

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 16 December 2025

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 13 January 2026

Report of: Strategic Director of Place

Title: RAMM Forward Plan (2026-29)

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

1.1 This report sets out the requirement to approve a Forward Plan for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery (RAMM) to cover the years 2026 to 2029. It is anticipated that the outcome of Local Government Reorganisation will require the Forward Plan to be revised and approved by the appropriate governing body before its stated end date. Arts Council England have advised for the purpose of Accreditation, museums affected by LGR should make their submissions based on their current arrangements.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That Executive recommend Council approval of the Forward Plan for the Royal Memorial Museum and Art Gallery for the period 2026 to 2029.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 A Forward Plan approved by the museum's governing body is a requirement of Museum Accreditation, which is the UK standard for museums and galleries. Only museums which hold Museum Accreditation may apply for major investment from Arts Council England and most other sector funding bodies.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources

4.1 The Forward Plan outlines the key aims and actions of RAMM for the next three years which will determine the use of ECC resources, as well as funding received from Arts Council England and a variety of external funding bodies. In the light of an external review completed in October 2025, RAMM will be developing a five-year Strategic Roadmap that will outline increased opportunities for income generation and philanthropic giving to enable a reduction of ECC investment in the museum without diluting the quality of the museum's activities.

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5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 There are no additional financial implications contained in this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 Although there is no legal requirement for RAMM to put in place a forward plan, Members will note that a forward plan is required in order to maintain the Museum Accreditation Standard. Details on this requirement are set out in this report.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 The Monitoring Officer has no additional comments.

8. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

8.1 In recommending this proposal, potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equality Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention.

8.2 The aims and actions outlined in RAMM's Forward Plan positively impact people within the protected characteristic groups of disability, gender reassignment, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation.

8.3 RAMM aims to be welcoming to everyone whatever their background. As an ACE National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), RAMM must demonstrate how it contributes to the Investment Principles set out in ACE's Let's Create Strategy 2020-30. At the heart of ACE's Inclusivity & Relevance Principle is a commitment to achieving greater fairness, access and opportunity across the cultural sector, ensuring that England's diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that ACE supports and in the culture they produce.

8.4 RAMM must demonstrate the Inclusivity & Relevance principle in the work it produces, both building a relationship with its communities, and demonstrating how its work is accessible and relevant to those communities. ACE requires NPOs, like RAMM, to agree targets for how their governance, leadership, employees, participants, audiences, and the work they make reflects the communities in which they work. These targets cover both protected characteristics and socio-economic background.

9. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

9.1 One of the five key aims of the Forward Plan is to improve the museum's environmental sustainability. This involves a carbon reduction plan with proposals to lower energy usage, for example in lighting and environmental control, more use of sustainable materials, for instance in temporary exhibitions, and benefitting from solar panel arrays on roofs at RAMM and the Ark.

9.2 One of RAMM's programming themes for the next three years is 'Raising awareness of environmental challenges' and, specifically, presenting content that addresses the challenge of climate change and habitat loss which impacts our planet and the natural world. The theme aligns with ECC's decarbonisation of the city and ACE's Environment Investment Principle.

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10. Report details:

10.1 The museum first opened to the public in 1868 as one element of the landmark Gothic Revival building on Queen Street. It was established as a memorial to the Prince Consort, Albert, who died in 1861, and encompassed not only a museum but a school of art, library and later a college which evolved into the University of Exeter. From 1899, the museum was granted authority to prefix its name with 'Royal'. The acronym RAMM has been in common usage for many decades.

10.2 Major investment in RAMM by ECC and National Lottery Heritage Fund enabled a substantial development project which created an off-site storage facility, additional temporary display spaces, new entrance, improved visitor orientation and refurbished permanent galleries which opened in December 2011. RAMM won the Art Fund prize for Museum of the Year in 2012 and has continued to receive accolades and awards for the quality of its visitor experience and programming ever since.

10.3 Since the pandemic, RAMM's annual visitor figures have reached about 200,000 and this has been calculated to contribute at least £6.8 million to the local economy. Visitors are attracted by the permanent displays as well as a dynamic public programme of temporary exhibitions – featuring RAMM's collection, touring exhibitions and loans, contemporary art and even some specially commissioned artworks – running alongside themed events, talks and workshops which cater for people of different ages and backgrounds. Upcoming exhibitions for 2026 include 'Grayson Perry: Aspects of Myself', 'Wow! Amazing Science in Children's Books' and 'Colour'.

10.4 RAMM's inclusive engagement work helps give people a sense of pride in their locality. Its learning programme introduces children to local and national history as well as to cultures that may be less familiar to them. Through a Youth Panel and Future Skills programme young people have the chance to actively engage with the museum and its staff and since 2023 RAMM's Community Panel has helped shape the museum's programming.

10.5 In order to plan effectively, the Museum Accreditation Standard expects museums to have a Forward Plan. This should include the fixed period that the plan covers; a statement of purpose; key aims and objectives; resources; agreed budgets for the current and subsequent year; and a review date. It states that the plan should be set within the local and national context.

10.6 RAMM's Forward Plan 2026-29 comprises an introduction; executive summary; historical and contextual information; vision and mission statements; alignment with ECC and ACE policies and strategies; five aims, each with key actions and people-focused outcomes; methods of monitoring; review date and appendices.

10.7 RAMM's five aims are:

1. We will deliver ambitious and enjoyable in person and digital experiences for our audiences
2. We will care for the museum's world class collection, and make it better known and better understood

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3. We will aim to foster a sense of civic pride, belonging and community cohesion
4. We will strive to ensure the museum is welcoming for everyone, whatever their background, and our audiences, staff and volunteers are representative and reflective of our local population.
5. We will adopt a strategic approach to improving the museum's financial and environmental sustainability

10.8 RAMM's Forward Plan 2026-29 will be reviewed in September 2028 or sooner if the stated assumptions change.

11. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

11.1 RAMM directly contributes to two intended outcomes of ECC's strategic priorities. Within Local Economy it is integral to 'A vibrant cultural and tourism offer' and in People it plays an important role in 'A safe and thriving city with great things to see and do'. RAMM plays a key role in the cultural life of Exeter, through displays and temporary exhibitions that attract visitors to the city centre. Its collections relate to Exeter and its citizens, and the museum's engagement work helps promote community cohesion and establish a sense of local identity.

12. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

12. Without an approved Forward Plan, RAMM would not meet the UK standard for Accreditation which creates the risk of losing critical funding sources and causing reputational harm to the city. Approving the policy allows RAMM to proceed with the Accreditation submission.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 No. To achieve Museum Accreditation status museums must have a Forward Plan agreed by its governing body.

Strategic Director Place, Ian Collinson

Author: Helen Hartstein and Julien Parsons

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None.

List of Appendices:

- RAMM Forward Plan (2026-29);
- Appendices (Background analysis; Economic value report; Audience data; Current organisation chart; Risk register)

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