

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Arts and Culture Forum held at Online via the Zoom app on 16 April 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.20 pm

21 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

22 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2024 were agreed.

23 Declarations of interest

5. Year 3 Cultural Programme.

Councillor Ian Barlow, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Director of Sidmouth School of Art.

5. Year 3 Cultural Programme.

Councillor Vicky Johns, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Works for an arts based charity in Sidmouth.

24 Year 3 Cultural Programme

The Cultural Producer's presentation and report provided a summary of the third year of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF) Cultural Programme, from April 2024 to March 2025. This three-year funded programme was helping to both support the delivery of East Devon's Cultural Strategy 2022-2031 as well as deliver funding into the district's diverse and distinctive creative communities and help to support their activities and events. The three-year cultural programme was now complete, and a fourth year had been agreed in principle, with total funding of £37,985 toward Creative East Devon Fund (£20,985), ACED network (£2,000), Screen Devon (£10,000) and Villages in Action (£5,000).

The total year three budget allocation for the Cultural Programme in 2024/25 was £52,000. During this year it predominantly focussed on two activities: the continued support for and development of the Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) network through meetings and training, and continued delivery of the Creative East Devon Fund grant scheme. Funding was also designated to support the new initiative Screen Devon. Other activities during 2024/25 included grants for museums and the cultural tourism map. It was noted that funding for a continued Cultural Programme beyond March 2026 remained uncertain.

The Cultural Producer was thanked for her comprehensive report and presentation and members agreed that she was pivotal in delivering the work of the Cultural Strategy.

RESOLVED: that the Arts and Culture Forum endorses the report and the successful delivery of the third year of the UK Shared Prosperity Fun Cultural Programme.

25 **Villages in Action**

The Forum received a presentation from Mair George, Creative Director, Villages in Action detailing the work of Villages in Action (VIA) and how this related to the East Devon Cultural Strategy. The presentation outlined the success of VIA and the 56 performances that had taken place in East Devon, including box office income, audience and participant attendees, community fundraising and the number of paid artists. Funding had also been received from Heritage Lottery and Arts Council England.

Activities for 2025-26 were the recruitment of the East Devon network lead, which the uplift received from EDDC had enabled, a summer performance programme and From Devon with Love (First Steps Touring) bursary.

The Forum discussed the importance on collaborations with other organisations, as well as the accessibility of the venues. Cultural activity was a huge benefit to people's health and wellbeing and should be available to all. It was noted that 21% of people had been able to walk to the events. The importance of promoters was highlighted as VIA relied on volunteers within communities.

The Creative Director was thanked for her interesting presentation, the excellent community networking that took place and also for including the EDDC logo on the VIA website. It was suggested that VIA could use the EDDC Residents Newsletter for publicity of their events.

26 **South West Museums Development**

Representatives from South West Museums Development (MDSW) had given their apologies for the meeting, but the Forum noted the report contained within the agenda papers detailing the work of MDSW and how this related to the East Devon Cultural Strategy.

27 **Screen Devon**

The Arts and Culture Forum received a presentation from Claire Horrocks, Manager of Screen Devon, who had been in post since January 2025.

Screen Devon had been working hard to establish themselves and to make Devon more film friendly. They had been working on logging infrastructure, understanding workforce capacity, identifying skills gaps and informing a new programme of skill development. Screen Devon intended to track the economic impact from screen productions in the region, as well as nurture and support Devon's creative industries and identify where there were gaps. By aligning cultural strategies across the county local authorities could work towards shared goals and ensure they did not miss opportunities to collaborate, benefit and grow, putting Devon on the map and building a strategy to become recognised as a world class destination.

Screen Devon collaborated with Exmouth Film Festival to deliver a pop-up industry event. The session included an industry guest speaker, information on Screen Devon and its role in the region, and networking. Seven enterprises and five organisations from within East Devon were supported.

The presentation outlined post event outreach and targets for 2025-26. These included Screen Devon acting as a simple one-stop point of contact to make life easy for visiting productions and providing a process for simple Devon-wide permits. Screen Devon would help to broker new locations and manage a private directory.

The Forum agreed that collaborations were extremely important and that the more all involved worked together the better. There would be economic benefits from the ripple effect of screen tourism. Screen Devon was a significant initiative bringing investment into the area. It was noted that recent filming in Beer brought £700,000 to the local economy and approximately 40% of this figure would have gone directly to East Devon businesses.

The Screen Devon Manager thanked EDDC for its continued support and investment and committed to hosting another event with an East Devon based provider. On behalf of the Forum the Chair thanked the Manager of Screen Devon for her presentation and congratulated her on year one.

28 **Manor Pavilion Theatre**

The Arts and Culture Forum received a presentation from the Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager on the previous and forthcoming twelve months at the Manor Pavilion Theatre.

The presentation included information on theatre usage, where customers were coming from, and the Sidmouth Summer Play Festival. Ticket sales and bar sales had seen a year-on-year increase until covid. This post covid recovery trend had continued, despite the theatre closure in January and February 2024 for building work. It was noted that art investment contributed up to £4 to the local economy for every £1 spent by a local authority.

The Big Survey was conducted in December 2024, with 656 people completing the anonymous survey. The results revealed a friendliness score of 9.4 out of 10, and respondents highly likely to recommend the theatre to a friend. The survey confirmed that the right types of performances were being put on and justified having a summer play festival, with it being the most popular fixture and having the most mentions and being the most attended. It also revealed what people's favourite shows were and what they would like to see more of. Constructive criticism highlighted the need for more online advertising and a greater social media presence, more matinees requested, and local transport infrastructure impacting attendance.

Looking to the future the Manor Pavilion Theatre would take the feedback from the Big Survey to help it grow and improve. The Play Season would continue and be developed. There would be new comedy nights and more contemporary drama, as requested by the public. Long standing relationships with local societies would continue and youth theatre would be supported.

It was noted that refurbishment of the theatre would take place in early 2026, with redecoration of the auditorium, a new carpet and the seating being replaced. A capital budget of £260,000 had been provided by EDDC.

On behalf of the Forum the Chair thanked the Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager for his presentation. The Forum agreed that the Theatre was a fantastic asset to East Devon and were pleased to see the venue go from strength to strength. The Manager and his team were congratulated for the remarkable covid recovery.

29 **East Devon events update**

The StreetScene Events Officer introduced herself and explained that the events team (two officers) managed the hiring out of StreetScene and car parks land to those who want to put on events across the district. In addition to this they:

- Hosted a maximum of six weddings on EDDC land at Connaught Gardens, Sidmouth, where they acted as venue manager.
- Granted filming and photography permissions.
- Administered fitness licences.
- Provided administration for the Safety Advisory Group.
- Managed the Sidmouth Folk Festival Seafront Traders.
- Provided support to town and parish councils.

The Events Officer outlined the numbers of days and events that had taken place over the last few years, with the majority taking place in Exmouth. A wide variety of events were approved, from regular town band performances to larger scale festivals. 2025 was fully booked for weddings, with only one slot available in 2026. The team were extremely busy, but it was hard to predict the number of future events as only six weeks' notice was required for low level events. If it was not possible to hold an event on Council land organisers would be signposted to other locations within East Devon in order to support the district-wide economy.

The events officers were part of the national Local Authority Event Organisers Group, which allowed for benchmarking and collaborative working with other events officers across the country.

It was noted that the Events Strategy and Policy, approved in March 2021 needed updating to reflect the Cultural Strategy and the Tourism Strategy.

In response to questions from members the Events Officer explained how event safety was assessed and the measures that were taken to support event organisers. She was thanked by members of the Forum for the fantastic job the team were doing.

Attendance List

EDDC Councillors present:

O Davey
P Fernley
N Hookway
V Johns

Town Representatives

R Doorbar, Budleigh Salterton Town Council
C Buchan, Cranbrook Town Council
I Barlow, Sidmouth Town Council

Officers in attendance:

Charles Plowden, Assistant Director Countryside and Leisure
Graham Whitlock, Theatre and Arts Centre Manager (Manor Pavilion Theatre)
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer
Caitlin Davey, Events Officer
Sarah Elghady, Cultural Producer

Also Present

Mair George, Villages in Action
Claire Horrocks, Screen Devon
Jack Price, Axminster Town Council

Apologies:

J Brown, Honiton Town Council
J Farrow, Axminster Town Council
P Faithfull
Jo Cairns, South West Museums Development
Vic Harding, South West Museums Development

Chair

Date: