

Meeting of the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Tuesday, 5 September 2023, 10.00 am

Council Chamber – South Kesteven House,
St Peter’s Hill, Grantham, NG31 6PZ.

Committee Members present

Councillor Paul Fellows (Chairman)
Councillor James Denniston (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Graham Jeal
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Robert Leadenham
Councillor Paul Martin
Councillor Charmaine Morgan
Councillor Chris Noon

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter (Deputy Leader of the Council)
Councillor Richard Cleaver (Leader of the Council)
Councillor Phil Dilks (Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning)
Councillor Rhea Rayside (Cabinet Member for People and Communities)
Councillor Paul Stokes (Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure)

Other Members present

Councillor Ian Selby

Officers present

Nicola McCoy-Brown (Director of Growth and Culture, Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Craig Spence (Acting Director of Housing)
Karen Whitfield (Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure)
Jade Newby (Tourism and Visitor Economy Officer)
Beth Goodman (Leisure Officer)
Sarah Downs (Democratic Services Officer)

12. Public Speaking

There were none.

13. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors' Emma Baker, Harrish Bisnauthsing and Susan Sandall.

Councillor Tim Harrison substituted for Councillor Baker, Councillor Charmaine Morgan substituted for Councillor Bisnauthsing and Councillor Graham Jeal substituted for Councillor Sandall.

14. Disclosure of Interests

Councillors' James Denniston and Charmaine Morgan disclosed that they were directors of LeisureSK Ltd.

15. Minutes from the meeting held on 13 June 2023

It was proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2023 were a correct and accurate record.

16. Announcements or updates from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members or the Head of Paid Service

The Deputy Leader announced that the Head of Economic Development, Jon Hinde, had recently left his post. The Officer had been involved in work supporting local businesses during the Pandemic with £56 million in support grants allocated. The Deputy Leader passed on his best wishes for the future. The Chairman added his own thanks and best wishes.

The Deputy Leader had recently attended a meeting called by Sir John Hayes, the MP for South Holland and the Deepings. This was attended by various parties including the Deepings School, the Chief Executive and Leader of Lincolnshire County Council and the Chief Executive of our own Council where the future of Deepings Leisure Centre was discussed. A Tender exercise was currently underway where bidders could express an interest in running the business.

The Leader informed the Committee that he was pleased to say that the café at Stamford Leisure Centre had now reopened and the staff that had facilitated that were thanked.

17. Update on Markets

The report was introduced by the Deputy Leader who acknowledged that the Market Deeping Market was the oldest within the District. It was believed that the Market Charter was still held in Grantham by Sir Richard Tollemache.

It was important for the Council to work closely with market traders across South Kesteven in order to maintain their viability and maximise their potential, attract footfall and aid other businesses in a town to flourish.

On 6 September 2022, the Culture and Visitor Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update on the Council's markets. Since then, the Council's political make up had changed with street markets remaining a vital part of South Kesteven life which continue to contribute to wider social, economic and environmental strategic goals.

On 14 June 2023, a further report was presented to a meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee. This outlined the findings of a review of the operational aspects of the Council's markets service. That Committee approved an action plan and agreed to receive an update on the actions undertaken within three months of the meeting, recommending review of the market service be given further consideration by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Economic Development Team periodically visited the markets in Bourne, Grantham and Stamford to observe stall occupancy levels, product offering, customer footfall, car parking movements and the general ambience on market days.

South Kesteven's markets had been a focal point of local business for centuries, playing a key part in the social, cultural and economic life of the District. However, the threat of decline had increased in recent years because shoppers had greater choice in how and where to purchase the goods, food and services traditionally associated with a street market. It was essential that consideration was given to how best the markets could be improved. The Deputy Leader recommended that the Committee consider the implementation of a 'Task and Finish' group to oversee a consultation where the best ideas could be used to make positive changes.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:

- The report was welcomed as being thorough with interesting historical facts about the markets.
- Reassurance was requested that the Council was committed to preserving, protecting and enhancing the markets.
- The stallholders needed to be at the heart of any decisions made, as they were essential to the success of the markets and attracting people to the area. Parking charges were an issue to be considered in Grantham.
- More dialogue with shopkeepers in our various towns was suggested to note how their businesses were affected by the markets.

- There were existing bodies, such as the Charter Trustees that were also happy to take an interest in the local markets. Was the creation of another group necessary?
- Car parking charges and volume of traffic were an issue in Grantham on a Saturday.
- Some elected Members were opposed to the setting up of a 'Task and Finish' group, considering the group as an unnecessary extra working group. A positive way forward was requested through a simple action plan.
- There was already a 'Town Team' for Grantham. The markets could be removed from their remit to prevent duplication of work.
- Elected Members were invited to visit the markets to show their support and speak to the stallholders. Grantham Market was known to have traders leaving their pitch once they had sold all they had.
- It was considered important to set a timescale to determine completion of a consultation, with elected Members from the whole district being involved.
- The Task Group was likely to be a sub-group of the Committee, made up of democratically elected Members who could then decide who to consult.

The Deputy Leader confirmed the Council's commitment to the markets as a way of maintaining the local economy and allowing entrepreneurs to flourish. However, it was essential that value for money was considered. Resources were not infinite. There had to be consideration as to whether the Council were the best able to run the markets. While members of the Grantham Civic Society and Charter Trustees were welcome to contribute, it would be problematic not to extend the collaboration to voices within the community. The decision remained for the operation of the markets to be the responsibility of the Council, with engagement to be encouraged from all sections of the local community. The Deputy Leader confirmed that he hoped to bring a report back to the Committee early in the new year at the meeting set for 9 January 2024.

A Member **proposed** that the Grantham Charter Trustees, alongside the Town Councils of Bourne and Stamford be tasked with overseeing the consultation of the markets.

This was **seconded**.

An amendment was **proposed** to confirm a **timeframe** within the consultation.

The Director for Growth and Culture informed Members that the Town Team had not yet been fully formed and if Members requested, it could look to oversee the consultation of the markets.

It was proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** that:

The Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) **considered and commented on the contents of this report.**
- b) **that the Grantham Charter Trustees, alongside the Town Councils of Bourne and Stamford be tasked to overseeing a consultation regarding the future of markets, with the support of South Kesteven District Council, to report back with proposals to the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

18. HelloSK App and Draft Discover South Kesteven website

The Deputy Leader introduced the report.

The annual 2021 STEAM study had revealed an upturn in tourist numbers had helped to boost South Kesteven's visitor economy by 3.5% to £168.63 million and 2,232 full-time equivalent people were employed in the sector.

It was recognised further efforts were needed to attract more day and stay visitors and increase dwell time and therefore spend in the local economy. Accordingly, it was strongly believed internet marketing and the use of mobile apps could help the Council to connect with residents, businesses and visitors to show them the visual appeals of South Kesteven as a destination and possibly more exposure than could be achieved through traditional print advertising.

At its 13 June 2023 meeting, the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a review of the Hello SK app and the Discover South Kesteven website be added to the work programme for today's meeting.

The Welcome Back Fund provided a window of opportunity for procurement of a local app, for which £50,000 was spent on the creation and launch of the HelloSK app.

The Hello SK app was procured through a formal tender process in March 2022. The app met a desire and need to support local businesses as South Kesteven emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. Offering a new approach to supporting the local economy, reflecting the influence of digital technology on the way consumers shop, communicate and engage with businesses.

Hello SK app was free for both businesses and consumers. Small fees of 3% of purchase price were incurred for businesses when goods are purchased through the app. This was a lower fee than many comparable apps.

Council Officers met with Bubltown, the developers of the app, fortnightly to share updates on the progress of the app, discuss opportunities for growth and hear

about best practice from other organisations using similar platforms. As of 9 August 2023, the Hello SK app had been downloaded by 1,276 consumers and contained 205 business profiles from across South Kesteven.

Discover South Kesteven was the tourism and visitor economy brand for South Kesteven District Council. The brand was well recognised and supported by its website, publications, social media presence (TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly known as Twitter)) and in-person events, such as the successful Visitor Economy Networking Event, trade shows and business events.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) presented the opportunity to update the Discover South Kesteven website and support the tourism and visitor economy businesses across the District.

The proposed updated Discover South Kesteven website had been created with a visitor to the District in mind and supported the Hello SK app by encouraging visitors to download the app and take advantage of the Global Position System (GPS) maps function, enabling visitors to navigate from their current location and explore South Kesteven.

Members raised the following points during discussion:

- It was felt the app needed to appear more friendly and welcoming with a clear mention of South Kesteven District Council and the local area. The requirement to register may be potentially off-putting to some.
- It was hard to measure Hello SK app's success in terms of revenue.
- The Council were perhaps trying to build something that already existed. Where was the value to be achieved? If it became embedded within the culture of the district, it may be difficult to move on without it in the future, if it did not work positively.
- 13 other Councils were using the same app, however, only Coventry – a significantly larger city had over 5,000 users.
- The 3% fee was received by a private, third-party company but Council Officers were contributing their time too.
- A Member suggested that more time be given to making the app a success and building an identity. A year was not necessarily a reasonable amount of time to expect such results, especially post-pandemic.
- The Council were perhaps unable to find the resources to make the app a success through a large promotion campaign.
- Unicom Technology were shown on the 'Companies House' website as dissolved. The Council was to investigate the status of all third parties.

- Was 'South Kesteven' a strong enough brand, rather than Grantham or Lincolnshire?

The Director of Growth and Culture confirmed that the project was funded through the Welcome Back Fund at no cost to South Kesteven District Council and negligible time by Officers. Members had agreed at previous meetings to set up an app following funding received from the Government. The feedback received was to be considered and addressed with Bubltown, including the technological requirements to advance the app. Members had requested ideas to attract visitors to the area and the app was one of several such ideas.

The Tourism and Visitor Economy Officer informed Members that the Christmas 2022 campaign had been the most successful to date. Ideas for the coming year would involve local community groups and schools. It was believed Unicom Technologies had undergone a name change and this was yet to be updated on the website.

A Member proposed that Members that were involved in the decision to produce the app, collaborate with the Director of Growth and Culture and her team to develop ideas.

It was **proposed and seconded** that the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that the HelloSK app no longer be used.

The Committee voted 4 in favour and 5 **against** the proposal.

The Director of Growth and Culture asked Members to consider allowing work to continue on the draft Discover South Kesteven website enabling the website to go live as soon as possible.

It was proposed, seconded, and **AGREED** that **the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

- a) Considered the progress of the Hello SK app, making any suggestions of additions or amendments which should be reflected.**
- b) Endorsed the proposal to release a survey over the coming months to encourage feedback from businesses and consumers who use the Hello SK app.**
- c) Considered the content of the updated Discover South Kesteven website and Hello SK app, looking at them clinically, taking good advice and making any specific suggestions to be considered by the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for amendments to be reflected prior to publication (viewable) live on the web.**

- d) **Agreed to receive a quarterly update on the Hello SK app and a six-monthly update on the Discover South Kesteven website.**

19. Outturn 2022/23 position for LeisureSK Ltd

LeisureSK Ltd was a not-for-profit Teckal company, wholly owned by South Kesteven District Council. The company was formed in September 2020 and commenced the management of Council owned leisure facilities from 1 January 2021. The contract covered a five-year period and was due to end on 31 December 2024.

In previous years, the Council's former Companies Committee received details on the financial performance of LeisureSK Ltd and approved the annual Business Plan. In line with the Council's Constitution, this responsibility now lies with the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A copy of the final audited accounts for LeisureSK Ltd for financial year 2021/2022 were presented to a meeting of Companies Committee on 10 January 2023 along with the Business Plan for 2023/2024.

The final accounts for financial year 2022/2023 were to be presented to a future meeting of the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration, once these were received from the auditors.

During financial year 2022/2023 LeisureSK Ltd faced financial and operational challenges, especially in relation to the cost of utilities and the recruitment and retention of staff. In operating the leisure facilities under a local authority trading company model, the Council had full transparency on the income and expenditure and wider performance of the company.

Members raised the following points during discussion:

- It was suggested that a tour for Committee Members be given of all the leisure facilities within the District, including Deepings Leisure Centre.

The Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure informed Members that the Deepings Leisure Centre building had been handed back to Lincolnshire County Council and their agreement was required before Members were to be shown around the area.

ACTION:

Committee Members to receive a tour around the District's leisure facilities.

(As Directors of LeisureSK Ltd, Councillors' Denniston and Morgan left the Chamber before the vote at 12:50)

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the **Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee**:

- a) **Agreed to receive the final audited accounts at a future meeting once these are available.**
- b) **Agreed to receive further updates on the performance of LeisureSK Ltd, this is to include an assessment of the annual Business Plan.**

(Councillors' Denniston and Morgan rejoined the meeting at 12:55)

It was **AGREED** that the meeting be extended to continue after 3 hours.

20. Sport and Physical Activity Strategy Action Plan six-monthly update

The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure presented the report.

The Council's Sport and Physical Activity Strategy was adopted in 2021. The Strategy focused on a collaborative approach along with other providers within the District in order to increase levels of physical activity.

The report provided a wide range of information on work undertaken by the Leisure Team to support the strategy outcomes, including those elements of work undertaken with wider partners and stakeholders.

The report also provided information on the most recent 'Active Lives Adult Survey' data which was published in April 2023.

The Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure informed the Committee that the Government had recently announced a new strategy called 'Get Active – the future of sport and physical activity'. Officers were currently exploring the context of the new strategy and assessing whether amendments were required, if so, amendments would be brought back to the Committee for approval in the future.

One Member suggested the consideration of the private and voluntary sectors within sport provision- be included within the strategy to promote physical activity throughout the District.

Concern was raised on costings to support voluntary sector classes. It was queried whether the Council could support the groups financially or whether any funding opportunities may be available to them.

The Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure clarified that voluntary physical activity groups may be eligible to utilise the Council's Community Fund.

In noting the progress and delivery of the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for South Kesteven, the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Considered the results of the latest Active Lives data available for South Kesteven and agreed the results of future Active Lives survey data form part of future regular six-monthly updates.**
- b) Suggested enhancements to the extent and clarity of the information produced for the next six-monthly update report.**

21. Cultural Strategy KPIs

The Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee had agreed to receive six monthly updates on the progress and delivery of the Action Plan within the Cultural Strategy. During the debate at the meeting held on 13 June 2023, it had been agreed a series of draft key performance indicators would be presented for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee, which would go on to form the basis of the six-monthly updates. At a meeting of Cabinet on 11 July 2023, the Cultural Strategy (2023 to 2026) was formally adopted as the key strategic document to underpin the delivery of cultural activity across South Kesteven.

A series of key performance indicators have been drafted for consideration.

The key performance indicators were to be updated at six monthly intervals to demonstrate progress with the implementation of the Cultural Strategy. In addition to sharing any highlights or successes, it was equally important to bring to Members' attention any areas or workstreams which had proved more challenging. A further report was to be presented to the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 November 2023 which would provide information on the wider performance of the Council's Arts Service.

One of the key objectives of the Cultural Strategy was to widen the participation and reach of the Council's arts service, ensuring accessibility for all. To support this ambition, it was proposed a 'Pay it Forward' scheme be introduced. Pay it Forward schemes had been successfully introduced nationally as a fundraising initiative, the resulting funds being used to enable local residents, including children and families, to attend cultural events for free.

As the free usage is fully covered by donations, the free participation will not directly impact the income of the performers, workshop leaders and touring companies. This is extremely important given the impact of COVID-19 and the associated recovery period on the livelihoods of those engaged in the arts. Free usage would be available across all three of the Council's artistic venues (Guildhall Arts Centre, Stamford Arts Centre and the Bourne Corn Exchange). Activity would not be limited to live performances and could include films, workshops and other interactive sessions.

During discussion, Members raised the following points:

- The report was welcomed, especially around collaboration and partnership. Culture arises from the communities.
- Was it possible that local businesses could support the 'Pay it Forward' Scheme? The Council should encourage all the support that it could and aim to encourage all demographics to enjoy arts and culture.
- Rural communities with weaker transport links were a barrier and prevented some senior members of the community from travelling into the towns.
- Were the Council still able to access funds from the Lottery Scheme? Such funds could support the Pay it Forward Scheme?

The Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure informed Members that the Council supported the rural touring scheme which provided high quality artistic performances in local village halls.

The Director of Growth and Culture confirmed the team would look into the availability of Lottery funds and report back to Members of the Committee.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the **Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

- a) Considered the draft Key Performance Indicators, suggesting amendments or additions.**
- b) Agreed the final version of the Key Performance Indicators will form part of formerly agreed six monthly updates on the implementation of the Cultural Strategy.**
- c) Supported the introduction of a Pay it Forward Scheme across the Council's Arts and Cultural venues.**

22. Work Programme 2023-24

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

The Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure requested an additional agenda item to the meeting on 30 November 2023. The Showman's Guild requested that the Grantham Mid-Lent Fair change or extend the times. Consultation was underway to be reported back to the Committee.

The Visitor Economic Strategy was agreed to be deferred to a meeting in the new year.

The STEAM data update was agreed to be brought to 30 November meeting.

The consideration of holiday activity provision for young people across the summer within the District was requested prior to March 2024, within the remit of the District Council.

23. Any other business which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

There was no other business.

24. Performance of LeisureSK Ltd

The Director of Growth and Culture presented the report.

This report covered activities which had taken place between January 2023 and July 2023.

LeisureSK Ltd continued to face operational challenges relating to the availability of supplies and services, and increased supplier costs, especially in relation to utilities. This aligned with the national picture and the challenges being faced by other leisure providers. As a result of increased utility and staffing costs, a management fee of £500,000 for LeisureSK Ltd was approved at Full Council on 1 March 2023 as part of the Council's annual budget setting process.

The recruitment of suitably qualified staff continued to be a challenge within the leisure industry, this had caused difficulties at Grantham Meres Leisure Centre where there had been a higher turnover of staff. The Contract Manager for LeisureSK Ltd, with the support of the Board, continued to review the company staffing structure to try and mitigate the increased cost of operating the three leisure centres without impacting upon the levels of service delivery and customer experience.

As a result of the rising energy costs, the Board of Directors recently commissioned energy efficiency surveys across the three leisure centres. The surveys were undertaken by a sector leading energy saving consultancy firm - Leisure Energy Ltd. The resulting reports highlighted a range of energy saving measures.

The Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered whether any enhancements were required to the level of information provided for inclusion in the next six-monthly update.

*(At 13:46 the Committee **AGREED** to exclude the Press and Public from the meeting on the grounds that if they were to be present, exempt information could be*

disclosed to them as defined in the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Act).

(Restricted Minute)

25. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 13:55.