

Report to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Cultural Services
Report submitted by: Head of Libraries, Museums, Culture and Registrars
Date: 16 March 2016

Part I

**Electoral Division
affected:**
All

The Future of Blaze - Young People and Culture Project
(Appendix 'A' refers)

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Executive Summary

This report is requesting agreement for a sum of £10,000 to be allocated from the Libraries, Museums, Culture and Registrars (LMCR) budget 2015/16 towards the Blaze young people's arts and culture project.

The report follows on from the decision that was taken by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Cultural Services on 4 November 2015.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the provisions of Standing Order No.25 have been complied with.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Cultural Services is asked to agree:

- (i) that a sum of £10,000 from the LMCR budget for 2015/16 is allocated to Curious Minds as a one off payment to help secure the future sustainability of the Blaze project.
- (ii) that the payment at (i) above is conditional upon match funding from Curious Minds.

This decision should be implemented immediately for the purposes of Standing Order 34(3) as any delay could adversely affect the execution of the County Council's responsibilities. The Council's payment would enable match funding to be released by Curious Minds to help the Blaze project's transition to a sustainable future without Lancashire County Council funding.

Background and Advice

Blaze began as a project funded by the Legacy Trust as part of the North West's Cultural Programme for London 2012. The Legacy Trust was a charity established in 2007 London, with the aim of creating a lasting cultural and sporting legacy from the London Olympic Games.

The project was developed and delivered by Lancashire Arts Development Team in partnership with Blackpool Council and it was conceived as a youth led artistic programme that combined art, digital practice and physical activity to engage the public in the run up to the London Olympic Games in 2012. Young people had the opportunity to develop their artistic and organisational skills by working with a range of international artists to create original events that culminated in a spectacular Blaze Festival as part of Preston Guild 2012.

Since 2012, Blaze has been purely Lancashire focussed and Blackpool Council is no longer involved in delivering the project. Blaze has won support from Arts Council England and delivers arts events, activities and workshops, instigated by young people and working with professional artists in Lancashire County Council libraries. The young people benefit from a range of creative experiences and gain significant organisational skills which have helped participants secure employment in arts and cultural organisations across the North West.

Blaze's aim is:

"To develop future creative communities in Lancashire, by engaging young people with the arts, libraries and museums."

Current Position

Over the last 12 months Blaze has secured over £70,000 of external funding for delivery

Blaze has a strong brand identity and because of external funding has had some flexibility in the way it promotes and develops projects to engage young people.

Most of the freelance team have come to the end of their contracts with the Project Manager due to finish imminently.

Blaze Achievements

Since April 2015, Blaze has recorded 1231 attendances by 13 -21 year olds at creative sessions in Lancashire libraries. This is an age group that libraries traditionally have found the most challenging to engage with. Blaze has made progress in the training and work experience that it has given to young people and many have taken the journey from being participants to volunteers, to becoming part time staff for Blaze and then on to other employment in the creative industries.

Participation figures	1231
Blaze Festival audience	4967
Other live audience	9011
Online, broadcast, print audience	27,000
Total audience	40,708

Blaze has helped several young people reach their goal of gaining entry to university by providing out of school opportunities that they can cite in their applications.

Blaze currently delivers activity in five of the recently identified Service Planning Areas – Burnley Central (2), Preston Central (5), Hyndburn East (6), Skelmersdale (7) and Fleetwood (8). In addition Blaze produces a quarterly magazine written and edited by young people - Culture on A Shoestring, which is distributed across Lancashire and beyond.

“I’ve never been good in social situations but I’ve learned and gained a lot of experience and want to volunteer more on projects and around Burnley.” T, Burnley.

“Meeting new people has given me a different perspective and respect for others. I have learned to be more tolerant” C, Skelmersdale.

Advice

Officers have been working in consultation with the arts sector to develop new ways of supporting and developing the arts infrastructure in Lancashire in the context of local authority funding challenges. A recurrent theme of this work is that strengthening partnerships and co-operation across the sector will help build resilience in the sector and it is in this context that the future of Blaze should be viewed.

Officers are in the process of submitting an arts investment paper to Cabinet Working Group for the Third Sector which details a further commitment from Curious Minds to financially contribute to the development of an arts and culture offer for children and young people in Lancashire.

Curious Minds

Initial conversations have taken place with Lancashire based organisation Curious Minds who are a registered charity with a mission to connect children and young people with the best quality arts provision by broking relationships with schools, youth groups and arts organisations. Curious Minds are a charity funded by Arts Council England to be the bridge organisation for the North West. Curious Minds hold funding that could be released if there was a Lancashire County Council match. As Curious Minds is not a direct delivery organisation they feel Blaze would complement their existing work. Curious Minds have funding for projects such as Blaze that must be matched £1 for £1. So a £10,000 commitment from LCC would allow Curious Minds to allocate £10,000 to Blaze, meaning an initial budget of £20,000. This would be a one off payment to help Blaze transition to a sustainable future without Lancashire County Council funding. An agreement on the priorities for Blaze for 2016/17 would be drawn up by officers. Curious Minds feel that could give the staff resource and expertise to develop and grow Blaze. Curious Minds have

recently relocated to Preston, which puts them in a more central location in the County and they will become the only Arts Council National Portfolio organisation based in Preston. Curious Minds are confident that Blaze could become sustainable beyond 2017 as a youth arts delivery and consultation project, after the initial transition investment from Lancashire County Council. See Appendix 'A' for further details.

Consultations

Discussions have been held with the freelance staff who currently manage Blaze. Discussions have also taken place with Curious Minds as detailed in this report.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management and Legal

There is a risk in reputational damage in withdrawing a service for young people that delivers in 5 of the top ten neighbourhoods identified as Service Planning Areas in the draft corporate strategy. The success and sustainability of the project is more likely with a provisional commitment of £10,000 as this would help unlock external funds.

There is also a risk is that the Council's payment of £10,000 is not match funded by Curious Minds. Terms and conditions will be imposed to ensure that the council's payment is returned should match funding not happen.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
N/A		
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
N/A		