



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee


Tuesday, 12 May 2026

Report of Councillor Paul Stokes,
Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet
Member for Leisure and Culture

Cultural Strategy Six Monthly Update

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To update the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee on progress with the actions contained within the Cultural Strategy, and to inform them of plans to refresh the strategy for July 2026.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the information provided and offer suggestions on any additional information required for future updates, or for inclusion in the refresh of the Cultural Strategy.

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Connecting communities
Which wards are impacted?	All Wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. Activity is being delivered within existing budgets and financial performance is monitored on a regular basis.

Completed by: David Scott – Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer.

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 It is within the remit of the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor and assess the performance of the Council's Arts and Cultural Service. There are no significant legal or governance implications arising from this report.

Completed by: James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1. The Council's Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027) sets out the vision for South Kesteven to be "A thriving district in which to live, work and visit". To underpin this vision, the key priority of Connecting Communities identifies the Council's role in delivering and facilitating a sustainable leisure and cultural offer and celebrating and promoting the strong heritage and rich culture of South Kesteven.
- 2.2. The Council's Cultural Strategy 2023 to 2026 (the Strategy) was developed during 2023. The draft Strategy was considered at a meeting of the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 June 2023 prior to it being formally adopted at a meeting of Cabinet held on 11 July 2023.
- 2.3. The Strategy is the guiding document for the Council's Arts and Culture Team and underpins cultural activity within the Council's three artistic venues, outreach activity across the district, and how the team engage with the wider cultural sector.
- 2.4. At a further meeting of the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September 2023, a suite of key performance indicators was agreed

against the key themes in the Strategy. It was proposed these Key Performance Indicators would be used to assess the implementation and effectiveness of the Strategy.

- 2.5. Since the adoption of the Strategy there has been a significant amount of progress made, this being the second six monthly update provided to this Committee. For ease of reading, an update of work undertaken has been split into sub sections alongside other relevant updates:

- A) Pay It Forward Scheme
- B) Event Outreach Activity
- C) Newton 300
- D) Marketing
- E) Venue Updates
- F) Update on Key Performance Indicators
- G) Cultural Strategy Refresh

A) Pay It Forward Scheme

- 2.6. The Pay it Forward scheme was launched in September 2023 and gives patrons the opportunity to donate when booking tickets. The funds raised are used to provide arts and cultural opportunities to residents who would otherwise be unable to access these services for whatever reason.
- 2.7. How the donations have been used is displayed on the websites of all three Council venues, and people who make donations automatically receive a thank you email.
- 2.8. Last financial year the fund raised £8,320. Currently Theatre company 'Circo Rum Baba' are working with the arts service to organise a small tour of their production 'Over the Moon', an acrobatic interactive piece of theatre designed specifically for children with additional needs.
- 2.9. The aim is to take this to four schools within South Kesteven that specialise in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Schools such as this can face barriers to attending theatre events due to transport, the higher ratio required for staff to pupils, and venue restrictions. By taking this to schools specifically the students will get to experience arts and culture they may not be able to access as easily.
- 2.10. The fund continues to grow and has also been used within the last financial year to welcome a small group of teenagers from Art Pop Up's Youth Group. The 9 teenagers attended a cinema screening of 'Lilo and Stitch 2'. Several of the attendees had not previously been to the cinema or even been inside Stamford Arts Centre before.

B) Event Outreach and Activity

- 2.11. SKDC continues to contribute just over £3,500 annually to the Rural Touring Scheme, which is also funded by Arts Council England. The scheme takes high quality live performances to rural spaces. Being operated by Live and Local, the Scheme continues to be extremely well supported in South Kesteven. The events which have taken place and are planned include a range of drama, music and comedy. The latest programme runs across 2025 and 2026, engaging 8 venues across the district with a total of 14 events. **Appendix One** provides a detailed report on the activity undertaken.
- 2.12. Since September 2025 the Arts Service has had a budget of £20,000 to spend on outreach and activity across South Kesteven for financial year 2025/26, with a budget of £100,000 being allocated for the current financial year.
- 2.13. The proposed events programme for 2026/27 was presented to this Committee in February and subsequently approved, including recruitment to a permanent Events Officer post.
- 2.14. The events that have taken place so far are:

Name	Overview	Date & Location	Cost	Attendee No.
Stamford Wassail	Lantern making workshop and procession ahead of the annual Stamford Wassail.	3 rd Jan Stamford Community Orchard	£1,020	Workshop – 40 Procession & Wassail - 180
Skate Skillz	Skateboarding and street art workshops in each skate park during the February Half Term.	16 th Feb – Deeping St James 17 th Feb – Stamford 18 th Feb – Bourne 19 th Feb – Grantham	£5,932	400 – across all events
BMX Skillz Showcase	<i>BMX display team at Market Deeping BMX Track.</i>	<i>21st Feb – POSTPONED DUE TO POOR WEATHER New date: 26th Sep – Market Deeping BMX track</i>	<i>£2,088</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Covid-19 Day of Reflection	Commissioned memorials with a reflection ceremony in each location to mark the impact of the covid-19 pandemic.	8 th March Wyndham Park, Grantham Stamford Leisure Pool Bourne Leisure Centre The Deepings Practice, Market Deeping	£7,011.96	61

Spring Skillz	A family fun day with a focus on encouraging people to try something new. Activities included a climbing wall, skateboard workshops, circus skills, and pottery painting.	4 th April, Wyndham Park, Grantham	£3,265.20	1,500
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2.15. Stamford Wassail

3rd January at Stamford Orchard

The free workshop, run by Sam Rodden, was fully booked and enjoyed by all attendees. Creating the lanterns made the audience feel like part of the event as they were able to lead the procession to the orchard

Data from Surveys and Evaluations:

- 77% of attendees had never been to the orchard before
- 69% of participants had been to an SKDC Arts Venue within the last 3 months

Feedback from Stamford Community Orchard: *“It nearly doubled out visitor numbers to over 180. It has given us the confidence to have a lantern procession in future years.”*

“Working with SKDC was excellent – score of 5/5.”

2.16. Skate Skillz – February Half Term

Deeping St James – 16th February - Attendees: 75

This event ended early due to sudden heavy rain at 1.30pm which made the park unusable. Up until this point the workshops were well attended and appreciated.

Stamford – 17th February - Attendees: 150

This was well received by families, and it was noticed that a couple of attendees had returned to practice what they had learnt in The Deepings and ask for more advice.

Bourne – 18th February - Attendees: 100

A lot of people decorated their equipment at the graffiti workshop, more so than the previous events. There were skaters who had been to previous events, and they started to offer advice to people who had just taken one of the beginner workshops. This built a feeling of community at the parks.

Grantham – 19th February - Attendees: 75

Skating in the park was postponed due to the constant rain making conditions unsafe, however the instructor was still around to give general advice and was able to use the balance board to show new skaters the basic positions.

The graffiti workshop went as ahead as planned and was received incredibly well. Many people stayed for quite a while to finish the graffiti boards. These have been left at the visitor centre to be displayed on the railings of the skate park.

Data from feedback:

Participants were part of 2 age groups, *under 18s* and *31 to 50* showing it was popular with families
95% of participants had not skateboarded before.
59% of participants had not visited the skate park before.
50% of participants heard about the event on social media, word of mouth was the second most common way to hear about events
77% had not visited the SKDC arts venues in the previous 3 months
“It’s been absolutely fantastic. My son is a complete beginner and he’s progressed so much in a day. It would be great to have regular meet ups as part of a club in the future.”
“Fab session and great to have something like this!”
“Thank you for putting the event on, keeping it free and encouraging our kids to try new things.”

2.17. **Covid-19 Day of Reflection**

Sunday 8th March

Four memory trees commissioned from Don’t Lose Hope - a mental health charity based in Bourne.

Locations:

Grantham – Wyndham Park – approximate attendees 20

Stamford – Stamford Leisure Pool - approximate attendees 15

Bourne – Bourne Leisure Centre - approximate attendees 6

Market Deeping – The Deeping Practice - approximate attendees 20

A short reflection ceremony was held in each location with key figures from the local community speaking on the impact of the pandemic before inviting attendees to attach a ribbon to the tree in a moment of reflection.

The memory trees are now listed on the national memorial database and will remain in situ for community to make use of in the coming years. Since the events took place another council has been in touch looking to do something similar.

2.18. **Spring Skillz**

Saturday 4th April – Wyndham Park, Grantham

This made for a very busy day in the park with an approximate 1,500 visiting during the event.

Data from feedback: Due to the volume of people at the event, the Survey QR codes were not overly visible and staff did not have time to conduct the feedback surveys. In future an additional member of staff will be budgeted for to allow for survey responses to be taken.

From the surveys that were completed the following data was collected:

-88% of respondents had not visited one of the SKDC venues in the last 3 months.

-When asked about a fair ticket price, per participant (for all activities), 63% of respondents said a price between £1 and £6 would have been fair. 13% of respondents wanted the event to be free.

-The age groups represented in the feedback at under 12 and 31 to 50

“Thank you so much, it was such a wonderful day, which I’m sure took a lot of organisation!”

“Great to see lots of different activities aimed at children of all ages but also different interests. A great addition would be a woodland workshop station, making bird feeders or something similar. It's a great location, coffee, ice cream, parks and toilets available, and a wander along the river as well as the event.”

- 2.19. Future events that were approved are in the process of being organised with many dates now confirmed. **Appendix Two** provides an updated list of upcoming events. These will be advertised on the Arts Centre's websites, social media, flyers, and posters and banners where appropriate when all details are confirmed.
- 2.20. Music in Quiet Places was successful across 2025, with four music events taking place in Hough-on-the Hill, Witham on the Hill, Folkingham and Greatford. The most recent series sold 495 tickets across the four events, which is an improvement on the performance in 2024 when 424 tickets were sold.
- 2.21. The 2026 Music in Quiet Places Season is now on sale with the locations confirmed as St Mary & St Peter Church in Harlaxton, St Andrew's Church in Billingborough, St Andrew's Church in West Deeping and St Stephen's Church in Careby.
- 2.22. Each year the Council work with four venues in rural areas of the district and programme a professional, classical concert in each. This year the four classical concerts are:
 - Chameleon, a four-piece band playing 13 instruments between them.
 - Elmore Quartet, award winning London based string quartet
 - K'antu, a four-piece folk inspired ensemble performing with more rare instruments such as the Lute and historical percussion.

C) Newton 300

- 2.23. In a similar way to how the Council convened meetings between stakeholders regarding Thatcher events, Officers are currently hosting meetings to discuss activity to mark the 300th anniversary of Isaac Newton's death on 31st March 2027.
- 2.24. The meetings have attracted over 20 people from various businesses and organisations including 'Lincoln Big', the National Trust and freelance artists and producers, all looking to put on activity to mark the occasion.
- 2.25. The aim is for The Council to act as a facilitator for stakeholders to share plans, event information and collaborate where possible. The Council will also produce a promotional flyer for the collective events should there be enough activity organised.
- 2.26. SKDC are currently looking to contribute to the anniversary in several ways. Within the Guildhall Arts Centre's normal programming budget, conversations are underway with Dame Maggie Aderin Pocock, British Space Scientist, science

educator and co-host of 'The Sky at Night'.

- 2.27. There will also be a series of workshops across the summer that are STEAM based (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) for children to learn new skills and celebrate some of Newton's discoveries.
- 2.28. A chess tournament is also being organised across the district. Working alongside the Lincolnshire Chess Federation, Officers will be working with local chess clubs to host a tournament in each of the four towns, with the final looking to be held in the Newton Hall in the King's School Grantham in 2027.
- 2.29. Alongside this, arrangements are underway for a Chess Grandmaster to host a simultaneous exhibition. This will involve a grandmaster playing multiple opponents at once, moving around the room to do so. This is a good event to spectate, and Officers will be looking to attract school students as the opponents.
- 2.30. Using remaining budget from the Future High Street Fund, the extremely popular Luminarium will be installed in Wyndham Park for 9 days, from 27th March – 4th April 2027, across the anniversary of Newton's Death.
- 2.31. The Luminarium is designed to 'bring about an encounter with light'. Visitors walk inside the structure, which is made of different domes and connecting tunnels, all with designs that allow the natural light to push colour and patterns through the structure. It is described as a 'contact with beauty, light and art', linking into Newton's most famous experiment refracting light.
- 2.32. The large installation is created by Nottingham Artist Alan Parkinson, and managed by Architects of Air. It has travelled internationally with visitors reaching above 1,000 per day and visitors travelling from miles around to attend. Head of Programming at The Sydney Opera house described it as "the most attended presentation ever" to take place there.

D) Marketing

- 2.33. "What's On" brochures are printed three times a year for the Guildhall and Stamford Arts Centres. These brochures are also distributed by staff around the towns in locations like shops, cafes, and hairdressers, making them easily accessible for customers.
- 2.34. Each venue has established branding, with large 'What's On' diary pages printed as roller banners and large outdoor posters. These have received really good feedback and work as a point of reference for passing customers who may not be familiar with the activities offered within the arts centres.

- 2.35. Across the venues, social media is being used not just for show promotion but also to deliver more interactive, engagement-driven content. More recently reels are being utilised to share short-form videos after events, and to advertise certain genres.
- 2.36. The three venues use Spektrix as their box office ticketing system. This provides a range of reports, offering valuable data and insights. The top four ways audiences find out about events remain the same as the previous report: 1. Word of Mouth, 2. Brochures, 3. Website and 4. Direct Email Notifications.
- 2.37. Social Media followers currently stand at:
- Guildhall Arts Centre Facebook: 7,417
Guildhall Arts Centre Instagram: 1,667
- Stamford Arts Centre Facebook: 10,080
Stamford Arts Centre Instagram: 4,531
- Bourne Corn Exchange Facebook: 2,700
- 2.38. Hirers at Bourne Corn Exchange who choose to sell their tickets via the venue benefit from receiving marketing via our social media channels and being included on E-shots to customers on our database.
- 2.39. Stamford and Guildhall Arts Centres send monthly E-shots about upcoming events for all subscribers. Targeted emails are then sent to specific customers based on their individual booking history to inform them of similar events they might enjoy. Currently, the Guildhall email list includes 13,227 subscribers, Stamford Arts Centre has 13,487, and the newly established Bourne list has 573 subscribers.
- 2.40. Comparing financial years, in 24/25 emails opened were 616,000 and in 25/26 emails opened were 834,100 – an increase of 35%. Clicks on content and links within the emails were also up by 37% compared to the previous financial year.

E) Venue Updates

- 2.41. All three venues continue to hire out spaces for meetings, parties, celebrations and other events. As well as this Arts and Cultural events also take place within the venues including dance classes, youth drama workshops, art workshops and more recently an increase in adult crafting workshops.
- 2.42. Promotion of room hire is ongoing, with all three venues exceeding the budgeted income for last financial year for room hire.
- 2.43. Bourne Corn Exchange in particular attracts a high number of parties and private events due to having a large capacity, and the stage for people to hire in bands

and live entertainment.

- 2.44. Stamford Arts Centre has recently stopped offering Cinema Membership and is instead offering a multibuy discount. This is to encourage users to book further in advance for more films and encourage audiences to try films they might not have done before.
- 2.45. Although the priority booking was appreciated by many, to get schedules out on time the venue was having to confirm the programme early, when a couple of days extra might have secured a bigger title film from a bigger distributor. This new way of working allows the venue to get popular titles potentially closer to the release date.
- 2.46. Stamford Jazz events have recently moved from the Cellar Bar to a new set up in the ballroom, increasing the capacity and income for the arts centre and musicians. These events regularly sell out and the move has increased the potential attendance by 100%.
- 2.47. Stamford Arts Centre has also seen the introduction of some more adult workshops, recently this was lampshade making. Many customers are repeat visitors to workshops which have sold out on each occasion.
- 2.48. The Independent Cinema Organisation programmes the Stamford Arts Centre cinema and recently put out a survey to Stamford cinema attendees in order to steer their programming and support the venue. The feedback was generally positive, with 89% of attendees falling into the 'promoters' category, meaning they would actively encourage others and speak positively about the cinema offering at the venue.
- 2.49. With careful programming and targeted marketing, the classical concerts at Stamford Arts Centre have also seen an increase in sales:

Doric String Quartet, 2024: 119 tickets
Doric String Quartet, 2026: 199 tickets

Imogen Cooper, 2023: 173 tickets
Imogen Cooper, 2026: 214

Red Priest, 2021: 144 tickets
Red Priest, 2025: 214 tickets
- 2.50. The Guildhall Arts Centre has received well known acts within the last six months, including Gyles Brandreth and famous comedian Ed Byrne.
- 2.51. Both venues are now programming a children's storytelling ballet company, that has been marketed as an introduction to ballet for families. These shows with

accompanying workshops have proven to be incredibly popular. They are on sale at an accessible price to encourage young people and families to attend this more traditional kind of performance. ‘Let’s All Dance’ have become a regular in both venues programmes and have incredibly good attendance compared to programming ballet for adult audiences. This kind of experience should carry through and grow future dance audiences.

F) Key Performance Indicators

2.52. An update on activity undertaken to support the Key Performance Indicators previously agreed at a meeting of the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September 2023 is provided in **Table One** below:

Table One – Key Performance Indicators		
Partnership and Collaboration	Numbers of providers engaged with a Council established cultural network	The Stakeholder group for ‘Thatcher Fest’ was successful liaising with community groups and businesses to curate a series of events, providing a ‘festival’ feel. This approach was received well by stakeholders and gained national press attention.
		A Stakeholder group has been set up for the Newton 300 events with a group of over 20 representatives from local community groups, heritage sites and businesses across Lincolnshire.
		The Wassail event in January was done as a collaboration and addition to the existing event run by Stamford Community Orchard.
		Conversations and partnerships are being

		formed with motorbike groups to support the Bike Night in Grantham, and the Lincolnshire Chess Federation to support the district wide chess tournament for Newton 300.
Placemaking	Number of outreach events held or supported by the Arts and Cultural Services team	The 'Into Film Festival' to be hosted in Stamford Arts Centre in 2026, giving school students the opportunity to attend films for free through the organisers.
		'Nature Makers' days were held in both Bourne and Stamford, providing free family activities
		The Pay it Forward Scheme has also allowed for outreach activities to take place, as well as bringing people into venues. There are further plans to take a professional show to SEN schools.
		Music in Quiet Places sold 495 tickets across the four events in 2025.
		Funding continues to be allocated to the Rural Touring Scheme providing touring performances in rural areas of SKDC
Attendance Numbers at Venues		For each financial year the Arts Centres programmed events sold: Guildhall 24/25: 17713 - £245,947.10 Guildhall 25/26: 17, 274 - £258,846.25

		<p>Stamford 24/25: 35,579 - £325,070 Stamford 25/26: 38455 - £358.524.00</p> <p>Bourne 24/25: 1531 tickets sold through Spektrix (623 of these being the Whale) Bourne 25/26: 121 tickets sold through Spektrix</p> <p>Bourne is mainly a venue to hire and only has the one space available for activity when compared to the other venues, therefore significantly lower ticket sales are expected.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	Social prescribing service established and residents engaged	The Arts Service has worked alongside Inspire+ to provide Activities for HAF Camps using Pay it Forward donations
		The newly established events budget focusses on events to improve wellbeing through attendance and to encourage social interaction.
	Numbers of participants engaged with the arts service from target groups	Information has been provided in the body of the report how the Pay It Forward Scheme is benefitting residents who would not otherwise be able to access the arts service.
		Stamford Cinema continues with Audio Description and Watch Word equipment for cinema screenings, opening up accessibility to

		deaf and visually impaired audiences.
		Grantham Operatic Society have worked alongside the venue technicians to have the first amateur 'relaxed' performance.
	Take Up of Rural Touring programme across district	The Scheme continues to be extremely well supported in South Kesteven with the some of the fourteen performances planned across eight different venues already underway.
Value for Money	Amount of external funding secured to support the service	The Future High Street Fund was utilised to support the Guildhall Arts Centre by securing a Lighting Desk that was failing, but imperative to hosting events. The fund also has provided new furniture and a revamped coffee shop space making it more attractive to customers.
Cultural Venues and Programmes	Number of volunteering hours engaged in delivery of Arts and Cultural Events	Last financial year the total number of volunteer hours at the Guildhall Arts Centre have been 2169 hours, between 41 volunteers.
		Stamford Arts Centre have an emerging pool of 13 volunteers, starting with live theatre events. More volunteers will be recruited to grow the volunteer pool to eventually cover live performances in the theatre and ballroom.

		<p>Venue volunteers are essentially to the delivery of the live programmes and workshops. The venues have volunteer ushers welcoming customers into the venue, helping them with their enquiries and working to evacuate theatres in the event of a fire or incident. The Guildhall also has Follow Spot Volunteers, controlling the spotlights from the balconies for live performances.</p>
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G) Cultural Strategy Refresh

- 2.53. The current Cultural Strategy will expire in July 2027 and is therefore due to be refreshed and updated.
- 2.54. Surveys are currently being curated to send out to current audience members via our mailing lists, paper copies will be available at the venues. There will be a further survey specifically for Members to share their views.
- 2.55. The aim of the survey is to gauge what residents currently want to see from the Council in terms of arts and culture, as well as questions specifically about the venues to improve and shape the service offered.
- 2.55 The results of the survey and draft refreshed Cultural Strategy will be shared with the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a further meeting prior to it being considered by Cabinet for adoption.

3. Key Considerations

- 1.1. This report provides an update on work being undertaken since the adoption of the Cultural Strategy and the achievement of the agreed Key Performance Indicators.

2. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 It has previously been agreed that the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive a six-monthly update on the Cultural Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 As the Council strives to deliver best value and the widest engagement with its arts and cultural service, Members are requested to provide suggestions on any additional information they wish to see.

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix 1 – Live and Local Rural Touring Scheme Report
- 6.2 Appendix 2 – Updated Events List Information