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Exemption applied: None

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UK Shared Prosperity Fund cultural programme

Report summary:

The report provides a summary of the second year of outputs of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF) cultural programme, from April 2023 – April 2024. This is a three year funded programme which is helping to both support the delivery of East Devon's Cultural Strategy 2022-2031 as well as deliver funding into our district's diverse and distinctive creative communities and help to support their activities and events. The three year Cultural Programme is due to be complete in March 2025.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That the Arts & Culture Forum:

- endorses this report and the successful delivery of the year two outputs of the UK SPF cultural programme.

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that the Forum is informed and updated annually on the progress of the three year UK SPF cultural programme in the most reliable and transparent manner. The cultural programme year two outcomes will feed into the overarching monitoring and evaluation being reported to DHLUC by the Economic Development team as the UK SPF programme co-ordinators.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergencies
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☒ Culture, Tourism, Leisure and Sport
- ☐ Democracy and Transparency
- ☐ Economy and Assets
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; .

Links to background information .

Link to [Council Plan](#):

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ Outstanding Place and Environment
 - ☒ Outstanding Homes and Communities
 - ☐ Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
 - ☐ Outstanding Council and Council Services
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Report in full

1. Year 2 UK SPF Cultural Programme Activity (April 2023 – March 2024)

1.1 In Year 2, the Cultural Programme had an allocation of £35,000 and predominantly focused on two activities; the continued support for and development of the Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) network through the launch of the ACED website, meetings and training, and the launch of the Creative East Devon Fund grant scheme.

2. Arts and Culture East Devon

2.1 The Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) network saw considerable growth in Year 2, expanding its membership from 71 in July 2023 to 150 in March 2024. EDDC continued to provide support to the network through running meetings three times a year, providing free training opportunities, and recruiting new ACED Champions and mentors. Network meetings took place at Seaton Gateway Theatre, Manor Pavilion Theatre (Sidmouth) and Thelma Hulbert Gallery (Honiton) – ensuring that by changing locations each time we maximised engagement across the district.

2.2 The increase in membership can be somewhat attributed to the launch of the Creative East Devon Fund, which was exclusively open to ACED members. As the network has expanded, EDDC has made a conscious effort to ensure the grassroots community organisations who comprise ACED have maintained a good degree of ownership and involvement. One change made to facilitate this was to appoint an ACED Champion as the co-chair of each network meeting. Each ACED Champion, six more of whom were recruited in Year 2, has a specialist area, including artistic disciplines such as theatre and themes like climate change. Through co-chairing the meetings, the Champions have greater control over the agenda and the opportunity to share knowledge and events related to their specialisms.

2.3 It is vital to the future of the network that members take an active role in its work and governance. This is key to ensuring it is responsive to the needs and creative aspirations of the cultural sector in East Devon. The network needs to be for the community by the community, with the Council engaging and enabling, rather than leading. Successful delivery of the Cultural Strategy is reliant on participation from cultural organisations and to dedicate time and resource to the network requires a sense of ownership that cannot be attained through a top-down approach.

2.4 The launch of the ACED website in July 2023 assisted in the separation between ACED and EDDC activity by creating a separate site for the network to access. The ACED website serves as the home of the ACED member directory, publicises opportunities for grant funding and collaboration, and shares information regarding the Creative East Devon Grant Fund. Although paid for and maintained by EDDC, the branding and design are aligned with the Cultural Strategy and ACED network, rather than EDDC's corporate branding. This clearly identifies it as a space belonging to ACED rather than EDDC.

3. ACED Training

3.1 Twelve different training sessions were made available for ACED members in Year 2. These were: Digital Marketing, Volunteer Recruitment and Retention, Marketing (Campaign Planning & measuring success, monitoring and evaluation), Making a Living as a Artist, Carbon Literacy Training, Fundraising 101, Collections Management, Governance, Public Speaking, Mentoring and Bid Writing.

3.2 All training opportunities were fully funded, with some taking place in person and others online. Surveys undertaken of the ACED network were used to determine the most requested training topics and whether there was a clear preference for in-person or online sessions.

3.3 Just over half the training sessions were held online, which proved a more cost-effective way of delivering due to the removal of room hire fees and travel expenses for trainers outside of the district. However, five sessions were delivered in person, depending on both the subject matter and the demand from network members. The surveys conducted did show an appetite for in-person training, which was supported by the fact that the three best attended sessions were all in-person.

3.4 Whilst attendance varied across the training held, most sessions attracted at least ten participants and had a higher average attendance than those held in Year 1. The maximum number of spaces available varied, but in general, trainers restricted numbers to the mid-teens to ensure quality provision and a higher level of engagement. This puts the actual attendee number close to the target numbers across most of the sessions delivered. With an average cost per head of £30, the delivery of training was a low-cost way to support the ACED network and upskill cultural organisations across the district. In total 134 individuals benefitted from free ACED training in Year 2.

3.5 To support the evaluation process, attendees were asked to rate the quality of the training provided and how relevant it was to their work. Of the responses provided, positive feedback was given across the board, with all strongly or mostly agreeing that the training was relevant, of a high standard, and improved their knowledge and understanding. Testimonials from beneficiaries described training given as 'informative, clear, and useful', 'pitched at just the right level', and described the trainers selected as 'very experienced and knowledgeable'.

3.6 There is some crossover between the training courses provided to the ACED network and those available through the UKSPF-funded Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), with topics such as volunteer recruitment and marketing covered by both. As all training provided by the CVS can be freely accessed by ACED members, it would be best practice to ensure UK SPF does not fund duplicate training by sharing the planned training schedules between the CVS and the Cultural Programme. This only applies to a small number of training courses, as most are either arts-specific or approach the topic from a creative or cultural perspective, unlike the more generalist CVS provision.

4. Creative East Devon Fund

4.1 With an allocated budget of £25,000, the Creative East Devon Fund represented the majority of Year 2 Spend. The fund was designed to provide small grants to cultural projects and events occurring December 2023 and March 2024. The CEDF was exclusively available to ACED members, who could apply for grant amounts between £500 and £3,000. Although there was a 10% match requirement, in-kind contributions were accepted as match funding to align with the needs of potential applicants.

4.2 The Creative East Devon Fund is the first grant scheme run by EDDC with an explicit focus on supporting arts and culture organisations and activities. Although they have been eligible to apply to previous grant schemes, and the Culture, Leisure, and Tourism Fund was specifically targeted at the culture sector, the activities funded did not relate to culture and creativity. This meant the scheme was designed to specifically address the needs of cultural organisations and remove common barriers experienced by those groups.

4.3 The policy was non-prescriptive in the activities the fund could support, with applications welcomed across artistic disciplines and types of cultural organisations. The main requirement for applications was the demonstration of alignment with the East Devon Cultural Strategy and the 'celebration of everyday creativity'. This could include support for cultural events, specific initiatives for young adults, the transformation of underused spaces into arts venues, or the use of art to tackle the climate emergency.

4.4 Applications for the CEDF had to be submitted by mid-November, with all projects fully complete by the end of Year 2. This timeline presented a challenge to potential applicants, as many cultural events – such as festivals – are held during the summer months. Furthermore, the second round of CEDF was planned for summer 2024, creating a gap in grant provision. As some events are annual and operate on fixed schedules, organisations could not adjust the dates of their activity to comply with the grant deadlines. To overcome these challenges, a small number of projects were permitted extensions to their delivery window, enabling the majority of activity to conclude within Year 2 whilst providing the necessary flexibility. In future, should funding allow, the intention is to keep the CEDF application window open year round, with applications appraised and approved on a quarterly or biannual basis remove any restrictions on time-bound projects from applying.

4.5 However, there was also a clear benefit to making grants available during the winter months as a method of incentivising cultural activity during the low season. It incentivised the development of projects specific to that time of year, such as the Winter Lights Festival, and for organisers to schedule activities in the winter months where they could be flexible on timing.

4.6 There was a high level of demand for the CEDF, with the 22 applications made requesting a total of £51,119. The amounts requested spanned the range of funding available, with 10 requesting the full £3,000. Although the high number applying for the full amount suggests that there may be scope to increase the maximum grant amount, no feedback from potential applicants suggested that a larger grant maximum was desired.

4.7 All applications received were reviewed by two officers and scored against creative engagement, link to the Cultural Strategy, deliverability, value for money, and public benefit. Additionally, all applications requesting £1,500 or above were required to meet at least one UK SPF output or outcome and provide information on how they would measure and evidence its achievement. Once all projects had been appraised and moderated, the scores and recommendations were presented to the UK SPF panel for consideration.

4.8 Due to the strength and quality of applications received, 13 projects were recommended for approval, totalling £31,585. As there was underspend elsewhere in the UKSPF programme, panel members were presented with the option to approve grant awards in excess of the £25,000 allocated and thereby approve the transfer of unspent funding from other UKSPF projects. In the end, 14 projects were successful in receiving grant funding, with £31,869 awarded. A full list of projects that were awarded funding can be viewed on the ACED website: [Creative East Devon Fund - Grant Recipients | Arts and Culture East Devon \(aced.org.uk\)](https://www.aced.org.uk/creative-east-devon-fund-grant-recipients)

4.9 Outside of the CEDF, EDDC have been approached by organisations seeking grant funding for small projects. One request, issued prior to the launch of the CEDF, was from the theatre company Four of Swords, who run immersive theatres schools during the summer holidays. They requested £500 in grant funding to cover the cost of two bursary places on their summer Immersive Theatre School for children from low-income families.

4.10 This request was decided outside of a grant process, with the funding authorised due to its alignment with UKSPF outputs and an agreement with Four of Swords to produce and share a monitoring report. The launch of the CEDF provided a formal framework through which to consider future requests and ensure parity in the decision-making process. However, the option was also publicised on the ACED website that organisations could email EDDC regarding funding opportunities for any projects that did not fit within the parameters of the CEDF.

4.11 The instigation of a formal grant process created a robust mechanism to process funding requests from cultural organisations. It ensured all awards were underlined by a thorough and

transparent decision-making process, with involvement from elected members. Furthermore, the marketing of the CEDF publicised the opportunity to cultural and heritage organisations across the district, meaning eligible organisations were aware of the availability of funding.

5. Outputs and Outcomes

5.1 There was significant progress towards achievement of all the target outputs in Year 2, with all but two exceeded. The direct connection between the activities undertaken and many of the outputs, such as the provision of training and issuance of grants, facilitated this achievement. Whilst there were challenges in Year 1 with linking the planned activities with the outputs and outcomes pledged, many of these difficulties were overcome in Year 2 as activity was designed with a greater focus on output achievement.

5.3 The numbers reported to MHCLG at the end of Year 2 and recorded at the start of this evaluation are not an accurate representation of the outcomes achieved in the time frame. As the CEDF grant recipients had until the end of the financial year to complete their projects, their reports were not submitted in time for inclusion within the year end reporting. If those figures could have been included, outcome achievement would've been significantly increased.

5.4 One way in which the challenges in measuring outputs and outcomes were lessened was through the design of the CEDF. As most applicants had to detail in their applications which of the UKSPF outputs and outcomes they would achieve and how they would track and measure their progress, a clear line was drawn between activities funded and outputs expected. The wide range and diversity of projects funded allowed for different outputs and outcomes to be targeted to ensure the CEDF impacted all metrics.

5.5 Additionally, the recipients were more easily able to measure some of the outcomes than EDDC. For example, some events supported are run annually, so they had participation data for previous years they could use as a comparison point to demonstrate change. Measuring change has proved difficult for EDDC, as the guidance provided required bespoke surveys and access to past data. Whilst it is hugely challenging and would likely require additional budget dedicated to commissioning this data, for EDDC to measure this for cultural participation across the district, it was far simpler for funded projects to do this on a smaller scale.

5.6 Despite these improvements, there were still difficulties in reporting outputs and outcomes in line with the guidance given. Although all recipients were given the definitions and threshold required to claim an output or outcome, all responses needed sense checking to ensure they were being consistent with guidance.

5.7 Furthermore, the guidance lacks clarity in places, particularly with measuring digital engagements. Whilst digital engagements can be included under 'increased engagement', there is insufficient detail on the level of engagement required to qualify. Internally, a decision was taken to classify certain digital activity as in and out of scope to only permit deeper forms of engagement, such as watching a recorded video of activity, rather than metrics such as page views.

5.8 Thus far, the most difficult outcome to meet has been 'improved perception of facilities or amenities'. As this outcome focuses on physical infrastructure, it doesn't neatly align with either activities funded or any aims of the Cultural Strategy. Whilst the strategy mentions creating new spaces for culture, this outcome explicitly requires improvements to existing facilities. Although one CEDF funded project, the installation of new signage boards at the Gateway Theatre, did focus on improvement of an amenity, this was not typical of applications received.

5.9 One reason for this is that capital upgrades are costly, and therefore not well suited to a small grants scheme. Furthermore, the scoring matrix, which awards marks for creative engagement, wider social benefit, and strategic alignment, does not reward these types of projects. Measuring the perception of a building is also harder than perception of an activity, as there is not a fixed user group who are willing to complete feedback forms to reflect their changing opinions of a space. Many grant recipients who reported against this outcome just responded 'yes' rather than producing a figure.

TOTAL outputs achieved across all Creative East Devon Funded projects in Year 2:

Volunteering opportunities: 192

Increased Engagement numbers: 2997

Number of Local Activities or Events supported: 11

Number of community Led Programmes Supported: 11

Increased Visitor Numbers: 4279

Under 30s engaged: 1052

6 Impacts

6.1 The impacts realised through the Cultural Programme paint a more detailed picture of its benefits. Through the reports provided by CEDF recipients, testimonials given in training feedback forms, and messages sent by beneficiaries to EDDC, the breadth and depth of the impact is more visible. These also demonstrate how adeptly the programme is meeting the objectives of the Cultural Strategy, which is as important a metric of success as UKSPF outputs and outcomes.

6.2 As previously mentioned, the post-training surveys demonstrate the value of the sessions to the attendees, with feedback indicating that the training delivered was useful and high quality. Additionally, surveys conducted following Year 1 fundraising training showed that two respondents submitted successful bids for grant funding following the training. Those who respond to surveys represent a small sample of those who undergo training, which makes measuring the true extent of the impacts challenging, however this only means there may be wider benefits of which we are not aware.

6.3 The greatest impacts from the Cultural Programme were shown in the post-project reports provided by CEDF recipients. When applying, each applicant had to detail how they would meet the aims of the Cultural Strategy within the project, and the report template mirrored this by asking beneficiaries how they had met each theme within the strategy. Their responses present a comprehensive picture of how the strategic aims were met across the range of funded projects, with all demonstrating alignment with numerous themes.

6.4 One significant benefit shown by the CEDF projects was the improvement on participant's 'health, happiness, and wellbeing', in line with the second aim of the Cultural Strategy. Overwintering, a project by CIC Tidelines which invited members of the public to participate in a musical piece inspired by birds on the Exe Estuary, shared feedback such as 'I felt mentally buoyed', 'it's been a joy mentally and physically', and 'I feel calmer, more at peace, and connected to my environment'.

6.5 This response was typical of feedback received from all projects. Chhaya Youth, a dance collective who staged a performance of Ophelia with their grant, shared a testimonial from a participant saying 'I have evolved physically and mentally with your support and I am just so grateful'. Paddleboat, who ran music making classes at Mill Water Academy and the Deaf Academy, specialist educational needs schools, shared that the activity had brought out students' confidence and increased their happiness.

6.6 Another theme that was strongly represented in the CEDF projects funded was the use of culture to tackle the climate emergency. Many projects had this as an explicit focus, with Overwintering taking participants out to the Exe Estuary to listen to the birds, the Chhaya Collective partnering with environmentalist groups in Exmouth to collect beach waste to make their costumes, and the Magpies Festival of Thrift organising a week-long festival centring on promoting reuse and recycling of goods. Additionally, Sidmouth School of Art's Winter Lights Festival created art installations designed to prompt visitors to reflect on the impacts of climate change and invited them to write a message to send to local MPs with a call to action.

6.7 Furthermore, it was evident that the projects funded encouraged residents to consider work in the cultural and creative industries and supported training and employment opportunities for local creatives, in line with the fourth theme of the Cultural Strategy. This included commissioning local

artists to design art installations and run workshops, but also to inspire younger residents to consider a career in the arts. Six of the fourteen funded projects had an explicit focus on working with younger people, partnering with local schools and colleges to deliver elements of their project.

6.8 The projects funded also displayed a good geographical spread across the district. Although half of the projects predominantly took place in either Sidmouth or Exmouth, funding was also distributed to smaller locations with a less established cultural presence. The 'Cranbrook Art Club Pilot' was delivered by the Youth Arts Health Trust on Cranbrook Education Campus, bringing a much-needed creative activity to the new community. One of the smallest grants was awarded to Stockland Parochial Church Council to create a display celebrating the history of the village which brought together the small community to commemorate its heritage.

6.9 Although the grants awarded did support the third strategic aim of the Cultural Strategy to increase opportunities for children and young people to participate in cultural and creative activities, this predominantly centred on children rather than young adults. The UKSPF Investment Plan highlights the importance of attracting and retaining 18–30-year-olds to live and work in East Devon to address the demographic imbalance, with an enhanced cultural offer cited as a method of achieving this aim.

6.10 The young adult age group was not explicitly targeted in any CEDF projects, with no reports demonstrating how this demographic had benefitted from funded activity. Support for festivals and those events open to all likely did attract some younger adults and demonstrate the breadth of creative and cultural activities in the district, but this did not translate to tangible measures of the benefit to this age group.

6.11 The drawback of using grants as a method of project delivery is that design of the projects is outside EDDC control. Unless applicants put forward proposals for projects targeting 18–30 year-olds, activity targeting this age group cannot be funded, although the policy and scoring matrix could be adjusted to incentivise applications with a focus on young adults. Similarly, representation of this group amongst the ACED network is dependent on young creatives opting to sign up. This demonstrates that specialist intervention by EDDC in the design of the Cultural Programme is required to create a measurable and specific impact on improving creative opportunities for this demographic.

6.12 Overall, the CEDF grants had a hugely positive impact that was widespread in both the aims achieved and the location and types of beneficiaries reached. It proved an effective and low-cost way of supporting cultural organisations and delivering on both UKSPF outputs and outcomes and the themes of the Cultural Strategy. Furthermore this funding acted as crucial seeding for organisations to submit larger bids, using CEDF as match. Most notably Paddleboat Theatre subsequently applied to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and were successful in receiving a grant of £101,087.

Evaluation Summary

Key Question	Response
1. Was the project effective?	Yes, the activities supportive have been effective at growing the ACED network, expanding the provision of and increasing participation in cultural activity in East Devon, and providing support to arts and heritage organisations within the district.
2. Was the process of implementation efficient?	The continuation of Year 1 activity on the development of the ACED network was efficient as the groundwork was already in place. Although policy development and scoring of the CEDF grants was time-intensive, using models and materials developed for previous grants ensured a smooth roll-out of the scheme.

3. Did the project provide good value for money?	For the small budget awarded, the Cultural Programme was able to overachieve on output targets and deliver a huge number of impacts. The CEDF in particular demonstrated great value for money as the benefits of each project were significant in comparison to the small amount of funding awarded.
4. Did the project provide additionality?	The Cultural Programme continued to be the main source of public support for local creative and cultural activity in East Devon. Although there are other artist collectives and potential funding pots, such as Arts Council funding, these do not provide the flexibility required to meet changing needs at a local level.
5. Did the project align with the strategic ambitions set out in the UKSPF Investment Plan?	Strong strategic alignment was shown through Year 2 activity on the Cultural Programme. Although the CEDF was not outlined in the Investment Plan, it clearly worked towards ambitions such as improving the local cultural offer, bring communities together through creative activities, and inspire appreciation of and a desire to protect East Devon's natural landscape.

Lessons Learnt:

- Implementation of a formal and transparent grant process with a defined policy and scoring criteria is a fairer and more robust way of issuing small grants to creative organisations and attracts interest from a wider range of community groups.
- Provision of capital grants to improve facilities and amenities is currently absent, and likely out of scope, for the Cultural Programme, but should be considered in the design of future funding programmes.
- Grant scheme recipients require support to measure and accurately report the outputs and outcomes achieved and the definitions for each metric need to be available at both the application and reporting stages.
- The popularity of training sessions varies by topic and method of delivery and attendance should continue to be monitored to ensure all sessions are attracting sufficient interest to provide good value for money.
- Delivery of cultural projects is often time-bound and running a year round grant scheme with a longer delivery window can unlock additional applications from seasonal events.
- The under provision of cultural and creative activities for young adults requires greater EDDC intervention via targeted and specific support and cannot be left solely to community arts organisations.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications from the report.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report.