

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum held at THG, Honiton on Friday 13 February 2015

Present: EDDC Councillors:
John O’Leary – Culture Champion (Chairman)
Tom Wright - Deputy Portfolio Holder Environment

Town representatives:
John Dyson - Sidmouth
Douglas Hull – Axminster (Vice Chairman)
Jo Talbot – Ottery St Mary

Community representative:
Nikki Milican

Roger Werner - Villages in Action

Officers: Angela Blackwell, Thelma Hulbert Gallery Curator
Charlie Plowden, Service Lead - Countryside and Leisure
John Golding, Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment
Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer
Emma Molony, Marketing and Fundraising Officer
Gemma Girvan, Gallery & Shop Officer

Apologies: Cllr Steph Jones,
Cllr David Chapman
Gerri Bennett – Community Representative

The meeting started at 11:35 and ended at 13:10

*32 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum held on 5 March 2014 were confirmed as a true record.

*33 **Declarations of interest**

None

*34 **Cabinet Minutes**

Charlie Plowden, Service Lead - Countryside and Leisure updated the Forum on the minutes from Cabinet on 30 October 2013. With specific reference to the Thelma Hulbert Gallery and the business Survival Strategy. Referring to the Arts Council funded business report he acknowledge that there had been no document to drive the business forward. However now that there was a grant from the Arts Council the need to proceed with certain elements of the business survival report was essential. The Cabinet report on the Thelma Hulbert Gallery in January updated members on the social value of the gallery and latest activities and budget position.

Cllr Tom Wright - Deputy Portfolio Holder Environment acknowledged that Cabinet at the meeting on 7 January 2015 was more supportive of THG although he was disappointed that seeking charitable status was no longer an option. Charlie Plowden explained why this was not feasible. Smaller pots of funds could still be applied for, although a full-time officer post to lead on this was necessary for its success. John Golding confirmed that if there were clear advantages in gaining trust status the Council would still be interested in exploring this further. It was suggested that the Council's new website should have a page allocated for Arts and Culture where THG and the Manor Pavilion could be promoted as well as using more extensively the Council's weekly publication the Knowledge.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted and the Service Lead - Countryside and Leisure look into the provision of a dedicated Arts and Culture web page on the EDDC website.

*35 **THG Think Tank feedback**

The Service Lead, Countryside and Leisure reported the outcome of the Think Tank held earlier that day. Cabinet had recently expressed support for the gallery and although appreciated the social value of THG, reiterated the need for it to be more businesslike. Cabinet had recommended approval of the gallery's budget for 2015/16 which in the present climate of budget pressures was very positive.

Angela Blackwell updated the Forum on the awards THG had won – gold in the Devon Tourism Award, silver in the South West Tourism Awards for Access and Inclusivity as well as going forward into the National competition. The popular Matisse exhibition was the biggest the gallery had shown. Grants were awarded from the Arts Council, Heritage Lottery and smaller grants from the Prince's Trust and others. The new team of 5 (equivalent to 2.5 full-time members of staff) were doing a lot of work with schools. John Dyson congratulated the team for their success. The more THG progressed the more likely funds would become available to support the work of the gallery and local groups. It was commented on how much recent positive press coverage there had been and the profile being raised from the Tourism Award evening; attended by 300 ambassadors from across the region.

The question was asked as to how the team felt the THG website was working - do searches and hits work? It was felt that the Matisse exhibition would now bring people back to the gallery. Questionnaires were given out to provide comprehensive information about visitors and their spending habits when they visit places of interest. Brochures go out to all Tourist Information Centres. It was commented this sophisticated level of knowledge of audience footfall spending and type was very useful feedback. The cafe area just sold drinks and biscuits; Honiton had many very good cafes so THG did not want to compete, especially due to a lack of facilities. The team was considering working in partnership with these cafes.

Charlie Plowden stated that the Forum needed to understand and act on the recommendations from the Think Tank in order to move forward. These were:

1. Look into a permanent local artists' exhibition with lower cost art for sale. Better promotion of local art when it was in the gallery.
2. Consider the future use of the 'Thelma room' and how it could bring in additional income.

3. Refresh the shop regularly. Consider charging artists for exhibiting their work.
4. Extend opening hours. Explore the operational side of the gallery and the capacity of the team.
5. Increase the use of inside and outside space to optimise capacity and income.
6. Look into external signage from the town and car parks; with 13 spaces available for short stay visits to the THG.
7. Explore opportunities for partnership/collaboration with the Beehive Centre.
8. Promote the principal of EDDC supporting Arts and Culture.

RESOLVED: that the feedback from the Environment Portfolio Holder (THG) Think Tank of 13 February 2015 be noted and the recommendations implemented.

***36 THG Business Survival Strategy 2014/15**

Charlie Plowden informed the Forum this would be referred to in future to see how THG was performing compared with the aims, objectives and values of this strategy.

***37 Villages in Action (VIA) update**

Roger Werner from VIA praised the team from THG on their achievements. He suggested partnering up with other galleries for joint funding opportunities and shared exhibitions.

Roger updated the Forum with VIA's plans for 2015/16. VIA was an Arts Council's Non Profit Organisation (NPO) until April 2015 when it would be able to apply for separate funding providing greater opportunity. VIA received LA funding from Teignbridge, West Devon, Mid Devon and EDDC. They had raised money for training sessions for village promoters – to help set up Facebook pages etc. and strengthen the organisation as well as enable links with other villages. There were 17 villages involved in promoting events and 34 performances had been booked. £2000 had been raised by VIA events for local venues. They continued to work with care homes for the elderly by developing a programme of afternoon shows; this was subsidised by VIA. Feedback from the care homes' staff was very positive on engagement from the residents – this made the subsidy worthwhile.

Other initiatives were:

- A "Threads 2" textile project with older people in an East Devon Community.
- "Postcards from the Path" - an Exhibition and workshop project with printmaker Anita Reynolds, inspired by her walk along the Jurassic Coast. There would be exhibitions and workshops in Colyford and Stockland in May.
- Co-commissioning a new theatre piece aimed at a wide age range - "Lost Tales of Devon" with local theatre company Theatre Rush. This would tour from Autumn 2015.
- Working with an Arts Consultant to reassess our operating model and look at ways of making VIA more resilient. They would evaluate social impact and organisational development.
- Planning a pilot project to support theatre performances in Market Town venues including the Beehive Centre; this is from Arts Council funding and if

successful will open the project up to other venues across Devon.

- On 15th May 2015 would be launching an appeal for private donations, to open up a new income strand for VIA. The high-profile launch event would be held at the Kenn Centre, Kennford and feature readings from VIA Patron Michael Morpurgo.
- A new part-time marketing assistant post would be appointed to help increase social media activity.
- Working with the Laura Ashley Foundation on textile projects.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted

*38 **Any other business**
None

*39 **Date of next meeting**
It was agreed that next meeting will be held on 18 September 2015 at 11am at the Manor Pavilion, Sidmouth.

The Chairman thanked the team and officers for attending the meeting and Think Tank.

Chairman Date