

Report to: Arts and Culture Forum



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Cultural Strategy Progress and Budget Request

Report summary:

The report provides a summary of progress made on the East Devon Cultural Strategy and articulates a case for an internal budget to continue delivering cultural activity.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That the Arts & Culture Forum:

- Support the request of an internal budget of £37,500 to continue the successful delivery on the Cultural Strategy in 2026/27 for consideration as part of the budget-setting process.

Reason for recommendation:

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) programme funded by central Government will end in March 2026, with no replacement likely to benefit East Devon. Without future funding, there is a high risk that the momentum which has been generated in the delivery of the [Cultural Strategy](#) will stall.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Assets and Economy
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☒ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☐ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☐ Environment - Operational
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information [Cultural Strategy](#) and [Tourism Strategy](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
 - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☒ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☐ Financially secure and improving quality of services
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Report in full

1 Cultural Strategy Progress

The East Devon Cultural Strategy (2022 – 2031) is made up of 31 potential work programmes. Four years (and almost half-way) into delivery of the strategy 6 of the 31 programmes have been completed, 23 have made good progress and just 2 are yet to be started, as outlined below.

For more details on the related activity of these programmes please see the appendix, to which the below numbering correlates.

Completed work programmes:

- Strengthen and support the ‘people-that-do’

1.1.1 Build post-Covid confidence and capacity for volunteers and community groups in our towns and parishes through training in governance, business planning, digital transformation, fundraising and reducing carbon impact, as well as training in core creative skills, such as producing live events, interpretation, collections management

1.2.1 Celebrate East Devon's volunteers through recognition and rewards

1.2.2 Explore the potential for promoting and diversifying volunteering opportunities through a central portal

- Cultural tourism

3.1.1 Linking with the new Tourism Strategy, develop a central ‘what’s on’ hub to inform both the tourism industry and consumers about the local cultural offer

3.1.2 Support new ‘product development’ in the tourism sector to attract visitors beyond the peak season by working with cultural partners to promote art classes, retreats, workshops, links with food, wellbeing, sustainability and nature

- Cultural leadership

7.1.3 Invest in a Cultural Producer to provide a central hub for our strategic values, advocacy, communications and development of the strategy, including coordination of the Cultural Compact and ACED network

In progress:

- Strengthen and support the ‘people-that-do’

1.1.2 Enhance the quality and appeal of collections, and the sustainability of local museums, through a programme of shared capital investment in display and interpretation

1.1.3 Explore the potential of a new network that supports more community asset transfers and sharing of policy support and good practice for village halls and other cultural venues, to ensure their place at the heart of our communities

- Protect and enhance the natural environment

2.1.1 Link with a range of nature, tourism and cultural organisations, and the University of Exeter, to audit/understand the current offer and develop an ambitious year-round programme, connecting culture and nature across the district

2.1.2 Work with local museums and South West Museums Development to engage in national conversations about the climate crisis and enable displays of natural science and biodiversity collections in East Devon's museums

2.1.3 Invest in initiatives which work closely with communities in creative, innovative ways to connect local people with nature and the challenges we face in preserving it, especially within communities not currently engaging. For example: Tidelines (Exmouth), Sidmouth Seafest, Thelma Hulbert Gallery's Creative Cabin (touring)

2.2.1 Use Julie's Bicycle, a recognised tool for monitoring cultural impact, to support EDDC-funded and independent festivals to monitor and improve their environmental performance, leading to a sustainable events guide

- Cultural tourism

3.1.3 Invest in cultural visitor attractions that have potential to attract national visitors for a broad season (April-October) and across the district. This could centre around visual arts, via Thelma Hulbert Gallery, Killerton House and Ocean, along with galleries and public art

3.2.1 Work with independent promoters and local Destination Marketing Organisations, as well as the in-house events team, to maximise impact from notable events and festivals, with particular focus on those that take place in June/early July and September/October (i.e. beyond the peak tourism season)

- Creative enterprise and skills

4.1.1 Explore the concept of a creative digital skills hub for films, TV and gaming – possibly linked to the Future Skills Centre run by Exeter College

4.1.2 Join Devon Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP) and/or explore the value in setting up a more localised LCEP to strengthen links between the cultural sector and schools / education providers

4.1.3 Coordinate a programme of paid creative apprenticeships across a range of East Devon cultural organisations, to provide pathways to employment and increase capacity of the local cultural sector

4.1.4 Establish a regular Youth Forum for young creatives and activists to help shape and influence the cultural offer

4.2.1 Run a pilot programme to enable artists and community groups to take meanwhile leases on empty shops, for use as studios, workshops and pop-up galleries

4.2.2 Invest in co-working, workshop and mixed use spaces to strengthen community infrastructure, especially in new developments, and take advantage of the shift away from commuting and towards local working

- New places for culture

5.1.1 Link with the Exmouth place-making and masterplan to audit/understand current provision, local needs and opinions to shape a vision and delivery plan for culture in the town

5.1.2 Explore the potential of Exmouth Pavilion as a creative hub for young people

5.2.1 Work with local residents, Libraries Unlimited and other partners to ensure Cranbrook and other new housing developments have an appropriate, high quality cultural offer co-designed with local residents

5.2.2 Lever planning gain to embed new indoor and outdoor cultural spaces for culture in new developments

- Connectivity

6.1.1 Continue building the ACED network via regular meetings, newsletters, information -sharing and socials

6.1.2 Convene a steering group to devise a business plan for ACED, reflecting on success to date and exploring how best to democratise its leadership and management, maximise effectiveness and build its role in supporting delivery of this Cultural Strategy

6.1.3 Establish new networks that link with ACED, to provide specialised communities of practice

- Cultural leadership

7.1.2 Integrate Cultural Strategy Objectives and Actions into wider Council plans, staff work schedules and resource planning to understand what resources are available and where gaps remain

- Capture value

8.1.1 Work with Arts Council England and other regional partners, such as Plymouth or Exeter to explore tools available for measuring impact across East Devon cultural organisations

On hold/Not yet started:

- Cultural leadership

7.1.1 Establish a Cultural Compact or other partnership to lead this strategy, including collaborative projects and shared funding bids

7.1.4 Assign a small budget to pay freelancers for their time in strategic leadership roles, such as the Cultural Compact

2 Budget Request

This financial year (2025/2026) the Cultural Programme has been allocated £37,985 through the UKSPF, and to date has overachieved on targets and good value for money observed. Given the continued delivery of the Cultural Strategy and Tourism Strategy is a key corporate priority, there is a clear strategic case for providing a small rolling budget for both for this continued activity.

A [recent report](#) by the Great South West showed that creative industries in the South West are outpacing those in London. Helping to nurture this sector further could help the longer-term growth narrative of the region. An ongoing budget also contributes to LGR readiness, by maintaining strategic commitments and sector resilience during a time of uncertainty.

Cultural Budget Activity (Proposed, 2026/27)

Culture Budget Request	Proposed Activity 2026/27	Request for 26/27
£37,500	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 which was £14,000 (£10,000 for Villages in Action and £4,000 for Museums Development South West). We also wish 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.

This request sits alongside a tourism budget request in order to continue delivery on the tourism strategy; integral to cultural strategy delivery.

Tourism Budget Activity (Proposed, 2026/27)

Tourism Budget Request	Proposed Activity 2026/27	Request for 26/27
£30,000	East Devon Tourism Network	£10,000
	Festival & Events Support	£10,000
	Cultural Tourism Map Marketing	£5,000
	South West Visitor Economy Hub	£5,000

There are financial incentives for the council to promote growth in the cultural and tourism sectors. This is shown visually below:



Small rolling budgets for culture and tourism should be regarded as investments, to help secure additional income whilst protecting the existing revenues already generated.

3 Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) Network

Funding for next year will ensure we can continue to maintain the [ACED website](#) which hosts a directory of 222 creative organisations and individuals in East Devon and provides a central platform to engage, promote and talk about arts and culture across the region. It will also ensure we can continue to coordinate ACED Network meetings three times a year, inviting industry leaders to share best practice and funding opportunities. These are always well attended (our last meeting in October 2025 at Exeter Science Park had 39 attendees) and are crucial in terms of promoting connectivity for creatives in a rural area to foster collaborations.

Through the UK SPF Cultural Programme budget, between January 2023 and March 2025, 153 cultural organisations and 528 volunteering opportunities were supported, and 217 ACED members attended training courses.

4 Creative East Devon Fund (CEDF)

The instigation of a formal grant process (scored by Officers against creative engagement, link to the Cultural Strategy, deliverability, value for money, and public benefit) has created a robust mechanism to process funding requests from cultural organisations. The design of CEDF has meant delivering the goals of the East Devon Cultural Strategy is shared across multiple partners – who feel a shared ownership in the benefits of the strategy.

To date 41 organisations have been awarded grants through the CEDF, engaging over 7,000 people, supporting 28 local events, and creating 11 freelance roles in the arts and culture sector. Projects awarded funding in the current round 3 have yet to report on their outcomes and so these figures are due to increase - a list of recipients can be found on the [ACED website](#).

Overall, the CEDF grants have had a hugely positive impact that is widespread in both the aims achieved, the locations and types of beneficiaries reached. It proved an effective and low-cost way of supporting cultural organisations and delivering the themes of the Cultural Strategy.

5 Villages in Action (ViA)

For over two decades ViA has worked alongside East Devon communities to grow opportunities for our residents to host a whole range of excellent creative work – across dance, theatre, music, circus, spoken word, poetry, visual arts and more.

ViA is seeking a cultural top up of £5,000 on the existing annual contribution of £10,000 (totalling a £15,000 contribution for 26/27, the same as this financial year) to continue the East Devon Lead role. Wendy Van Der Plank has been in this part-time role since May 2025, leading on supporting a new cohort of volunteer promoters, increasing the level of bespoke training for local event promoters and increasing impact and resilience of the ViA network.

This new role has enabled new partnerships with venues, organisations and potential promoters in East Devon. New links have been made with: Gittisham Village Hall, Mariner's Hall in Beer, Exmouth Arts and East Devon National Landscapes. Conversations are ongoing, and ViA anticipate that events will be co-hosted by these new partners next year. Through this role ViA have secured a Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra performance in a new venue: St Mary the Virgin, The Minster, Axminster in December. ViA are also expanding their Daytime Seniors activity. Conversations are also advancing with Manor Pavilion Sidmouth about co-programming some exciting work over the next 12 months, having discovered a shared passion to support younger generations of theatre technicians to stay rooted in the local area.

6 Screen Devon

Supporting Screen Devon will be a key part of increasing income received from filming on council assets. We have seen a [significant increase](#) in large productions in East Devon over the last few months.

Estimated production spend data in East Devon District is limited, although figures from Screen Devon for two recent quarters is outlined below. These are attributed to a Bollywood production (2024/25) followed by a Feature film at Beer Quarry Caves (2025/26):

2024/25 (Q3)

- Feature Film – Medium Budget > £10m+ - **£759,000** (inc. prep/strike dates)

2025/26 (Q1)

- Feature Film – High Budget > £60m+ - **£3,132,250** (inc. prep/strike dates)

Case Study – Bollywood Film: House Full 5, Beer & Sidmouth, October 2024

The events team charged £35,000 for filming in Beer and £11,151 for hire of the Sidmouth car park and EDDC Officer time spent. After expenses, including vehicle hire and further staffing expenses the total clear profit for EDDC from the filming was £23,093.82.

Screen Devon provided us with a breakdown of expenditure from the production company that totalled £687,112.74 spent at local Devon based businesses with an estimated 40% (approx. £275,000) of the total spend going directly to East Devon based companies, specifically hotels and restaurants.

There is a clear economic case to continue investment in cultural and tourism related activity. With these small investments, we can not only protect the income we already generate but help to grow these sectors further.

Financial implications:

The recommendation is for this funding request to be presented to members as part of the budget setting process, this will be decision for members to consider alongside the necessary reduction in spending to balance the exiting identified budget gap for 2026/27. (JS/131125)

Legal implications:

The legal implications are included within the report (ALW/02553/131125)