

Meeting of the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

**Thursday, 11 December 2025,
10.00 am**

Committee Members present

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

Councillor Matthew Bailey
Councillor James Denniston
Councillor Gareth Knight
Councillor Robert Leadenham
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Max Sawyer

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Paul Stokes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture
Councillor Philip Knowles, Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing also Director of LeisureSK Ltd

Officers

Karen Whitfield, Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place)
Jade Porter, Arts and Cultural Services Manager
Michael Chester, Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces Team Leader
Charles James, Policy Officer
Lucy Bonshor, Democratic Officer

David Rushton, Chairman LeisureSK Ltd
David Scott, Director of LeisureSK Ltd

33. Public Speaking

There were no public speakers.

34. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Emma Baker, Councillor Chis Noon and Councillor Rhea Rayside.

Councillor Noon was substituted by Councillor Tim Harrison and Councillor Rayside was substituted by Councillor Max Sawyer

35. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor James Denniston disclosed an interest in respect of gym equipment due to his employment that, depending on the discussion in respect of LeisureSK Ltd agenda items would require him to leave the meeting during discussion.

Councillor Philip Knowles stated that as he was a Director of LeisureSK Ltd he had an interest in those agenda items.

36. Minutes from the meeting held on 14 October 2025

The minutes from the meeting held on 14 October 2025 were proposed, seconded and agreed.

37. Updates from the previous meeting

The Democratic Officer confirmed that all actions from the previous meeting had been completed.

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

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture made the following announcements:

BBC Radio Lincolnshire had produced a podcast celebrating 75 years of BRM (British Racing Motors) in Bourne. The Podcast was due to be aired over the Christmas period. Reference within the podcast made by Jackie Stewart stated the importance of Bourne in respect of the current multi-billion pound industry that motor racing had become and that it would not exist without Bourne and the BRM opposing Ferrari at that time, it was a good piece of marketing material for Bourne.

The next announcement was in respect of the improvements being carried out in respect of play parks across the District which Members had been notified of. The Play Park Strategy was working well and the Deputy Leader of the Council asked the Committee to acknowledge the work being undertaken by the Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces Team Leader, Michael Chester in respect of the improvements. *(Michael Chester received a round of applause from those present).*

The third announcement was in respect of the Christmas light switch on and Christmas markets held in all the four towns and the work carried out by the Teams to make this happen. In some cases it had been the Town Councils, in respect of Grantham it had been South Kesteven District Council. Acknowledgement was also made of those rural areas that had been involved in Christmas celebrations for everybody. Grantham Christmas light switch on and market had been very successful with a number of people attending and he thanked the Arts and Cultural

Services Manager and her Team for all their hard work in delivering a fantastic event. *(Jade Porter received a round of applause from those present)*

The final announcement was in respect of a decision that had been made at a recent Cabinet meeting where an opportunity had arisen in respect of some sports facilities for the Deepings. Deepings Sports and Social Club had been working with the Football Foundation and Lincolnshire FA. They had reached a point where they could potentially receive a grant of £700,000. A contribution was required from the District Council to match the Deepings Sports and Social Club contribution which was given by the Cabinet subject to various conditions being attached to the Council's grant to allow the Football Foundation grant to move forward. The Council granted £200,000 but it was stressed that there were conditions attached to the grant which had to be met by the Deepings Sports and Social Club in relation to usage and planning and the grant from the Council had to be in place in order to receive the £700,000 grant from the Football Foundation.

Members suggested that this grant should have been scrutinised by the Committee, however, there was not sufficient time between the meeting and the Cabinet meeting to enable this. The Chairman requested that wherever possible this could be achieved in the future.

A request was made about erecting notices on the play parks to advise when they were closed so that residents were aware. It was stated that once definitive dates were known then notices would be erected accordingly.

39. Corporate Plan 2024-27: Key Performance Indicators Report - Mid-Year (Q2) 2025/26

Before presenting the report the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing stated that there was a museum in Bourne which had replicas and memorabilia in respect of the BRM and its founder Raymond Mays which was opened at weekends for those interested in BRM and F1 motor racing.

The report before Members presented the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan 2024-27 within the remit of the Culture and Leisure OSC for Quarter two and was the third report that the Committee had received.

There were eight actions within the report of which six were green, on or above target and two were amber but it was expected that these actions would improve. The Committee were reminded that the targets belonged to the Committee and if they thought there were no longer relevant or were inadequate then they could ask for them to be changed to more appropriate KPI's going forward. The Cabinet Member thanked Charles James, Policy Officer for the work in compiling the information before the Committee.

The Chairman asked a question about financial worth and how it was calculated in respect of COM4 and the total social value generated. It was stated that information came from the Moving Communities platform from Sports England who measured the health benefits from those people who used the Council's leisure

centres, how many times per week, how long they used it for which equated to health benefits, so a financial figure. A detailed calculator had been developed by Sheffield Hallam University and it was stated that the Officer would try and provide further information for Members. The figure shown was that received from Moving Communities platform.

The Chairman indicated that he would like to see how the calculations were made at some point.

Further discussion followed with one Member asking how the KPI's could be scrutinised when there did not appear to be measurable targets included. The Chairman stated that the Committee had drawn up the targets with as many as possible being given a number, however some of the targets were subjective. It was noted that the targets were qualitative rather than quantitative in respect of this OSC with an emphasis on qualitative commentary rather than a target number with reference being made to the Housing OSC KPI targets.

More discussion in respect of where information for the KPI's came from and the qualitative v quantitative nature of the information supplied.

Members noted the report.

40. LeisureSK Ltd Performance Report - Quarter 2 2025/26

The Deputy Leader of the Council presented the report which gave the Committee an update on the performance of LeisureSK Ltd during quarter 2 2025/26. The performance requirements were against the Leisure Management Contract as set out in a new agency agreement which had commenced in April 2025.

It was noted that some of the KPI's had changed from the previous Leisure Management Contract and the data shown in the appendix would form the baseline data from which performance would be measured going forward. It was not a measure of how LeisureSK Ltd was performing against each individual KPI. Regular monitoring was carried out in respect of the leisure centres and sports stadium and any issues that required to be addressed were reported to the Centre Management Team. If any rectification required was the responsibility of the Council, this was reported accordingly internally to the service area responsible.

Members discussed the report and the following issues were raised:

- Questions around the NPS score contained in the Appendix Table which appeared to have drastically reduced across all three leisure centres, why had it dropped so significantly compared to the last set of data and what mitigation and plans were being put in place to address this drop. The Member asked if a report was required from LeisureSK Ltd in respect of a mitigation plan answering the questions of why the NPS had dropped and how this could be recovered.

- The NPS score was a measure of a customer's experience based on how likely they would recommend the centre to family and friends. Each year the leisure centres undertook the Sport England Moving Communities Customer Experience Survey. This was a standardised survey that was sent out to all local authorities and operators and looked at the users of the facilities within the last three months. It was calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors, those that scored 0 – 6 on the NPS survey from the percentage of promoters that scored 9 – 10 on a scale of 0 – 10. It was noted that the range could be from a low of minus 100 where the customer was a detractor to a high of 100 if every customer was a promoter. It was noted that the figure had gone down as it was linked to the customers experience within the leisure centres. It was for LeisureSK Ltd to state what actions they would take to address the results the surveys had produced, it was noted that the NPS was just one question on the survey and that there were a host of other questions asked.
- A further comment was made in respect of the National NPS level which was currently 21.9, however, it was noted that this was for different sized operators and operator models and it was hard to mirror operators exactly, it was an issue to pick up with LeisureSK Ltd to put plans in place to address the data.
- The Member who had raised his concerns asked if this could be an action for a report to come back to Committee.
- The Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd referred the Member to the Business Plan for next year which was an item on the agenda. Objective 9 of the Business Plan was to develop a Customer Service Strategy which would measure customer engagement and satisfaction. Reference was made to the Moving Communities data which did not necessarily mean customers were dissatisfied, its whether they would be less likely to recommend the leisure facility. The information did not give a reason for the recommendation. The Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd stated customer information was an area LeisureSK Ltd wanted to develop further in respect of the information held regarding customer engagement and satisfaction. Information was not measured as well as it could be. Customer satisfaction was a key objective for LeisureSK Ltd for 2026 to enable more information to be given on the reasons for the numbers reported. The reasons "why" would inform how the Customer Service Strategy was developed; customer experience and satisfaction would be a main focus area for improvement for 2026.
- The Chairman asked if the information and format was an issue. The Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd stated that it was the content of the Moving Communities data which was very high level and collected the same way for each local authority most surveys were carried out by email and telephone and had a limited sample size. The Moving Communities Data did not help LeisureSK Ltd understand the level of customer engagement and it was an area that needed to be improved.

- Clarity was sought in respect of the difference between a NPS survey and a satisfaction survey to which the Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces Team Leader responded.

A comment was made in respect of the cleanliness items contained within the report in respect to Stamford Leisure Centre. It was stated that the majority of the items had been rectified. The £100,000 the Member referred to would cover more maintenance items especially in areas such as the changing rooms. It was noted that Stamford had received more visits during quarter two following customer feedback during the summer period and these visits had been carried out at a different time of the day with reports in respect of cleanliness items being rectified required within 72 hours. Deep cleaning of the changing rooms by a professional contractor at Stamford Leisure Pool had also been undertaken which had been successful. A further question was asked in respect of the refurbishment plans and it was stated that these would focus on the changing room areas as £100,000 had been allocated to Stamford and the specification and procurement route were currently being looked at.

The Deputy Leader of the Council was confident that the issues would be addressed but stated that the cleanliness of the leisure centres was simply not good enough at the present time. It was noted that the LeisureSK Board were taking the cleanliness of the centres very seriously and it had to improve.

Further comments were made which included:

- Financial implications which the report had implied that there were none – the report before Members dealt more with metrics rather than finance which was within the next agenda item.
- Maximum occupancy of Grantham Swim School had not been highlighted – Swim England allowed a capacity of 85% which allowed movement between children in swimming lessons, it was how the programme could be expanded further with the limited pool space available especially in respect of Grantham. The Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd stated that the swimming programme at Grantham was being looked at with a view to moving some club slots to release more capacity.
- 31% reduction in accidents although no denominator was shown – this had been picked up by the LeisureSK Board and data would be presented with more context going forward the same with complaints. It was noted that the Council's Annual Health and Safety report did report on the accidents and it was suggested that the KPI in respect of this may be changes slightly going forward.
- It was explained that this was the first year of a contract and would form the baseline data going forward
- More comments were made in respect of having mystery shoppers, the development of the Customer Service Strategy, cleanliness of the leisure centres, capturing everyone's experience who attended the leisure centres including those who may not necessarily book in for an activity but spectate.

The Committee noted the report.

41. LeisureSK Ltd Finance and Operational Performance Update - Quarter 2 2025/26

Members received the LeisureSK Ltd Finance and Operation Performance report for quarter 2, 2025/26. The report stated that an increased surplus was expected as outlined and summarised in Appendix 1.

(10:55 Councillor Matt Bailey left the meeting and did not return)

The overall budget surplus was achieving a profit of £148,000 which was an achievement of £76,000 against the budget which was a positive position with surpluses being reinvested back into the business. Focus would continue to be on what was being spent and what income could be generated. The Board was pleased with the direction that was being taken and the Business Plan which was the next item on the agenda was also showing a positive operational direction for the sites across the District.

Questions were asked about how the leisure centres could compete with other companies such as PureGym and were there any speculative figures for surpluses beyond 2026.

The Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd referred to where your “niche” in the market was. If it was Pure Gym then the leisure centres probably couldn’t compete but leisure centres offered other programmes and also they had the use of large swimming pools which was how you differentiated yourself from other gym organisations.

A further question was asked in respect of the reduction in membership at Stamford would this be permanent and it was stated that this was being monitored closely and if supply increased then market share would be affected. Research was being undertaken to see what Stamford’s “niche” should be and work was on going in that regard.

Although a profit was being forecast it was noted that memberships were down, swim schools were down, income was behind budget and also Pure Gym was causing market erosion and maintenance demands were rising how could the business be operating at a profit. The Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place) responded that this was a new agency contract in its first year which was dealing with some financial difficulties from the previous year which had arisen from irrecoverable VAT. That was why the accounts were showing a surplus for the year.

The Chairman stated that it was hard to quantify a profit when it was a wellbeing facility that was being provided for the general public. These type of facilities did not always seek to make money, but provide facilities that helped the wellbeing of people to lead more fulfilling lives. However, value for money should always be sought wherever possible.

Further questions were asked about the backlog of work and it was stated that a much better way of working across the sites than had perhaps happened historically was in place with closer working with the Council. Reference was made

to investing money in the sites which needed to be maintained and looked after and LeisureSK Ltd was looking at this and repairs were being carried out more. It was noted that the previous budget may not have been set at the right level and reference was made to the next item where the revenue repairs and maintenance budget had been increased to ensure sufficient funding was in place to undertake required maintenance. Closer working with the Council to address issues within the Centres was key.

A date for when the backlog would be completed was part of the bigger programme of investment in the overall sites. The Chairman reminded the Committee about the £500,000 reserve that the Committee had put in place and the Deputy Leader of the Council stated that significant progress needed to be carried out at the leisure centres within the next 12 months.

A comment was made that it may be helpful for future reports if a breakdown per centre was included with a few headlines to stop any confusion with regard to the figures before the Committee. The Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place) stated that she would take the comments made and discuss this with the LeisureSK Board outside of the Committee.

The report was noted.

42. LeisureSK Ltd Annual Budget and Business Plan 2026/27

The Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd presented the report. He began by stating that he was confident that LeisureSK Ltd would overperform financially for 2025/26. LeisureSK Ltd was aware that there were issues on the non-financial side which needed to be improved. The Chairman of LeisureSK Ltd referred the Committee to page 13 of the Business Plan appended to the report which stated that an operating surplus would be reached. It was proposed that a review of the Stamford gym area would be looked at with a plan developed to undertake refurbishment to look to increase overall participation increase by 5% across the contract. It was stated that the increase would be more likely in respect of the Grantham and to a lesser extent Bourne Leisure Centres.

Two areas that would be looked at in respect of capacity. It was proposed that a Business Development, Sales and Marketing Officer be recruited to start in April 2026. Reference was made to the comments that had been made during the meeting in respect of Stamford and it was noted that Stamford did not have a dedicated manager and LeisureSK Ltd were looking to recruit a dedicated manager for Stamford Leisure Centre in the New Year.

Utility consumption at all sites would be reduced mostly in Grantham through the decarbonisation programme which was currently in progress. It was proposed to increase fitness membership by 5%. It was also proposed that Padel Tennis would be launched at Grantham Meres Leisure Centre, however a low risk approach had been taken and it was proposed that a padel tennis lease holder be contracted and a procurement process would be undertaken in the New Year.

The timetable for Grantham Meres Leisure Centre was being reviewed with a view to finding more capacity for the swim school. A strategic and systematic approach to customer services was also being taken in terms of measuring customer engagement and satisfaction. Nine core objectives were proposed as outlined within the report.

Questions and comments raised by Members included:

- How data was collected by users of the swimming pools
- The proposed 5% increase in gym membership and it was noted that the gym had not been enhanced, the equipment was only being replaced and the cost of living crisis did impact membership which was why only a 5% increase had been proposed
- How the proposed padel tennis was being procured and the low cost route being taken.
- That some of the content of the pink papers appended to the report could be in the public domain as it was basic information. The Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place) stated that she acknowledged the comments made in respect of the pink papers and that would be taken into consideration in future reports.
- The Business Plan was still a draft document and it should contain realistic ambitions and it was acknowledged that LeisureSK Ltd appeared to be in a better position than it had two to three years ago and it was moving the right direction.
- A question was raised about Local Government Reorganisation and how this would affect contracts specifically the paddle tennis contract – the contract would be co-terminus with the LeisureSK Ltd contract.

Officers and Directors of LeisureSK Ltd were congratulated for the work undertaken to turn LeisureSK Ltd around.

43. Overview and Effectiveness of the approach and outcomes of Thatcher Fest, celebrating Thatcher's 100th birthday

The Committee received a report presented by the Deputy Leader of the Council which provided an overview and evaluation of the collaborative approach taken to deliver “Thatcher Fest”, a week-long cultural programme marking the centenary of Margaret Thatcher’s birth.

The review highlighted the strong outcomes achieved through the approach which included diverse programming and significant audience engagement, particularly from first time visitors. There was extensive regional, national and international

media coverage which raised Grantham's profile and supported local organisations and demonstrated the value of partnership working.

Events were delivered within existing budgets and the Council's programmed activity generated a modest surplus which showed that high quality cultural delivery could be achieved in a cost effective and sustainable way.

The Committee were asked to note the report and consider using the collaborative model in respect of future cultural events and festivals.

(11:35 Councillor Philip Knowles and David Rushton left the meeting and did not return)

The Arts and Cultural Services Manager was thanked for organising the successful event. The Council had been used as an enabler to promote the events which had been successful and it was felt that the same approach should be taken in the future. One Member stated that he would like to see an annual festival put in place with the Council being the enabler rather than the organiser as it had been so successful and he thanked everyone who had been involved.

One Member echoed the comments made but made comments in respect of the costings shown. It was stated that the 80's music event had already been programmed using Future High Street Funding it just happened that the event took place during Thatcher Fest. The Arts and Cultural Manager referred the Committee to events listed within the report and stated that those at the top were undertaken within the Arts Centre allocated pre-existing budget. If the funding from the Future High Street etc hadn't been received those events listed would not have taken place. A distinction had tried to be shown between what was within the existing programmed budget and that nothing had been added.

It was felt that the event had been fantastic and the Team had done excellent work. A question was asked in respect of next year's festival and whether there was a theme. It was stated that during the budget for 2026/27 it was proposed that an Events Officer role be introduced and an associated revenue budget. It was important that this type of work was carried out across the district and it was noted that Grantham had benefited from the Future High Street Fund which had been brilliant, however the whole district has to be looked at. Possible events for the next year were a celebration of the Queens 100th birthday and work was being done to reach out to Town and Parish Councils and stakeholders to see if there was an appetite for a celebration although it was stressed that it was early days. There was also a National Covid Reflection day planned for the 8 March 2027 so that was also being looked into.

Members noted the report.

44. Work Programme 2025/26

The Chairman stated that currently there were two items on the Work Programme for the meeting scheduled for 3 February 2026:

- Draft refresh of the Sports and Physical Activity Strategy
- Visit from Grantham Town FC

Confirmation was sought from the Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place) regarding the visit by Grantham Town FC. The Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place) stated that she had a meeting with the Chairman and the Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture on Monday and that agreement in respect of the Heads of Terms was imminent following legal input. However, she felt that perhaps February was too early and more information would be known after the meeting the following week.

➤ **Action**

That the visit by Grantham Town FC scheduled for February be moved to later in the year.

One Member made reference to the Wellbeing event that had been held at the Meres Leisure Centre in October at which 12-14 independent stalls had been present. He stated that he was the only Member who had attended the event and asked if the event was to be repeated in January. The Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place) stated that Beth Goodman was leading on the project and it was expected that events would be repeated in Bourne, Stamford and The Deepings. As soon as dates had been confirmed they would be circulated to the Committee. The Member asked if there would be another one at the Meres and it was indicated that this could be factored into the plan as it had worked very well.

The Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place) suggested that an item be included on the Work Programme for February in respect of the £500k reserve that had been put in place for investment in the Leisure Centres to update the Committee on progress and any future funding. It was proposed that the £500k be replicated in the budget for 2026/27.

The Chairman referred to an email received from Councillor Bailey in respect of the money that had been committed for investment which totalled £1m. He had requested a report which indicated where the money had been invested in leisure within the District as a whole. The Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place) indicated that it could be incorporated within the report she had proposed.

➤ **Action**

Item to be included on Work Programme for February 2026 on Investment of Leisure Reserve, to include other investments highlighted and where the money had been invested within the district as a whole.

One Member made reference to frustration in respect of certain leisure investments which seemed to be happening “outside” of the Committee to which both the Assistant Director (Leisure, Culture and Place) together with the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture responded.

A question was asked about visiting the refitted gym at the Meres and it was stated that a visit by the Committee would be arranged.

➤ **Action**

That a visit to the refurbished gym at the Meres be arranged for the Committee once completed.

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

A Member asked a question in respect of the closure of Stamford Arts Centre during the Stamford Christmas lights turn on and market event. The proposal for next year was for a two day event and it was asked whether the Arts Centre could be opened. It was stated that it wasn't financially viable to open the Arts Centre during this period as there were no bookings and two members of staff had to be present at the centre. However, once dates were known and confirmed a conversation could take place.

It was noted that Grantham Christmas Lights turn on would take place on Sunday 29 November 2026 and it was asked that this date be avoided in Stamford and the following week was suggested.

46. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 12:05.