

CULTURE, ARTS & HERITAGE EXECUTIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 3 JUNE 2025 - 4.00 PM



Fenland District Council

PRESENT: Councillor E Sennitt Clough (Chair), Councillor B Barber (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor P Hicks and Councillor M Purser

APOLOGIES: Councillor L Foice-Beard and Councillor G S Gill

Officers in attendance: Carol Pilson (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer), Jaime-Lea Taylor (Creativity and Cultural Development Officer) and Helen Moore (Member Services and Governance Officer)

CAH11/23 APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs French, seconded by Councillor Purser and resolved that Councillor Sennitt Clough be elected as the Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Heritage Committee for the Municipal Year 2025/26.

CAH12/23 APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR.

It was proposed by Councillor Sennitt Clough, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and resolved that Councillor Barber be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Heritage Committee for the Municipal Year 2025/26.

CAH13/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 4 February 2025 were confirmed and signed.

In relation to the content of the minutes, Councillor Mrs French stated that Section 106 money is specifically for development whether it be Highway, Education, Public Open Space or the National Health Service and not for agricultural function. Carol Pilson confirmed that the information given by Councillor Mrs French was correct.

CAH14/23 CREATIVITY AND CULTURE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER UPDATE

Jaime-Lea Taylor provided an update on Creativity & Culture Development as follows:

Amplifying Community Art & Culture Project

- This was funded by the UK: Shared Prosperity Fund and was an application written in collaboration with support from colleagues in the local sector back in 2022.
- It has been delivered for the past two years, and the grant was held by the Combined Authority and managed through FDC.
- It has been a significant project and until this point the largest project associated with the Fenland Cultural Strategy since it was adopted in 2021. The funding enabled the continuation of the Creativity & Culture Development Officer role for a further two years (September 2023-September 2025) and a range of local projects including...

- **The Fenland Culture Fund, funded and organised in collaboration with ACE:**
 - This is a scheme offering small grants of up to £2,000 each to local creative individuals and organisations and earlier this year round two was delivered successfully.
 - In round two, 55 total applications were received, and 35 grants were approved by the panel. This was a combination of revenue grants for activities and capital projects for equipment purchase and investment, with a total investment of £55,000.
 - This followed a similar but smaller round one which saw a total of 42 applications made and 19 of those awarded a share of £34,000.
- **Express Yourself Art in a Box**
 - A new creative wellbeing initiative designed to support people in Whittlesey who may be experiencing isolation, poor mental health or anxiety.
 - Work has been undertaken with six local artists to produce free art boxes and a series of free community workshops to help people reconnect, express themselves and improve their wellbeing through creativity.
 - It is acknowledged that the benefit of engaging with arts and culture can improve a person's mental health and wellbeing so these boxes have been made available to people through places such as the Jenner Health Centre, New Queen Street Surgery, Camsight, Helping Whittlesey, Whittlesey Food Bank, Phoenix Youth Club, Emergency Food Bank, Coates Community Living Room and Whittlesey Hangout as well as other spaces.
 - There are around 180 boxes prepared and 9 different workshops, with some already commenced and others happening across the summer at venues in Whittlesey, such as Peel House and St Andrews Parish Hall. Again, this project has been possible due to collaboration and the range of partners involved, with their skills to deliver or the knowledge and contacts to reach the people that will benefit.
- **Series of professional training:**
 - This has been a combination of online and in-person workshops bringing together people working or volunteering in arts, culture and heritage in the district, following some research this time last year a need was identified for improved communication and marketing skills in some of the arts organisations and cultural settings.
 - These sessions were held in different towns and spaces in the district, learning from hosting events at different times and days of the week and by combining some in-person workshops with an online course it is hoped it would suit more people, with the online sessions having been captured and made available to benefit from again.
 - Industry leading specialists in each subject were collaborated with and there was a focus on social media and Email Marketing with the ACE Digital Culture Network, Understanding Audiences with Indigo and Practical Strategies for Data and Ticketing with Baker Richards.
- **Fenland Place Partnership Project:**
 - Fenland has been successful in obtaining a grant of £420K from ACE, with the full project being a much larger cost in the region of £900,000, with this being met through partners contributions, expected income and sponsorship targets across the programme.
 - Clarion Futures is the lead partner running the project and there is a full consortium of 12 partners bringing together their own experience and expertise to deliver this over the next three years.
 - The project end date is the end of March 2028, and throughout the duration it will focus on enhanced cultural leadership development and improved infrastructure. It will see skills, jobs, training and volunteering opportunities made available, the creation of an

emerging artists' network and culminate in a new type of multi-arts festival programming that will happen in the summertime of 2027, and this will be brought about by specific art forum leads and dedicated commissioning panels.

- The project's main focuses are on new partnership models, cultural leadership development and multi-art festival production. It is hoped this will generate a better unified approach to culture, so that organisations and their leaders feeling more energised, resilient and become better resourced.
- This is huge and very significant and has been possible through the deep collaboration and support from ACE to have been able to reach this point. It is an exciting and great opportunity to create some brilliant work in Fenland and bring about a lasting change.
- The project is yet to fully begin; partners have been brought together once since the news and there have been some intensive workdays planned next week with the strategic group and delivery leads. This will be the first time they have worked together post application and the project properly begins. As the lead partner Clarion Futures are preparing a funding announcement press release that is expected to be published shortly.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Hicks asked what will be the first project once everything comes together? Jaime-Lea Taylor responded for public facing projects that will be visible to the community it will start to happen in 2026, there is budget for testing of the new types of programming to happen at existing festivals and activities in 2026 in readiness for the new type of landscape wide, multi art prolonged festival which does not normally happen here but is now planned for Summer 2027. She added that the infrastructure is being put in place regarding training programmes and meetings for this end project to come to life in 2027. Councillor Hicks commented there seems to be lots of background work which has been mentioned in other meetings but nothing to show for it in real terms.
- Carol Pilson explained when it comes to the Arts Council funding it does feel like this has been a long time coming, this is because there has been a lot of consultation, planning, filling in application forms and liaising with the Arts Council which can be a timely process to get to this stage of knowing, but the work has paid off and they have received half million pounds of investment in the area which could potentially double with all the opportunities within the bid. She continued when the bid is being put together there are not specific examples of 'I want to deliver this festival' instead aims and objectives are provided on how the money could be invested then the initial three months after the money is received is again often another planning stage of ensuring the right organisations are in the right place with the right training to make sure that the delivery of the project is a success. Carol Pilson continued she felt sure everyone in the room is keen to see the end results but she wanted to remind everyone that Fenland is a priority place for a reason, because this area does not have the infrastructure in place, the number of excellent organisations, artists and advocates need to be invested in before the evidence can be seen and showcased to the public on a grand scale because there has never been something like this in place before, so through the Culture Partnership, of which FDC have representation, it will allow a more detailed plan of what is going to be needed to be delivered within the three-year period to allow the funding to leave a legacy so that when the money does run out, there will be a group of people and a group of organisations which will take this forward independent of further funding.
- Councillor Hicks asked if there was a timescale with a date attached? Jaime-Lea Taylor responded the two halves of the project will be tested on existing Fenland events and festivals in the Summer of 2026 and across the Four Seasons programme of 2026 people will start to see programming because of this funding taking place. She continued that the larger landscape wide is totally innovative and a new type of way of working with the aim to be achieved by the Summer of 2027. Jaime-Lea Taylor added that as of Monday there will

be a two-day meeting with all 12 partners to discuss the design to get the project started.

- Councillor Sennitt Clough asked who the 12 members were? Jaime-Lea Taylor stated Clarion Futures is the lead partner and are ultimately responsible for monitoring and reporting, they are also investing in the project and supporting it quite significantly in terms of administration as well. There is also Market Place Arts focusing on a strategic steering group member but also as the lead for the community programming; 2020 Productions as a strategic group member and as the Children and Young People specialist; The Queen Mary Centre as a delivery group infrastructure for venue spaces; Wisbech and Fenland Museum as a Heritage and Museums Art Form delivery lead; Blackfield Creatives as a visual arts delivery lead; The CP Learning Trust as the leadership, skills, and the training/learning lead; New International Encounter Theatre as a delivery group performance lead in conjunction with the Angles Theatre and Gorilla Circus, one of the NPOS's, and the library are involved when it comes to putting on programming and commissioning work.
- Councillor Mrs French stated at the start of the presentation it was mentioned that 19 organisations were successful, there was £55,000 and they each got £2,000, but that is only £38,000 which means there is a surplus of £7,000. Jaime-Lea Taylor responded that there has been a misunderstanding, in round one of the Fenland Culture Fund, there were 42 applications made, 19 of those were successful and they had a share of £34,000, which were up to £2,000 each, however sometimes people might only apply for £200 depending on their needs. She stated that in the second round of the Culture Fund, there were 55 applications in total, 35 were granted successfully for a total of £55,000, but like before some people went for the full £2,000 some people might have only needed a few hundred. Councillor Mrs French asked for a list of the people who were successful and also suggested adding the Golden Age Fairs to the list of places to go. Councillor Sennitt Clough stated that she has sat on the panel for those grants and was pleased to see that the applicants were all Fenland organisations or Fenland individuals. Jaime-Lea Taylor added that all grants were signed off by Councillor Seaton as portfolio holder at that point and both round one and two awards are published on the website with full details of those that were granted.
- Councillor Mrs French commented that it was stated Arts and Culture were working with Four Seasons and asked as the Chairman of the March Events could she be emailed and kept informed? Jaime-Lea Taylor responded that nothing is defined yet, Isabel Eggington is the Four Seasons officer and has been involved in the bid since the beginning. She added that once it has been confirmed that everything is in place for the festivals then everyone who needs to know will be contacted. Councillor Mrs French added she would like to be informed sooner rather than later as there is a lot of organising to do before hand and if there was extra funding they would need to know in advance.
- Councillor Hicks asked about the art boxes, are they actual boxes full of craft items or are they boxes that get painted, as there is a shop recently opened in town which promotes painting boxes. Jaime-Lea Taylor responded that the Express Yourself Art in a Box is a Whittlesey Project, they are actual A4 size boxes that come prepared by the artist with all of the tools needed to create a specific type of project, it also includes a book with a QR code on which takes the crafter to a video where the artist is giving a tutorial and talking through the project. She stated that there are 5 artists working on the project and the idea is to encourage people to join workshops after the project is finished.
- Councillor Mrs French expressed concern about the funding. She understands there is £425,000 with another grant of £800,000 and wanted to know how this was going to be divided between 12 partners? Jaime-Lea Taylor stated the Arts Council Funding is £420,000 and the whole project includes cash contributions from all of the partners expected across three years, and it also targets is there a budget within this to employ a fundraiser and they have sponsorship targets to raise additional money, but until the fundraiser is in place there is uncertainty around what the grants will look like, plus there are also expected box office incomes as well, so some of this is an expected budget within the

Arts Council bid. Councillor Mrs French asked when there was going to be evidence of the budget? Jaime-Lea Taylor stated a budget does already exist with the application submitted and approved by the Arts Council. She added that Fenland District Council's only involvement in the project is as a partner through the role that she holds. Councillor Mrs French suggested that in order for this to work successfully there needs to be evidence of a budget plan so the committee can see how the funding is being used.

- Councillor Sennitt Clough suggested that Jaime-Lea Taylor as the Culture, Art and Heritage representative talk to the 12 partners and ask for a regular update to be shared at the meeting on a three- or six-month basis so this committee is not excluded from the discussions.
- Councillor Hicks reiterated that they need to be process figures and not ballpark figures, so the committee is given a clear picture.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough also added that she would like residents to see that they are going to benefit from the delivery of in-person activities.
- Carol Pilson stated within the funding bid there would have been a three-year programme outlined at a very high level, and felt it would be useful to circulate this document to the committee, so they can see the high level road map between now and March 2028 recognising the next three months is going to bring that plan to life and in three months' time through the participation of Councillor Sennitt Clough, Councillor Hoy and other members through different hats it will give the committee something much more tangible to visualise on what is going to happen.
- Councillor Hicks suggested that the fund receivers give back a set of accounts so that the committee can see the funding has been spent responsibly after the event has been run. Jaime-Lea Taylor responded that she agreed with Councillor Hicks and stated that a significant portion of this is Arts Council funded, which means that there is going to be a significant reporting responsibility and all the successful grantees are asked to fill in a feedback form after their event to report how the event went and what the funding money was spent on, along with photographs, videos and engagement with the project.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough asked if there was an update available on the assisted living facilities engagement of the list of names which was sent. Jaime-Lea Taylor responded that she was not overseeing that project, this was being funded through the shared prosperity fund and then it is being delivered by the partnership, so they have the suggestions, and whether this has been taken up or not she did not have that information to hand. Councillor Sennitt Clough asked if there was an update on the communication group and what they are delivering? Jaime-Lea Taylor responded that mention of the training workshops earlier was part of that subgroup and since the last Fenland Culture Partnership meeting the group is deciding if the Communications group is going to continue to meet.

Members noted the information reported.

CAH15/23 FENS FLAG COMPETITION

Councillor Sennitt Clough provided an update on the Fenland Flag competition and stated that a proposed competition framework has been sent to the Flag Institute for their view, they have written back to confirm receipt but this is still in discussion so an update will be given to the committee at the next meeting.

CAH16/23 FENLAND POET LAUREATE AWARDS

Councillor Sennitt Clough provided an update on the Fenland Poet Laureate and suggested that a folder of events for throughout the year be produced for the Laureate to attend events as if the Laureates is not familiar with the Four Seasons Events and various other events it could easily slip through the net, and nothing be attended, with the idea being to engage the Laureates.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Mrs French agreed a catalogue of events would be a good idea.
- Councillor Hicks stated it would be nice if the Poet Laureate could attend a lot of these events and read some poetry out. Councillor Sennitt Clough agreed and added they could write a poem for the event they are attending if there is enough notice given for the event, which was feedback from last year's Laureate winner Hannah. She added that, with the help of the folder, it would also allow the Laureate winner to diarise the events they could attend in advance.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated on a negative point some complaints have been received from local residents about the fact that the last two winners do not reside in Fenland, and it has been suggested that the rules of the competition are changed from live, work or learn in Fenland to just live or learn in Fenland.
- Councillor Mrs French stated as Councillors the rules are to live, work or reside in Fenland and she assumed the winners of the competition had some connection with the Fenland area? Councillor Sennitt Clough responded that last year's winner Hannah definitely had.
- Councillor Barber asked if it was just the 'working in' that people do not like? Councillor Sennitt Clough responded that it has been mentioned that somebody could work in the area for a day and say that they qualify as a Laureate. Councillor Barber added if people are working in Fenland, then they are spending a lot of their time in the Fenland area and feels this should still be included.
- Councillor Mrs French asked for detail of the actual complaint. Councillor Sennitt Clough confirmed that the complaints were about people not living in Fenland and there seemed to be a belief that they would not be able to represent Fenland as well as somebody who is residing within the administrative district. Councillor Mrs French asked if the complainant were themselves up for an award? Councillor Sennitt Clough confirmed that as far as she knows this was not the case, but the entries are anonymized.
- Councillor Purser stated that in another committee he attends the criteria they have is that they live in that area or go to a school in the area for at least four to five years to prove their heart is actually in the place and he feels this is an important area to think about.
- Councillor Hicks stated that he feels this is going to be impossible to police and feels it should be left as it is.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough referred to the mention of a sheet of additional information last year, and she would like to go back to this, suggesting there is a paragraph in the accompanying statement about if they were to win what would they do throughout the year as a Laureate winner.
- Councillor Purser stated he agreed with Councillor Hicks that it would be hard to police. Councillor Sennitt Clough added that having more information in the accompanying statement would help, not policing where they live, but how keen they are and how serious they are.
- Councillor Barber asked if anyone has visited schools to tell the pupils about the Poet Laureate Awards with a suggestion that they might enter. Councillor Sennitt Clough confirmed that she has contacted the schools and specifically the English departments and generally the responses have been very low, and they do not tend to engage but she would welcome some ideas on how this can be improved.
- Councillor Mrs French confirmed that in her experience the schools do not have the time to join local events.

Members noted the information reported.

5.00 pm

Chairman

DRAFT