

# REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 03<sup>rd</sup> April 2025

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Cllr Bob Foale – Culture**

### 1. Annual Summary & Highlights

The newly created Culture & Leisure service has combined previously separate service areas. Work is taking place to align good practice and share resource. Taking strong experience from developments in Exeter Leisure. Examples are already prevalent of the teams working closer together and providing substantial growth in primarily delivering on council priorities 'Prosperous local economy' and 'thriving culture and heritage'.

#### **Arts & Events:**

- Exeter City Council is working alongside The Exeter Partnership to produce and coordinate a new and ambitious place based Cultural Strategy for Exeter. This is a refresh of Exeter's current Place-Based Cultural Strategy 2019-2024. A new Cultural Strategy for Exeter is essential to align with Exeter's 2040 Vision for 'Thriving Culture & Heritage', the City Council's new Corporate Plan and emerging strategies and initiatives including a new City Centre Strategy, the Exeter (Local) Plan, and Liveable Exeter.
- The aim of Exeter's new Cultural Strategy is to set the strategic direction for the city and bring positive change for all those living, working, studying and visiting in the city. It will embed culture as a tool for a shared vision aligned to Exeter City Council's corporate priorities.
- The Exeter Partnership was recently established to support the Exeter Vision 2040, which envisions an inclusive, healthy and sustainable Exeter, where the opportunities and benefits of prosperity are shared, and all citizens can participate fully in the city's economic, social, cultural and civic life. The Exeter Partnership unites the city's anchor institutions and key stakeholders collaboratively to shape Exeter's future. Members of the Partnership will form a Connected Culture Theme Group to support the development of the Cultural Strategy. This will ensure that key City Stakeholders will become strategic advocates for culture in Exeter.
- The provocation for the Connected Culture Theme Group is: How can we better understand and celebrate the creativity and culture in Exeter? How might we establish an inclusive forum that improves access to funding for all, and how might these actions contribute to a unified cultural strategy that benefits both the city and its communities?
- Exeter Heritage Champions - Exeter City Council is a member of the Exeter Heritage Partnership Network, an informal network established in 2018 to share knowledge, challenges and opportunities across the heritage sector in Exeter. the Partnership Network has been awarded £103k by NLHF for a three-year development programme, with the ambition to make Exeter's heritage more accessible, more inclusive, and more resilient.

#### **Corn Exchange:**

- This year provided 243 events at the venue, these included blood donations, dance classes, dance performances, festivals, business conferences and jobs fairs to name a few.
- The team successfully replaced all production lighting stock with energy efficient LED fixtures, greatly reducing energy consumption.
- A substantial development in accessibility took place, a passenger platform lift from Market Street. Customers with impaired mobility can better access the building.

#### **The Custom House, Underground Passages and Red Coat Guides:**

- Conservation work has taken place to restore the rare ceilings of the custom house.
- Exeter Red coat guides and Underground passages won international recognition from TripAdvisor's Travellers Choice Award.
- The volunteer run red coat guides also extended their offer to include winter walking tours, supporting the cities year-round tourism offer.

#### **Mayoralty:**

- Supporting through attendance the Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor supported numerous events, The Sarah Turvill Multifaith centre opening, St John Ambulances new Exeter and East Devon Network and South-east Asian Society's spring festival to name but a few.
- At the Guildhall we were proud to deliver a public programme of events including the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D Day.

#### **Visit Exeter:**

- Launched during English Tourism Week in 2017, Visit Exeter has since grown into a powerhouse brand, championing businesses in Exeter and beyond.
- Exeter is one of the top 12 'destination cities' in the UK. We receive in excess of 2 million annual visitors, worth an estimated £206 million to the local economy and supports 2,500 direct jobs. It consistently ranks in the top 1% of retail destinations nationally and regionally<sup>3</sup>, with the 4th highest retail spend per overnight visitor in the UK.
- Visit Exeter is funded through commercial income, with the support of Exeter City Council. Our membership scheme unites over 180 businesses, including hotels, attractions, shops, cafes, and restaurants. Despite a small team of two, we deliver impactful marketing campaigns, press and PR, email outreach, and social media initiatives, working in partnership with city stakeholders to drive growth in Exeter's visitor economy.
- Our website, [www.visitexeter.com](http://www.visitexeter.com), has seen remarkable growth, with nearly half a million visitors in 2024 alone. Recent research highlights Exeter's growing appeal, with visitors travelling from further afield than ever before. Visits from over an hour away have surged by 1.7 million, and the average drivetime has increased from 49 to 57 minutes<sup>3</sup>.
- In 2024, we were proud to become part of the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) for Devon, officially recognised by Visit England. This partnership gives us a platform to share priorities, resources, and targets across the county. It also gives us a clear pathway to central government, to allow the voices of Exeter and Devon businesses to be heard. The LVEP's ambitious vision aims to boost Devon's visitor economy by over £300 million annually by 2030.

#### **Royal Albert Memorial Museum:**

- Four major exhibitions were delivered this year:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ARTIST ROOMS: Bill Viola, which showed three works from the well-known Passion series by Viola, the internationally recognised pioneer of video art;</li> <li>- Are we nearly there yet? A history of transport;</li> <li>- Pressing Images: prints from Exeter's fine art collection and</li> <li>- Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape, contemporary art exhibition exploring Dartmoor's evocative landscape through photography, film and Land Art. These exhibitions have attracted national press coverage, with Dartmoor in particular overachieving its commercial and visitor targets.</li> <li>• The city-centre 'Digging Exeter' event in September attracted 500 people. RAMM set up dig pits in Princesshay shopping centre for children and people giving public the chance to talk to archaeologists.</li> <li>• This year RAMM introduced a new supported placements programme for neurodivergent people, people with disabilities or learning disabilities. This programme was showcased at the Kids in Museums national conference in February.</li> <li>• RAMM collaborated with ECC social housing team to bring children's creative activities themed around transport and food in two underrepresented neighbourhoods in Wonford and Summerway</li> <li>• With craft practitioner Nick Mussell of Tanglewood Creations, RAMM offered hands-on metal casting workshops inspired by objects in the galleries to a variety of audiences, including people over 50 experiencing wellbeing issues, home educators, and refugees</li> <li>• As part of the NLHF funded Dynamic Collections project, RAMM worked with artist Simon Lee Dicker to deliver a series of 6 workshops with participants from Hikmat. 109 people from a variety of backgrounds (including Southeast Asian, Chinese, Arab, Libyan, Egyptian) took part in the project.</li> <li>• The Dartmoor Frame of Mind project saw 24 12 to 18 year-olds from across Devon venture onto Dartmoor with photographer Jo Bradford in the spring and early summer months, learning some top nature photography tips. An exhibition of their work was shown in the café exhibition area this was selected to be presented at the Museum Next Health &amp; Wellbeing Summit to an international audience</li> <li>• RAMM delivered regular multisensory outreach sessions at hospitals, care homes, older people's social housing common rooms</li> <li>• RAMM also returned to mental health wards for older people in Franklyn NHS Hospital with dementia-friendly object-handling.</li> <li>• the museum successfully completed a major project to repair a large part of the roof, part-funded by the Arts Councils MEND fund.</li> </ul> |
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## 2. Issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities

### Arts & Events:

- Work is underway towards the development of a new Cultural Strategy that will align to Exeter's emerging City Centre Strategy, Local Plan, Corporate Plan and Liveable Exeter priorities.

### The Custom House, Underground Passages and Red Coat Guides:

- Ongoing recruitment of red coat guides is taking place, due to the extensive voluntary commitment required this is complex and difficult.

### Mayoralty:

- Working with the business development team a project is taking place to focus on commercial opportunities at the Guildhall to provide further financial sustainability.

#### **Royal Albert Memorial Museum:**

- 2027-30 National Portfolio Organisation application – RAMM receives substantial funding from Arts Council England as part of its National Portfolio investment programme. The museum team is in the process of developing its 2027-30 application which will be submitted in July 2025.

### **3. Update or commentary on any major ongoing programmes of work**

#### **Arts & Events:**

- Cultural Compact was set up by Arts Council England (ACE) to bring a range of stakeholders together to achieve step-change in local cultural development, in Exeter. Funding from Arts Council has been allocated in Exeter to:
  - Produce an Economic and Social Value report of Culture in Exeter
  - The development of a citizen-participation platform to help inform a new Cultural Strategy
  - Develop a new Cultural Strategy that will align to Exeter's emerging City Centre Strategy, Local Plan, Corporate Plan and Liveable Exeter priorities.

#### **Corn Exchange:**

- The Exeter Tickets box office is thriving having sold four times as many tickets for partner events this year than any year previous, ensuring that booking fees are minimised for audience and local charities, venues and promoters. The Corn Exchange hopes to redevelop its website as Exeter Tickets featuring not only Corn Exchange events but also any other events sold by Exeter Tickets (including RAMM and Underground Passages) allowing audiences to purchase tickets for events across the city in a single transaction and improving the profile of local and charity events.

#### **The Custom House, Underground Passages and Red Coat Guides:**

- Thanks to external funding a new public gallery is being installed along with new reception and retail area.
- The incredibly popular Sea Shanty festival is set to return, work is well underway to deliver similar events for the Quay businesses and communities.

#### **Mayoralty:**

##### **Upcoming Additional Mayoral Events for 2025 –**

- 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Covid Memorial Event
- Royal Air Force Town Show
- 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VE & VJ
- 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Exeter being Twinned with Bad Homburg
- Royal Marines (CTCRM) Freedom Parade

#### **Visit Exeter:**

- We are embracing digital innovation to fuel growth. Our collaboration with DataThistle, the UK's leading live events data business, launched post-Covid, is driving people back into Exeter's cultural venues. This integration showcases live events on our website, enhancing the visitor experience.

- Plans for the 2025 include an updated visitor strategy to consider how Exeter's culture can continue to support the visitor economy, ensuring the city's cultural and heritage attractions, festivals and events can enhance the city's reputation as a high quality, sustainable visitor destination.

#### **Royal Albert Memorial Museum:**

- The museum has extended its relaxed opening sessions, which are particularly appreciated by people who are neurodivergent
- RAMM also launched its new free digital guide on the Bloomberg Connects app in January, which provides additional museum content for visitors through smart phones
- The Café at RAMM has reopened in a joint venture with Exeter leisure. Pulling resources and given time to establish and develop there is a real opportunity to provide greater financial sustainability to the museum.
- RAMM launched Time Odyssey, a partnership between Art Explora and the British Museum. This major new national learning programme is an interactive gamified learning experience designed for KS2 students, using augmented reality technology on tablets
- RAMM was successful in acquiring Lottery funding for Museum Meet Up, a year-long wellbeing programme aimed at over 50s struggling with anxiety and depression.
- After numerous years of closure, a project is well underway to return the museum bridge to the Roman wall. A feature that interprets and provides accessibility to this important historical landmark.

#### **Financial Performance**

- All areas of the Cultural portfolio are performing against budgets.
- A full review of the service is looking to identify a more effective and efficient governance model, which, in turn, will see an impact on financial performance and specifically a reduction in subsidy in some areas.

#### **4. Issues that may impact : services delivery/financial performance/future budget requirements**

##### **Arts & Events:**

- Creative Arc is a strategic collaboration between the University (UoE) and ECC to create a joint programme and network focusing on the role of culture and creativity in developing and shaping place.
- Creative Arc has been named in the University of Exeter/Exeter City Council's Civic University Agreement.
- Creative Arc is funded by Central Government's Shared Prosperity Fund £164,508 (via ECC) and the University of Exeter £150,000.
- The Creative Arc program - running since the 01 April 2023 coming to an end on the 31 March 2025. We are currently exploring funding models to continue post March 2025. Some of the commissioned projects include:
  - Community film-making project in Mincinglake & Whipton
  - Exploring flood risk in Topsham, and its effects on the culture and creativity of a community under that threat.
- To provide an example of the need; for the second round of commissions, we received 37 applications with a total project ask of £245K, for a pot of £40k.

We were able to fund 7 projects. For the third round of commissions, we received 25 applications with a total project ask of £147k for a pot of £35k.

**Corn Exchange:**

- Anti-Social Behaviour - Continued/escalated anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of the Corn Exchange including NCP car park can discourage customers from using/visiting the Corn Exchange and consequently may reduce income.
- A project is ongoing and under delay to repair failing concrete window surrounds on the outside of the building and replace a large number of the steel framed, single glazed windows.
- Fire safety improvements are required across the site, these are minor but in numerous quantity.
- A substantial risk exists from the need to replace existing boilers as soon as possible, which is only viable when out of need during the summer months.

**The Custom House, Underground Passages and Red Coat Guides:**

- Bridge works at the quay have the potential to cause substantial disruption to businesses and the public event schedule. Which could in return affect commercial event and associated incomes.

**Mayoralty:**

- The building condition is deteriorating and further formal work to assess the condition and need is urgently required. Work has already taken place to raise awareness with the heritage lottery fund to secure funding. The known areas of urgent need at present are:
  - Roof Repair and Insulation
  - Decarbonisation through solar panel installation associated to roof repairs
  - Heat decarbonisation through heating system replacement.
  - Decarbonisation through window Restoration and Insulation
  - Decarbonisation through lighting replacements
- The Guildhall has been without WIFI network for some time. Installation of a new secure internet connection, The Dark Fibre has been temporarily reinstated, but a more stable, long-term solution is being sought.

**Royal Albert Memorial Museum:**

- A contract for a specialist mechanical and engineering consultant has been renewed, this self-funded project continues to optimise the use of the air handling equipment and increase the lifespan of the associated infrastructure. The project is currently delivering a minimum of £85,000 per annum in efficiency savings, with further developments to follow.
- Buildings - Despite the recent reroofing project a section of complex historical roof still requires refurbishment. The museum team is working with the corporate property team to ready information to support fundraising.
- Buildings - Two roof structures installed during the 2011 restoration of the museum have long standing water ingress issues. Exploratory work is underway in hope that resolutions can be found before further deterioration arises.
- Interactives – dissatisfaction with the interactives in the museum is now the number one cause for negative comments from visitors. Work is ongoing to refurbish and improve the family area in the World Cultures gallery. Remedial work is ongoing on some of the physical interactives in the museum. A larger project has been identified and work is underway to plan for a Lottery funding bid to address these issues.

## 5. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered

### **Corn Exchange:**

- Repairs/improvements to building – There remains a possibility to develop the Corn Exchange to extend standing capacity. Previous modelling has identified that this could provide longer term financial sustainability and profitability. Such a development could be externally fundable due to the lack of similar scale artistic provision within the city centre. The team are interested in funding high level design and architectural consultancy services and engage in conversations with funders to explore such a development.

### **The Custom House, Underground Passages and Red Coat Guides:**

- Consideration to a linking up the volunteers of these facilities with the RAMM

### **Mayoralty:**

- We are exploring ways to utilise volunteers from other sites to help support the growing number of Guildhall bookings.

### **Royal Albert Memorial Museum:**

- External review of the museum – A specialist museum consultant is being commissioned to carry out a review of the museum. The review will make recommendations of any measures which can be undertaken to improve medium to long term financial sustainability, whilst balancing social value to local communities.