

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Arts and Culture Forum held at Online via Teams on 29 April 2026

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.15 am

10 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

11 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2025 were agreed.

12 Declarations of interest

4. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Ian Barlow, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Member of the Sidmouth School of Arts which had previously received a grant. Member of Sidmouth Town Council..

4. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Olly Davey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Member of Exmouth Town Council.

4. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Vicky Johns, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Arts administrator for South West Academy of Fine and Applied Arts..

13 East Devon Cultural Strategy

The Cultural Producer introduced herself and explained that she led on the delivery of the East Devon cultural strategy. She had recently delivered the fourth year of the UK Shared Prosperity Funded Cultural Programme (SPF), exceeding all targets. There had been 11 Creative East Devon funded projects as well as financial support provided to Screen Devon and Villages in Action.

Progress reports from Screen Devon, Villages in Action and Museums Development South West were included in the agenda papers and the Cultural Producer highlighted some key areas to note. Overall these organisations had evidenced that they laid strong foundations for future growth and it was hoped that EDDC could continue to support them. Whilst there was no more UK SPF funding going forward, there was a modest internal cultural budget to continue delivery on the strategy.

The Cultural Producer outlined:

- Creative East Devon Fund 2026 highlights – the fund had been oversubscribed and was highly competitive. Lots of positive feedback had been received.
- ACED network meeting – 37 people attended the last meeting at The Beehive, and a Festivals Champion had recently been recruited.
- ACED Volunteer of the Year – this would be awarded at the next ACED event on 3 June at Kennaway House. Nominations were open until 7 May 2026.

- Update on map at railway stations – thanks to EDDC’s partnership with South Western Railways and the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership a fantastic promotional opportunity had been secured to display the Cultural Tourism Map poster across various train stations on the Waterloo line from Exeter to London.

The Cultural Producer informed those present that both Exmouth and Sidmouth had submitted expressions of interest in the UK Town of Culture competition. A lot of hard work had gone into this new Department for Culture, Media and Sport competition. It was inspired by the success of the flagship UK City of Culture, which was a proven model for cultural placemaking. The competition aimed to spotlight the cultural contribution of towns of different sizes. The winning town would be awarded £3 million to deliver a cultural programme in 2028 and the other two finalists would receive £250,000 each to deliver elements of their bid. If either Exmouth or Sidmouth passed the expression of interest stage they would receive £60,000 to help deliver a full bid. It was suggested that if either of the towns were shortlisted that the Arts and Culture Forum considered a contribution of match funding from EDDC.

Members of Sidmouth and Exmouth Town Councils thanked the Cultural Producer and her team for all the help they had given the towns in submitting expressions of interest in the UK Town of Culture Competition.

14 **Screen Devon**

The Forum noted the Screen Devon UK Shared Prosperity Fund report and project summary to date, which had been included in the agenda papers.

15 **Villages in Action**

The Forum noted the annual report from Villages in Action, which had been included with the agenda papers.

16 **Museum Development South West**

The Forum noted the annual report from Museum Development South West, which had been included with the agenda papers.

17 **East Devon Festival Fund**

The Senior Economic Development Officer updated the Forum on the cultural tourism agenda. The East Devon Festival Fund had a good strong link to both the cultural and tourism strategies. Funding had been secured from an internal budget and was aimed at supporting existing established festivals to promote their activities outside of the district, in order to encourage more visits, overnight stays and tourism to the area. The initial budget was £10,000 but it was hoped to increase this in the future. Applicants could apply for grants of £500-£2,000 for external promotion of festivals.

The Senior Economic Development Officer also updated the Forum on the partnership with South Western Railways and the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership to display 62 promotional posters during April showcasing the Cultural Tourism map in key locations on the rail network, including Waterloo station, to pitch East Devon as a cultural destination. She hoped that this could be repeated in the future. The Forum agreed that

this was an excellent opportunity to promote cultural activities in the area whilst encouraging sustainable travel.

The Forum congratulated the Senior Economic Development Officer and welcomed the East Devon Festivals Fund. It was agreed that festivals had a positive impact on the local economy and could be a huge economic boost to the whole area.

18 **Sidmouth Folk Festival**

The Chair introduced and welcomed Tash Daley, Artistic Co-Director of the Sidmouth Folk Festival to the meeting. Tash was also the new ACED Festival Champion.

It was noted that Sidmouth Folk Festival would be held from 31 July – 7 August 2026 and had been running since 1955. It championed traditions from across the UK and internationally. An important part of the Festival was working with grass-roots emerging artists, sustaining and promoting regional traditional artists, as well as showcasing traditions from across the world. The Festival was an immersive, inclusive, multi-generational experience with over 80 events. It was worth £7.3million to the area, with around 175,000 people visits across the week.

The focus for 2026 was accessibility and communication. There were many free offerings, but not everyone was aware of this. There were also discount tickets for local people. The Sidmouth Folk Festival was very much community led with volunteer directors. This year there was a pre-festival concert and a Sidmouth in London event, showcasing Sidmouth and East Devon as a destination for both artists and tourists.

The Forum agreed that the Sidmouth Folk Festival was an excellent event. The Artistic Co-Director was thanked for being the ACED Festivals Champion and for her detailed update to the Forum. It was acknowledged that the Folk Festival was huge for the whole area, with extended stays and visits. There were many strong creative offerings in East Devon linking in with tourism and hospitality.

19 **Manor Pavilion Theatre**

The Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager gave the Forum an update on the recent refurbishment of the Manor Pavilion auditorium. The theatre was closed during January and February 2026 to enable the auditorium to be redecorated, a new carpet laid and the seating replaced. A great deal of thought and research had gone into the redecoration. The 277 seats had been specially made for the venue, providing greater leg room and the first few rows fully adaptable. It was noted that the theatre had last been refurbished 38 years ago. The Theatre Manager was very proud of the achievement and had worked closely with Property Services. All involved had worked hard, achieved the refurbishment on time and underbudget.

The Manor Pavilion Theatre had been very busy since reopening and feedback on the refurbishment had been fantastic. Forward bookings were going well into 2028. An interesting mix of 12 plays had been announced for the summer season, with tickets going on sale on 12 May 2026. The theatre was expected to be very busy over the season ahead.

The Theatre Manager welcomed members of the Forum to visit the Theatre and advised that a video of the auditorium refit was available on Facebook. In turn the Manager was

thanked and congratulated along with Property Services for the fantastic renovation. The Manor Pavilion Theatre was an asset to East Devon, not just to Sidmouth.

20 **EDDC events**

The East Devon Events Officer introduced herself as one of two members of the EDDC events team. She outlined the work of the team during 2025/26, which included:

- 180 events held on Streetscene land and car parks.
- 48 events in August 2025.
- 85 events in Exmouth.
- 385 days of events, an increase from 311 in 2024/25.
- 40 cancellations for various reasons, often weather related.
- 5 weddings held in Connaught Gardens in 2025 and 6 (maximum capacity) booked for 2026 and 2027.
- Fitness licenses were processed for East Devon land and open water swimming, predominantly in Exmouth.
- 10 filming permissions were granted in East Devon in 2025/26.
- Administration of the Safety Advisory Group which covered any event in East Devon, not necessarily on Council land.

The Events Officer advised the Forum that 2026/27 was on track to deliver a similar year. 112 events were currently booked for the forthcoming year, with more applications being received and many repeat bookings.

It was noted that the events were a good source of income for the Council. The financial impact across the district was not currently monitored as it was complex and expensive to capture and measure the data, but it was possible to do so through the South West Visitor Economy Hub. It was reported that the Exmouth Beach Management Plan indicated that the activities on Exmouth seafront amounted to £800m per year

The Events Officer and her colleague were thanked for their hard work.

It was suggested that in order to protect all the fantastic work the cultural and tourism teams were doing, that a document be produced establishing all the achievements, strategies and data. This could be used to persuade the new interim LGR authority to advocate to continue the excellent work.

Attendance List

EDDC Councillors present:

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

Town Representatives

R Doorbar, Budleigh Salterton Town Council
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

Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer

Caitlin Davey, Events Officer

Sarah Elghady, Cultural Producer

Chloe Woodman, Assistant Director - Communications, Digital Services and Engagement

Gerri Panteva, Senior Economic Development Officer

Also Present

P Arnott

R Collins

Tash Daley, Artistic Co-Director, Sidmouth Folk Festival

Jess Magill, Arts Manager, Exmouth Town Council

Apologies:

P Fernley

J Rowland, Seaton Town Council

Chair

Date: