

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Arts and Culture Forum held at Online on 26 November 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.05 am and ended at 12.30 pm

1 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2025 were agreed.

3 Declarations of interest

4 & 6. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Ian Barlow, Affects Non-registerable Interest, He was a Director of Sidmouth School of Arts, which had received Arts Council England funding.

4. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Nick Hookway, Affects Non-registerable Interest, He was a Devon County Councillor and an Exmouth Town Councillor.

4 & 6. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Olly Davey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, He was an Exmouth Town Councillor and the town council had received Arts Council England funding.

4. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Sarah Jackson, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Her employer ran an arts and culture venue.

4. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Vicky Johns, Affects Non-registerable Interest, She worked for the South West Academy of Fine and Applied Arts, and was the Mayor of Ottery Saint Mary.

4 Arts Council England presentation

The Chair welcomed Simon Jutton, Senior Relationship Manager, Arts Council England to the meeting. He explained that Arts Council England was the national development agency for creativity and culture. It was an arm's-length body accountable to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and was the distributor of National Lottery funds. It had nine offices, with its headquarters in Manchester and the South West Office in Bristol. The total income for 2024/25 was £843 million, which was split between Grant In Aid (£580 million) and Lottery receipts (£263 million).

Application decisions were based on the Arts Council ten-year strategy, 'Let's Create:

- The vision was that by 2030 England would be a place where everyone had the chance to unlock their own creativity, and have access to a wide range of high quality cultural experiences.
- It was built around three outcomes:

- Creative People.
- Cultural Communities.
- A Creative and Cultural Country.
- It was also built around four investment principles:
 - Ambition and quality.
 - Inclusion and relevance.
 - Dynamism.
 - Environmental responsibility.

Simon explained that the outcomes were about everyday creativity; how culture connected and operated within communities and in partnership with the professional sector, including internationally.

Arts Council work involved advocacy, investment and development.

During 2024/25 Arts Council England (ACE) invested £74 million in arts culture in southwest England:

- National Portfolio Organisations – about £36.6 million.
- Arts Council National Lottery Project Grants – about £12.4 million a year.
- Music Education Hubs – about £12.9 million.
- Strategic Funds - £11 million in 2024/25, but could vary enormously.

Development wise ACE offered expertise, advice and strategic interventions. The South West team held 22 artform and thematic specialisms, from dance to philanthropy, from international work to creative health. To support development in the cultural sector ACE offered a range of funding pots.

In terms of advocacy ACE offered:

- Intrinsic value.
- Economy.
- Health.
- Education.

Simon was thanked for his presentation and answered questions on the ACE application process, future funding for local authorities and support given by ACE to other councils that had gone through Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution in relation to culture.

5 **Villages in Action presentation**

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 performances that were taking place in East Devon.

Since the last meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum Villages in Action had been successful in securing its fourth consecutive Arts Council England National Lottery project grant to continue to develop the Agri Culture network and activities across rural Devon. Agri Culture started on 1 October 2025 and was a multi-faceted project focussing on four main areas:

- Live performances.
- Active participation workshops and sessions.
- Organisational development.
- Local artist and creative practitioner support.

East Devon was a key area for Villages in Action and with the uplift received from EDDC an East Devon Connector had been recruited. VIA were focussing on connectivity, working collectively and collaboratively, sharing best practice and exploring the potential for joint funding bids over the next six months.

As part of the present performance programme VIA had supported local artists at various stages of their career development and at different stages of their performance development. Various examples were given to the Forum. Feedback from audiences was that people appreciated the work of VIA, rural communities recognised the uniqueness of VIA and enjoyed the intimacy and connection that its activity cultivated.

A network connector event was held in East Devon in October with 13 potential community curators and partners, along with local creative. They represented a diverse mix of spaces and perspectives. It was an opportunity to discover what people wanted for their communities and to find out what motivated the people 'that do' in those communities. A consistent thread was community, well-being and inclusion, as well as affordability. VIA's bespoke model was adapted for differing communities and venues.

Following the presentation, questions were asked about the income from ticket sales, how artists and venues were found, and how connections were made.

On behalf of the Forum the Chair thanked the VIA Creative Director for her presentation.

6 Museums Development South West presentation

Jo Cairns, Museum Development Officer for Museum Development South West (MDSW) gave the Forum some background to MDSW. They were a team of museum and heritage development specialists working with the museum and heritage sector in the South West to effect positive, lasting change and deliver public value. MDSW received 53% of its funding from Arts Council England.

£360,000 was invested annually into nine Museum Development Officers (MDOs). 47% of this investment was secured from 18 local authorities across the South West. Local place-based MDOs were essential for the delivery of effective sector development providing:

- Responsive 1-2-1 development support.
- Facilitated access to specialist technical support.
- Understanding the role museums play within local communities.
- Trusted relationships – providing continuity.
- Connect, network and collaborate.
- Vital and informed advocates.

MDSW worked in partnership with EDDC with funding provided through the Shared Prosperity Fund. There were six accredited museums receiving support (A La Ronde, Allhallows Museum, Axminster Heritage Centre, Sidmouth Museum, Fairlynch Museum and Arts Centre, Killerton House) and there were four others not yet accredited, but still receiving support due to funding from EDDC (Axe Valley Heritage Museum, Exmouth Museum, Ottery St Mary Heritage Museum, Whimble Heritage Centre). Priority museums were museums that were accredited through the Arts Council England accreditation programme (Allhallows Museum, Axminster Heritage Centre, Fairlynch Museum and Arts Centre and Sidmouth Museum). Arts Council funding was received by MDSW for accredited museums. The accreditation scheme run by Arts Council England

ensured that museums were adhering to a certain standard. Being accredited showed that a museum was working to a particular standard and opened up opportunities for grants as a lot of funding was only open to accredited museums.

All the priority museums were accessing development support (target 60%), with 50% of the priority museums accessing three or more different development support opportunities. Eight of the ten (80%) museums and heritage organisations in the area were engaged in MDSW development support.

Projects delivered so far in 2025/26 included:

- £2,000 investment in Exmouth Museum and Axe Valley Heritage Museum participating in 'Reducing the Risks: Hazards in Collections' programme funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- MDSW Collaborative Capacity Builder Grant Funding was enabling three museums (Axe Valley Heritage Museum, Exmouth Museum and Whimble Heritage Centre) to take part in a Volunteer Leaders Wellbeing Day at Dartington Hall.
- Axminster Heritage Centre had participated in the MDSW Organisational Health Check Programme.
- Ongoing support for Exmouth Museum to strengthen their governance by converting to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

The Museum Development Officer explained that in 2024/25 EDDC received a 247% return on its investment from MDSW. It received:

- £9,900 in local Museum Development Officer support.
- £2,850 specialist and technical services in conservation, collection care and volunteering development, including ongoing support to Exmouth in Volunteering Fit for the Future programme.
- £400 access to technical accreditation advice by three museum organisations.
- £720 training with 12 delegates from 5 museums.

On behalf of the Forum the Chair thanked the Museum Development Officer for her presentation.

7 Screen Devon presentation

The Chair welcomed Claire Horrocks, Manager of Screen Devon to the meeting. Claire explained that she worked 2.5 days a week and a Film Officer was employed for 4 days a week. Screen Devon had established strategic partnerships and industry connections over the past year, both locally and nationally. Because work was service-based, the most significant investment was in its people – the Manager and Film Officer. This ensured that funding directly supported high-quality, evidence-based delivery rather than administrative overheads.

Screen Devon was approaching its first year of activity and the 2025-26 Impact Report was about to be published.

2025 priorities were:

1. Attract more productions to Devon by promoting desirable filming locations.
2. Boost the economy by driving investment towards local crew and suppliers.
3. Highlight Devon's potential as a film-friendly location.
4. Support and develop local talent.
5. Track and report on the economic impact of film and TV in Devon.
6. Collaborate with Southwest and national partners.

7. Promote sustainability by developing clear, actionable policies and create a dedicated resource centre for productions whilst looking at neighbouring areas for inspiration.

The headline impact and outcomes across Devon were:

- £9,000,000 projected production spend in 2025-26 (260% increase on 2024/25 and 190% above the projected 2025/26 forecast).
- 1000 web visits per month.
- 254 filming days, 126 prep days and 44 strike days.
- Social media reach increased by over 3000% from July-November.
- 13 local productions supported.
- 19 events hosted/attended by Screen Devon.

As Devon's regional screen agency, Screen Devon had implemented core film office services, opening potential for a streamlined and professional offer for incoming productions, including:

- Production support.
- Location database and scouting.
- Local authority film office network.
- Supplier directory.

Screen Devon were supporting local crew by providing direct guidance, promoting local talent to incoming productions, sharing opportunities, and acting as a key connection point between crew, productions and regional partners. The aim was to ensure that local professionals were visible, informed and ready for work. 120 crew were now registered and 50 crew opportunities were shared. Screen Devon aimed to understand Devon's crew and skill gaps, and to further develop skills.

Screen Devon were seeking a 12-month funding commitment of £10,000 for 2026/27 from each local authority to ensure continuity, attract major productions and deliver measurable economic and cultural benefits for the county. This would:

- Formalise Screen Devon's Screen Agency function.
- Develop the local crew pipeline.
- Enhance economic data capture and reporting.
- Scale services sustainably.
- Support Screen Devon in achieving sustainable long-term results, allowing it to work to an in-depth strategy, plan effectively and build on the new connections made during 2025, leading to more resilience and evolution.

On behalf of the Forum the Chair thanked Claire for her fantastic presentation and again emphasised the importance of networking and developing relationships and connections.

8 **East Devon Cultural Strategy progress and budget request**

The Cultural Producer's report provided the Forum with a summary of progress made on the East Devon Cultural Strategy and set out a request for an internal budget to continue delivering cultural activity. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) programme funded by central Government would end in March 2026, with no replacement likely to benefit East Devon. Without future funding, there was a high risk that the momentum which had been generated in the delivery of the Cultural Strategy would stall.

The East Devon Cultural Strategy (2022 – 2031) was made up of 31 potential work programmes. Four years (and almost half-way) into delivery of the strategy six of the 31 programmes had been completed, 23 had made good progress and only two were yet to be started. The Cultural Programme had been allocated £37,985 this financial year

through the UKSPF and to date had overachieved on targets, with good value for money observed. As the continued delivery of the Cultural Strategy and the Tourism Strategy was a corporate priority, it was felt that there was a strong strategic case for providing a rolling budget for this.

The Cultural Producer outlined some of the themes of the strategy currently in progress and successes so far. There had been particular focus on the theme of 'strengthen and support the people that do', delivering 23 training sessions to the Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) network since 2023, recognising volunteers through an annual ACED volunteer of the year award, and highlighting over 80 volunteering opportunities on the ACED website. Another theme that had made significant progress was Cultural Tourism, with the creation of the East Devon Cultural Map.

In terms of the theme 'creative enterprise and skills', the ACED mentoring programme was set up last year and six young people to date had gone through the programme, which provided pathways to employment and increased capacity of the local cultural sector. In terms of 'protecting and enhancing the natural environment through culture' the THG hosted regular climate conversation events and through the Carbon Action Fund (funded through the UKSPF) grants had been given for decarbonisation equipment to cultural venues. Finally in terms of 'connectivity' the Cultural Producer explained that she had co-ordinated nine ACED network meetings at rotating venues across the district.

The culture budget request was:

- Arts and Culture East Devon network: £2,500
- Creative East Devon fund: £20,000
- Villages in Action: £5,000
- Screen Devon: £10,000

This would be in addition to the existing internal Arts Development budget of £14,000 (£10,000 for Villages in Action and £4,000 for Museums Development South West). It was also hoped to accommodate a minor uplift of support for Museums Development South West of 8.8% (£4,355) in 2026/27 and 4.6% (£4,530) in 2027/28. It was noted that the culture budget request sat alongside a tourism budget request in order to continue delivery on the tourism strategy, which was integral to cultural strategy delivery. It was felt that small rolling budgets for culture and tourism should be regarded as investments to help secure additional income whilst protecting the existing revenues already generated.

The Cultural Producer was thanked for her informative report.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the request of an internal budget of £37,500 to continue the successful delivery of the Cultural Strategy in 2026/27 as part of the budget-setting process.

9 **Thelma Hulbert Gallery update**

The Gallery Manager and Curator gave the Forum a summary of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG) activity for 2025. The theme for 2025 was 'community and place'. The aim was to strengthen ties with both the local and artistic communities through the following initiatives:

- Encouraging emerging artists.
- Collaborating with local artists and photographers.
- Bringing renowned artists to a rural setting.
- Continuing climate-focused exhibitions.

- Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and accessibility into programming and delivery.

The Gallery Manager and Curator explained that the current Arts Council England project grant funding of £29,000 to support delivery for 18 months was coming to an end in March 2026. Just under £30,000 was being requested from the Arts Council to ensure the continuation and growth of the Youth Network and engagement programme that enriched the THG exhibition and wider programme. The support would also enable the gallery to maintain its vital focus on key priorities such as:

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- Addressing the climate emergency.
- Supporting emerging artists.
- Bringing renowned artists to the rural community.

The current Arts Council funding had seen the gallery interact with over 1,500 people across seven different locations and 50 different events, including schools workshops, community events and gallery workshops.

The Gallery Manager and Curator also outlined to the Forum THG achievements during 2025:

- Refurbishment and refresh from January to March 2025.
- Ashish Ghadiali exhibition – featured three high-profile films focusing on climate and racial justice.
- James Ravilious – An English Eye – this solo exhibition achieved the highest visitor attendance in ten years (3,270), with 42% of the visitors new to the gallery. It was the most viewed exhibition online, with 3,200 website visits to the home page (double the average).
- THG Open 2025 – there were over 460 entries for this biennial exhibition, with 104 artists selected. Sales increased by 50%, rising from £4,387.25 in 2023 to £6,582.46 in 2025.
- CAMP (Contemporary Art Membership Platform) – an exciting and dynamic network of artists based in Devon and Cornwall.
- Present Makers – a record-breaking 90 entries were received and 70 artists selected.

Engagement with the THG had been high with social media success and during the summer over 790 people visited THG's offsite and gallery activities. THG sold out of the five days of Summer Art Week activities for 11- to 17-year-olds.

On behalf of the Forum, the Chair thanked the Gallery Manager and Curator for her fascinating report and congratulated her on the success of the Gallery and increase in figures.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet note and support a funding bid to the Arts Council to support the Thelma Hulbert Gallery to:

- Enrich the Exhibition Programme by delivering an ambitious engagement programme that benefits the wider East Devon community — including local schools and our expanding Youth Network.
- Develop the Youth Network into a region-wide platform that extends beyond the gallery, engaging young people who may not otherwise have access to creative opportunities — such as those with school-related anxiety and young people leaving care.
- Reframe opportunities for young people by introducing live projects and creative briefs designed to build skills, confidence, and pathways into the creative industries.
- Expand internship opportunities through partnerships with Exeter College and support for care leavers.
- Continue to focus on the climate emergency by developing Climate Conversations into a Climate Symposium – a day to carve out space and time to inspire creatives to protect

and enhance the natural environment through their creative practice, share expertise and network in a participatory, supportive and solutions focused event of interactive workshops and talks.

Attendance List

EDDC Councillors present:

O Davey
P Fernley
N Hookway
V Johns
I Barlow
S Gazzard
P Faithfull
S Jackson

Town Representatives

S Gazzard, Exmouth Town Council
I Barlow, Sidmouth Town Council

Officers in attendance:

Graham Whitlock, Theatre and Arts Centre Manager (Manor Pavilion Theatre)
Gemma Girvan, Gallery Manager and Curator
Mark Barrow, Interim Director Place
Caitlin Davey, Events Officer
Sarah Elghady, Cultural Producer
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Geri Panteva, Senior Economic Development Officer
Chloe Woodman, Assistant Director - Communications, Digital Services and Engagement
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present

Cllr R Collins
Jo Cairns, Museums Development South West
Claire Horrocks, Screen Devon
Mair George, Villages in Action
Wendy Van Der Plank, Villages in Action
Simon Jutton, Arts Council England

Apologies:

C Buchan, Cranbrook Town Council
M Hall

Chair

Date: