustainable;
- Integrate arts into broader council activities – explicitly not an aim; and
- Contribute to wider council agenda – outcomes could be measured and some may be positive, but would not be directed.

### Targeted deep engagement

A foundation of deep engagement and sustainability targeted specifically around council priorities, building on this to focus on maximising opportunities for mass participation (or rather, cross-cultural opportunities) and use of existing venues through effective communications (and linking themes, potentially with high profile projects). This gives three clear priorities for activity – baseline sustainability and development (you need artists to be here and be capable), project focus (projects to deliver council outcomes), and overarching promotion and marketing, linking existing venues. The West Wing, Dance Academy, Creative Academy all useful contributors if they can self-sustain (and indeed could be supported indirectly where projects directly delivering council priorities can use their services).

- Cross-cultural participation – significant focus;
- Have a clear vision and strategy – yes, with some risk of strategic confusion over goal to build a foundation of priority-led deep engagement (with sustainability as a requirement), and then to use this activity to develop cross-cultural/mass participation;
- Find efficiencies – good prospects of achievable savings as West Wing, Dance Academy and Creative Academy not strategically required;
- Integrate arts into broader council activities – likely to be achievable; and
- Contribute to wider council agenda – a major focus.

