

1 Background

This paper outlines the outcomes of the first year (12 months, rather than administrative years) of the 'Creative Economy Commissioning' project; Strategic commissioning of services, used to procure appropriate interventions in the creative economy sector.

Commissioning began in August 2012 with the first 'Joint Commissioning Group' considering the process and timescales for identifying need, defining service objectives to meet the needs, allocating resources, and procuring providers to deliver the service objectives. Consultation with stakeholder groups and potential delivery partners was carried out by the JCG.

The six service objectives were agreed at the Commissioning Board on 21st March 2013 (minute 107 refers) and Members also delegated responsibility to the Head of Economy and Infrastructure, in consultation with the Chair of Commissioning Board to approve the 2013/14 commissions. The service objectives are as follows:

- i. The concept of a 'hubs' for creative economy activity in Ryedale. There is potential to develop this at existing centres in the north and south of the District. The provision of a virtual hub was also proposed.
- ii. A greater link between the creative and visitor economy, to improve the economic benefit of arts and heritage to the locality.
- iii. Support for creative individuals, businesses and enterprises to foster business growth.
- iv. Support for social enterprises to develop new audiences (contributing to economic sustainability moving forward)
- v. A small grant scheme to continue, to provide support for new, innovative projects or pump priming projects.
- vi. Enterprises should work collaboratively to improve joint action and reduce duplication.

2 The first round of Commissions were awarded in autumn 2013 to:

Ryedale Artworks: £11,000

Lead objective:(iii) Secondary objective:(ii)

RAW is a member driven organisation which provides support to professional artists & galleries. Formed in 2011, it has a growing membership (over 40 creative businesses) and it sought a commissioning relationship with RDC to enable it to expand its programme of support.

Ryedale Heritage Partnership: £21,000

Lead objective:(ii) Secondary objective:(iv)

The Ryedale Heritage Partnership was a newly formed partnership of 5 organisations (Ryedale's 4 accredited museums plus a social history collection newly gifted to the public). The partnership was created in direct response to the creative economy objective to improve collaborative action, with the aim of sharing expertise and specialist knowledge in order to maximise the economic benefit derived from the collections located in Ryedale.

Helmsley Arts Centre: £16,000

Lead Objective:(i) Secondary objective: (ii)

Helmsley Arts Centre provides not only a sustainable, multi purpose arts venue in northern Ryedale, but also an eclectic mix of services delivering a wide range of activities appealing to many differing audiences both for participation and viewing. HAC identified how its physical resource and expertise can be shared with other organisations in the area and how it could further improve links with the visitor economy:

Rural Arts North Yorkshire and The Shed On Tour: £11,000

Lead objective: (iv) *Secondary objective:* (ii)

Rural Arts North Yorkshire offers cultural services to rural communities throughout the County, particularly smaller venues such as village halls, which would not normally be able to provide quality arts programming. In 2012, a pilot project was developed in partnership with The Shed - an innovative and nationally recognised arts, music and poetry venue, established in 1992 – which took the expertise of Simon Thackray, the creator of 'The Shed' out to rural promoters through mentoring and innovative marketing support. This proposal sought to build on the success of the pilot project.

Ryedale District Council – Ryedale Open Art Exhibition: £3700

Lead objective: (iii) *Second Objective:* (ii)

The Ryedale Open was managed by RDC for 37 years and regularly attracted up to 2000 visitors. The week long show, in the Milton Rooms in Malton, was a selling exhibition which offered an opportunity for both professional and amateur artists to show and sell their work and it received many hours of voluntary effort. In response to the creative economy commissioning process improved links were made with visitor economy businesses in Malton and Norton area.

(Members will be aware that 2013 was the last year that the Art Exhibition was held.)

Ryedale District Council – Small scale / pilot commissions: £3000

Lead objective: (v)

Members recognised that access to relatively small sums of funding can provide organisations with the means to develop new or innovative projects, to pilot ideas (including activity which might be considered too high-risk without evidence of successful implementation on a smaller scale) and also to demonstrate local authority support to match funding organisations.

3 What Creative Economy Commissioning sought to achieve:

The Ryedale Economic Action Plan recognises the importance of the 'creative economy' to Ryedale's economic prosperity. The aim of the Creative Economy Commissioning project was to enable the sector to become stronger, more resilient and more sustainable in the longer term. Improving links to the visitor economy and supporting small businesses in the sector was also a priority. An additional aim was to reduce reliance on traditional grant aid in response to diminishing investment from the public sector.

Commissions were targeted to where it would make the most difference to the sector as a whole.

The creative economy is important to Ryedale, and this process seeks to maximise the benefits of the sector and ensure the 'whole was greater than the sum of parts'.

Commissioning was still a fairly new process to Ryedale District Council and a completely new process to the voluntary and community organisations in the sector. When discussing the process, officers were clear with potential delivery partners that commissioning is a learning and iterative process. It is flexible and adaptable to local circumstances. Clearly, a successful outcome is desired, but failure of part or all of a commissioned project is an option, providing the lessons are learnt and re-injected back into the commissioning monitoring and review cycle for subsequent years.

4 What our commissions have achieved in year 1 (2013/14)

i. The concept of 'hubs' for creative economy activity in Ryedale. There is potential to develop this at existing centres in the north and south of the District. The provision of a virtual hub was also proposed.

- Helmsley Arts Centre is now operating as a hub for the North of the District (in the absence of a hub in the south it is also offering support to the Milton Rooms, which is the preferred site for the southern hub in the future). HAC has been:
 - supporting other arts, cultural and community organisations by offering a free venue and advice where necessary. Originally HAC had also planned to offer support with marketing to smaller organisations but, due to staffing changes, they did not have the anticipated capacity to deliver this in the first year.
 - working in partnership with organisations, festivals and events and hosting activity wherever possible. Partners have included Ryedale Book Festival, LittleFest, Ryedale Artworks, Great Edstone Festival and Helmsley in Business

- offering work experience and skills development opportunities to young people who are interested in a career in the creative industries. More than 15 young people took advantage of this opportunity, which is ongoing.
- HAC also employed an RDC apprentice (partially funded through the commission). This was so successful (the apprentice completed an Arts Administration qualification) that the apprentice has been made a permanent member of HAC staff.

No proposals were submitted for a virtual hub and officers have recognised that this is something RDC may need to progress itself in the future. Meanwhile, RDCs Arts & Heritage web pages have been given substantial new content and Visit Ryedale website is offering a comprehensive “Whats On” facility.

Current/ongoing work includes:

- HAC is training a young person in technical skills (sound/lighting)
- The Milton Rooms has updated its Business Plan so that it includes an aspiration to become the hub for southern Ryedale. The Milton Rooms Management Committee will be applying to the Arts Council shortly for a small investment to support its programming.

ii. A greater link between the creative and visitor economy, to improve the economic benefit of arts and heritage to the locality.

- Helmsley Arts Centre began delivering an ongoing series of special “behind the scenes” events for visitor economy businesses, particularly accommodation providers. As a result there is now a scheme where VE businesses’ visitors are given a small discount if they attend, and in return for the referral, the VE businesses get points which lead to free tickets for themselves.
- HAC has also become a very active member of Helmsley in Business and leads on events for the town (such as Small Business Saturday and Yorkshire Day). This partnership has been very successful, as it has led to an increase in local audiences (from those who may previously have felt that HAC was “not for them”) as well as creating richer events for visitors and locals.
- Rural Arts have achieved a number of partnerships between small promoters and local businesses. Examples have included showcasing Helmsley Brewery products at a sold-out performance at Gilling East Village Hall; Weaverthorpe village pub offering 50p off spirits to accompany a touring theatre ghost story; and an opportunity for the new owners of Terrington Shop & Café to showcase their home baking at a well-attended play at Terrington Village Hall (this show, which was ostensibly about gardening, offered its audiences an even richer experience, as those who attended were given a discount off garden visits to Scampston Hall, which also provided a small exhibition for the evening).
- Ryedale Open Art Exhibition final private view was attended by a large number of visitor economy businesses, especially accommodation providers. Over 100 visitor economy businesses were invited (in addition to the usual guest list) and anecdotal evidence suggested that around half attended. Many local accommodation providers purchase locally inspired art works for their properties, to further promote the landscapes and heritage that draw visitors to the area.
- Ryedale ArtWorks worked in partnership with the Inspired By Gallery at Danby to showcase Ryedale’s visual arts offer to their large audience, which is predominantly visitors to the area. The exhibition was branded as Ryedale ArtWorks and visitors could pick up a copy of the Ryedale ArtWorks Artists Directory, enabling them to follow up with a visit to an open studio, or make contact with participant artists. Around 13,000 people saw this exhibition.
- A number of the Ryedale Heritage Partnership partners delivered special, themed, exhibitions which were cross-promoted to encourage multiple visits across the sites (enabling the museums with the larger visitor numbers to support the smaller ones).

Current/ongoing work includes:

- HAC continues to develop its relationship with accommodation providers and is gradually widening its invitation list to cover more of Ryedale, it is also advertising in bedroom browsers in both York & North Yorkshire.
- Ryedale ArtWorks has begun working with a distribution company to enable it to target areas where Ryedale’s visitors are known to originate as a priority for Directory distribution.

- Rural Arts North Yorkshire is continuing to work on partnerships with local businesses for a steadily increasing number of shows/promoters. It always ensures a relevant connection between the performance and the business, in order to maximise value for the audience.

iii. Support for creative individuals, businesses and enterprises to foster business growth.

- Ryedale ArtWorks has
 - supported 65 creative businesses through its development scheme (mentoring, access to specialist training, professional development seminars etc.)
 - created showcasing/marketing/exhibiting opportunities for 45 creative businesses
 - developed an ongoing partnership with the White Room Gallery in York which delivered a year long programme of exhibition opportunities for Ryedale ArtWorks members. These RAW branded exhibitions offered significant sales opportunities and the artists connections to the gallery have proven to be ongoing, as a number of the participants have been offered solo shows for the future. RAW's work has enabled nearly 15,000 people to see what Ryedale's artists are achieving.
- Rural Arts North Yorkshire has created a number of links between local creative businesses and local promoters. An exhibition by local photographer Lucy Saggars accompanied a performance of Northanger Abbey, for example, and an evening with Ian Macmillan was accompanied by a pop-up gallery created by Bils & Rye (a Nunnington-based gallery). These kinds of events not only create sales opportunities for the showcased business, but add to the feeling of a full night out for the audience.
- Ryedale Open Art Exhibition had strong relationships with local and regional galleries, who were invited to the private view and connected to participating artists in whom they had an interest. At the 2013 exhibition this led to a number of commissions, and at least 3 artists received offers of shows/relationships with private galleries. It is likely that this number grew, as often galleries will keep information on file for artists they intend to contact at a later date.

Current/ongoing work includes:

Both Rural Arts & Ryedale ArtWorks are continuing to develop these areas of delivery. Recently Rural Arts ran an event at NYMR to which they invited creative businesses, small promoters and visitor economy businesses. This event was well-attended and aimed to enable useful connections to be made.

iv. Support for social enterprises to develop new audiences (contributing to economic sustainability moving forward)

- Ryedale Heritage Partnership has:
 - Delivered a Heritage Trail across all museum sites (40 000 flyers were produced and distributed through the local press)
 - Had a joint presence at a number of country shows (to prevent duplication and maximise efficiency) in order to showcase the museums' work to these very substantial audiences
 - Run special events where they opened free to Ryedale Residents or offered a special deal. This was in response to the data that evidences that many visitors to Ryedale are visiting friends and relatives in the area
- Rural Arts has:
 - Provided mentoring from Simon Thackray (from The Shed) to enable small promoters to learn from his very successful venue. This mentoring has led to sell-out audiences in some venues and has covered areas such as maximising audience experience and marketing. Simon's support greatly increased the confidence of a number of new promoters.
 - Provided training in using social media, supported small promoters in creating websites, increased opportunities for purchasing tickets on line and worked to ensure that all Ryedale's programming is promoted via Visit Ryedale and Welcome to Yorkshire. The ongoing roll-out of Superfast North Yorkshire has been very helpful in this respect.

v. A small grant scheme to continue, to provide support for new, innovative projects or pump priming projects.

4 grants were made in the first year:

- Ryedale Book Festival were able to produce high quality print-work reflecting the quality of their festival. This also firmly linked the visitor economy with the Book Festival weekend in Malton. Their

audience continues to grow incrementally and they have just submitted an application to ACE to support a step change in the Festival for 2015.

- “Treasured Textiles” a heritage textiles exhibition for Rosedale/Hartoft, was made possible by a small investment from RDC. Local people were able to showcase family pieces (some generations old) in an exhibition which was well-visited and which received very positive responses from visitors.
- The Milton Rooms was able to send two volunteers (a Trustee and a volunteer programmer) to the Theatres Trust Conference in Leeds. This enabled them to network, make connections with other venues and learn from their peers; all of which enabled them to move further towards their ambition to be the southern arts hub in 2015/16.
- Street performers took part in a weekend of special events in Helmsley for Yorkshire Day (delivered by HIB). This aimed to increase visitors to Helmsley and anecdotal evidence from traders suggests this was a successful event (Helmsley does not have footfall counters, so empirical evidence is not available).

vi. Enterprises should work collaboratively to improve joint action and reduce duplication.

A number of partnerships have come together to deliver commissions or in response to work arising from them:

- Ryedale Heritage Partnership
- Rural Arts & The Shed
- Ryedale ArtWorks & Helmsley Arts Centre
- Small promoter clusters
- Woodhams Stone & Malton Museum

5 What we have learnt:

- Due to the timescale of the commissioning cycle, the process did not allow new partnerships time to develop and they were expected to begin delivering very quickly. This caused significant difficulties for some of the commissions. Commissioning was a new process for the organisations and represented a new way of working for both them and the Council. This required time to be understood and managed.
- Some of the initial proposals were over-ambitious or not at the right time in the delivery organisation’s development. This placed stress on the delivery partners where additional requirements stretched their resources. It was very difficult at the beginning to know what would constitute a successful commission, as this understanding needs to be built over time (both for the delivery organisation and for RDC)
- The amount of officer time that was required in managing this process was under-estimated. It was new to both the officers and the organisations and takes a very appreciatively larger time to manage than the previous RFO (Regularly Funded Organisation) grant scheme did.
- Most of the original proposals have been varied in some way, as it became clear at the regular review meetings that the original scope of the project required variation in practice and implementation. Although this is helpful, in that the flexibility is useful, it is more complicated than a grant scheme. Most of the commissions took longer to deliver than had been anticipated, partly due to the late start in the year. This led to administrative complications as commissions straddled financial years.
- The loss of grant aid towards core costs has been extremely difficult for some organisations. The delivery of commissioned activity has been felt by some to be at the detriment of their core activity.
- The focus of the small/pilot commissions remained on the delivery of the 6 service objectives and it is fair to say that this probably caused some difficulties for smaller grassroots organisations, which then required a lot of officer support to understand how the fund was relevant to them. The language of commissioning is less easy to understand than the language of grants.
- As a hybrid process (neither a grant nor a procurement) officers had to find the appropriate processes (for financial aspects and for monitoring/evaluation) as no guidelines/protocols existed.

These issues, experienced by both the Council (as the commissioning organisation) and the delivery partners, will result in amendments to the process for future years, and dialogue continues with the partners to ascertain the most expedient method of commissioning service delivery as we move forward.

March 2015