

Minutes

Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Thursday, 28 November 2024, 10:00am

**Council Chamber – South
Kesteven House, St Peter's Hill,
Grantham, NG31 6PZ**

Committee Members present

Councillor Murray Turner (Chairman)
Councillor Barry Dobson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Matthew Bailey
Councillor Emma Baker
Councillor James Denniston
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Robert Leadenham
Councillor Paul Martin
Councillor Chris Noon

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter (Leader of the Council)
Philip Knowles
Councillor Paul Stokes (Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure)

Other Members present

Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Graham Jeal

Officers

Richard Wyles (Deputy Chief Executive, S151 Officer)
Graham Watts (Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer)
Karen Whitfield (Assistant Director Leisure, Culture and Place)
James Welbourn (Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Michael Chester (Team Leader – Leisure, Parks and Open Space)
Jade Porter (Arts and Cultural Services Manager)
Charles James (Policy Officer)
Hannah Rowe (Performance Analyst)
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

Debbie Roberts, Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd
Paul Sutton, Director of LeisureSK Ltd
Matt Chamberlain, Contract Manager LeisureSK Ltd
Philip Knowles, LeisureSK Ltd

38. Public Speaking

There were no public speakers.

39. Apologies for absence

All Committee Members were present.

40. Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

41. Minutes from the meetings held on 3 September 2024

Minutes from the meeting held on 3 September 2024, 10:30am (Partly Restricted) and 3 September 2024, 14:00pm 2024 were proposed, seconded and **AGREED** as an accurate record, subject to a minor amendment.

42. Updates from the previous meeting

All actions were complete.

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

The Deputy Leader of the Council offered commiserations to the people of Stamford as their Christmas light event had been cancelled. The traders and those arranging the event had put in a high amount of effort.

The Grantham and Deepings Christmas light switch on was due to take place within the coming week. The Bourne Christmas light switch on was due to take place on 7 December 2024.

A Beeden Park opening event was taking place on 30 November 2024 at 10am. This park had been refurbished using grant funding and provided health and wellbeing benefits for local residents.

Works were starting to take place on Dysart Park with the help of UKSPF funding and a donation from Grantham Rotary. The plans were out to tender, the scheme was hoped to be developed quickly.

The Committee were invited to attend Stamford Pantomime on 19 December 2024, invites had been sent out.

44. Cultural Strategy 6 monthly Update

The Deputy Leader of the Council presented the report.

The report provided the second six-monthly update on the implementation of South Kesteven's Cultural Strategy 2023/26.

Since its adoption in July 2023, significant progress had been made towards delivering the strategy's objectives guided by key performance indicators.

The report highlighted several achievements, including the success of the Pay it Forward scheme. The scheme had raised £6900 to expand access to cultural experience for residents facing barriers to participation.

Updates were provided on outreach efforts such as the Rural Touring Scheme and the inclusion of rural communities to enjoy arts services. Innovative public art projects had been funded by UKSPF grants.

Additionally, the report outlined the significant steps taken to enhance marketing, improve accessibility and ensure the effective use of cultural venues alongside new developments such as in-house pantomimes at Stamford Arts Centre and repairs/upgrades to facilities.

The update reflected the Council's commitment to fostering a thriving, inclusive cultural landscape across the District, ensuring value for money and enriching the quality of life for all residents.

It was queried as to how much of the £6900 raised from the Pay it Forward scheme had been spent.

The exact figure spent at present was unknown, however, it was a constant rolling scheme where money was spent to fund an activity once it was received.

ACTION: For the Arts and Cultural Services Manager to provide the Committee with an update on how much of the £6900 raised from the Pay it Forward scheme had been spent.

A suggestion was made on bringing back elements of the Gravity Fields Festival.

The Deputy Leader of the Council clarified that there were several significant events forthcoming such as Issac Newton's birthday and 150 years of Kings School, Grantham. Officers were exploring potential opportunities to reincarnate elements of Gravity Fields festival but on a more affordable, smaller scale.

One Member raised the idea of a pop-up cinema and whether the Bourne Corn Exchange could be considered for such event. It was noted that people in Bourne either had to travel into Grantham or Peterborough.

The Arts and Cultural Services Manager highlighted that the idea of a pop-up cinema had been considered before. Bourne Corn Exchange received a high

number of bookings, however, the idea could be further explored due to a projector screen being available at the venue.

The Leader of the Council informed the Committee of a venue in the Deepings which had a projector screen, which was available to the community.

A suggestion had previously been made to Grantham Museum on the idea of a 'free-thinking festival' which could be similar to Gravity Fields Festival. This could include a series of lectures annually to celebrate the legacy of Edith Smith, Maragret Thatcher, Issac Newton and Nicholas Parsons.

A Cabinet Member informed the Committee on the special anniversary of Charles Worth in 2025, who has the leading couturier in Paris. A celebration would take place in Bourne.

Members praised the team for the work presented.

One Member requested whether the new development of flats on Swinegate could be named after a local historian, Malcolm Knapp, who had previously preserved a lot of Grantham's history.

October 2025 would have been Margaret Thatcher's 100th birthday, it was suggested that a political lecture take place in order to celebrate the occasion.

That the Committee:

1. Note the information provided and offer suggestions on any additional information required for future updates in relation to the implementation of the Council's Cultural Strategy.

45. Corporate Plan 2024-27 Key Performance Indicators: 2024/25 Mid-Year (Q2) Report

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing presented the report.

In March 2024, a new Corporate Plan for the Council was agreed until 2027. Subsequently, the Committee agreed a series of KPI's to receive and review the findings.

The report included the quarter two 24-25 report for the new KPI's. The KPI's included eight actions, which were all rated green overall.

All KPI reports would be uploaded to the performance reporting page on the Council's website via a new KPI dashboard. A face-to-face all-Member briefing on the dashboard and the Council's wider efforts to enhance transparency was due to take place in early 2025.

One Member sought clarification on an action on economic impact, which stated 'below target'.

The Policy Officer clarified that the targets were assessed overall and as a whole. The economic impact was a sub-measure which was below target, however did not impact the overall workstream being on target for the action.

That the Committee:

1. Reviews and scrutinises the performance against the Corporate Plan Key Performance Indicators in relation to the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2024-27.

46. Performance of Leisure SK Ltd

(Debbie Roberts, Paul Sutton and Councillor Philp Knowles were present in their capacity as LeisureSK Ltd Board Members).

The Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd presented the report, which was broken down into the performance of LeisureSK Ltd, the business plan for 2025/26 and a request in the budget for the following financial year.

At the previous meeting of the Committee, data on the Leisure Centres was provided. Information on attendance was included within the graphs alongside updates regarding Covid levels and how the Leisure Centres had returned back to pre-Covid levels for memberships in Bourne and Stamford. Grantham Meres had not returned to pre-Covid levels.

There was the potential for a refurbishment at Grantham Meres gym in the future.

The business plan provided was for one year only due to LeisureSK Ltd moving to an agency model from 1 April 2025. At present, LeisureSK Ltd had not received the new specification contract or set of new KPI's going forward. Therefore, the business plan had been based on a one-year, like-for-like basis.

The request for the £150,000 was to assist with cashflow issues that the company would incur. Under the agency model, the company would receive the income on behalf of the Council and deduct expenditure incurred, a reconciliation process would take place on a monthly basis with either the Council receiving the surplus or this being topped up in the case of a deficit. To assist with cashflow during the transition, the company would require an injection of cashflow from 1 April 2025. This would be repaid to the Council over the course of the financial year.

One Member queried what had been done to explore a simple overdraft facility for the £150,000.

A LeisureSK Ltd Board Member confirmed they were exploring costs of an overdraft facility. The cost of taking an overdraft facility from the bank would be more expensive than taking a facility from the Council.

It was noted the business plan had little specific reference to Grantham stadium. A query was raised on attendance numbers of Grantham stadium as figures were combined with Meres Leisure Centre.

One Member queried what plans LeisureSK Ltd had for the stadium to make it more attractive and attract more people to utilise it.

The Assistant Director of Leisure, Culture and Place clarified that Grantham stadium was included within the Leisure Management contract, therefore, LeisureSK Ltd managed the stadium on the Council's behalf.

The attendance figures provided for Grantham Meres did not include the stadium.

The Council had been in negotiations with Grantham Town Football Club regarding their usage of the stadium. Once negotiations were concluded, ways in which LeisureSK Ltd could improve the stadium usage would be discussed.

The Contract Manager for LeisureSK Ltd highlighted that additional groups used the stadium and it was also used for school events in summer holidays, and for charity events. The negotiation with Grantham Town Football Club was key, as once their dates of use were confirmed, the stadium availability could then be offered out for hire.

The Assistant Director of Leisure, Culture and Place informed the Committee that the Council was leading on negotiations with Grantham Town Football Club. It was anticipated that a report be brought to the next Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in January 2025.

It was queried whether any facilities which were no longer utilised could be brought back to operation where infrastructure was available, for example, the climbing wall at the Meres.

The number of GP referral patients for the 12-week fitness programme, which had been advertised by the Meres was questioned.

ACTION: For the number of GP referral patients for the 12-week fitness programme be provided to the Committee.

The Contract Manager confirmed that the climbing wall at the Meres was decommissioned in 2021, post Covid. The costs of repairs and maintenance far exceeded the expected use and income. The climbing wall infrastructure was still in place, but not used.

The increase in National Insurance had been provided on exempt papers as part of the financial information with the business plan. It was noted the increase was an outside pressure of the Council and was a change to the terms of operation implemented by Central Government. As the change was not the fault of commercial activities of LeisureSK Ltd, it was felt the figure should be in the public domain.

The Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd confirmed the National Insurance costs had been addressed in the financial section of the report but the National Insurance figures were not strictly commercially sensitive, however, with other aspects presented with the figures made it commercially sensitive.

A projected added cost pressure of £63,688 had been included as part of the National Insurance increase for the 25/26 budget. The accuracy on how many people this figure related to was queried.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed the cost should not be described as irrecoverable as LeisureSK Ltd would have modified their cashflow accordingly to absorb the new cost into their projections.

The figure on the National Insurance cost pressure was an estimate, due to only a number of LeisureSK Ltd employees being on a salary. It was unknown how many people from April 2025 -March 2026 would be included within the £5,000-£9,000 banding, due to extra shifts becoming available.

Clarification was sought around the standard of gym equipment as the report stated the equipment was of a good standard, however, an analysis identified a weakness of outdated gym equipment at Stamford and Grantham. The potential of requesting a £200,000 loan from the Council to replace the gym equipment was discussed.

The Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd stated the gym equipment was in a good and working condition, however, the need to replace and keep up with newer types of modern fitness classes and equipment was necessary to keep existing members and encourage new members to join.

Grantham Meres received a refurbishment in 2016 which cost £600,000. It was queried what would be updated with the £250,000 loan.

The refurbishment in 2016 included change of use in rooms, a refurbishment of upstairs toilets, offices, cycle studio, dance studio and a remodel of the flume in the Grantham Meres.

The £250,000 loan would merely be required to update the gym only.

It was requested that an assessment be undertaken before any gym equipment was purchased to explore the market and alternative providers. It was noted that the competitive market was different to 2016 and other gyms within the town had lower costing memberships.

The Deputy Chief Executive clarified the relationship between the Council and the LeisureSK Ltd company. The proposal before the Committee was company driven which would require a full business case and visibility of the market procurement change that LeisureSK Ltd would be looking to utilise.

A commercial loan proposal would be backed by evidence to validate the request and ensure the Council's money was being used efficiently.

One Member queried who would approve the grant of the commercial loan.

The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted the approval process would depend on the financial threshold as to what the request was. If the request was over £150,000, it would ultimately be a Council decision, which would mean going to Cabinet as a first proposal and recommending a modification to the budget framework to accommodate the loan.

An observation was made that the subject of LeisureSK Ltd would arise over the next few weeks in five different Scrutiny or governance meetings.

It was highlighted that taxpayers money was funding the company, therefore, the right governance and transparency was put upon the arrangement between the Council and LeisureSK Ltd.

It was queried whether S106 money, which was destined for leisure services could be utilised towards maintenance of the leisure centers.

It was clarified that S106 money was given to the Council rather than the company, therefore, it would be the Council's decision on how the money was spent.

A suggestion was made on a sub-committee to be formed where LeisureSK Ltd be discussed separately.

As part of LeisureSK Ltd's move to the agency model, governance routes and a better way of reporting to scrutiny were being explored.

The Assistant Director of Leisure, Culture and Place clarified that topics involving LeisureSK Ltd were mainly discussed at Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Other topics sat within the Articles of Association that the Council was responsible for the Directors of the company via Governance and Audit Committee.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** to go into private session.

Under Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public may be excluded from the meeting during any listed items of business, 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.

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

- 1. Notes the update regarding the performance of LeisureSK Ltd.**
- 2. Endorses the Business Plan for LeisureSK Ltd for one year 2025-2026**
- 3. Recommends that a budget of £150,000 is proposed for 2025/26 in order to stabilise the cashflow of LeisureSK Ltd on a temporary basis.**

47. Work Programme 2024 - 25

The Committee noted the Work Programme 2024-25.

A request was made whether the 'Markets Update' could include the usage of the increase in stalls at Grantham market and how this could be overcome.

The Leader of the Council had visited the Union Street Gallery which was part of Grantham Creative. They were a Community Interest Company promoting art in Grantham. Grantham Creative invited the Committee to attend for a visit with view to a wider discussion around art in the community.

ACTION: For a visit to Grantham Creative at Union Street Gallery, Grantham be arranged for the Committee.

Members were reminded of the Leisure Centre and Stadium Tours taking place on 16 December 2024. The tour would start at The Meres, Grantham at 9am.

The Leader of the Council suggested the Committee review the District's Arts Centres (how they work, their programmes and how they could be improved.)

It was requested that 'Sports Clubs in the District' be brought to the Committee meeting in January 2025.

Members considered broadening the scope of the Play Area Strategy. Areas which were not controlled or managed by the Council were discussed. The suggestion was raised on creating a network of play areas across the District, including Parish/Town Council's.

In addition to this, Members discussed who managed all other play areas in the District, not owned by the Council. The Committee were interested in inviting them to work in partnership with the Council in a best common practice exercise but an attempt to reduce the overall costs of maintenance to play areas.

The Play Area Strategy was considered by the Committee, recommended for adoption and now being formally adopted and that concentrates on the 38 areas that the Council currently maintained.

It was queried whether the Sports and Physical Activity Update being taken to the Committee in March 2025 was being heard early enough to plan events for summer 2025.

The Committee reviewed the Sports and Physical Activity on a 6-monthly review of the Strategy. It had recently been updated alongside the action plan.

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

There were none.

49. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 12:08pm.