

CABINET MEMBER DECISION



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Decision:

That approval is granted to allocate £9,600 from the Invest to Save Reserve to carry out a review of South Kesteven District Council's Cultural Service.

(1) **Details of Decision**

To seek approval to access £9,600 funding from the Invest to Save Reserve to fund a review of Cultural Services.

(2) **Considerations/Evidence**

South Kesteven District Council's Corporate Plan puts Cultural Services at the heart of achieving the council's vision to be the best place to live, work and visit.

Prior to the pandemic, the Cultural and Creative sectors, were reporting record growth and development, providing significant levels of investment and making a major contribution to the national economy.

Over the pandemic, the importance of cultural activities to the health and wellbeing of the nation has been widely acknowledged.

In September 2020, the Cabinet of South Kesteven District Council formally adopted a new Cultural Strategy for the district. This document prioritised a series of key actions that will support wider audience engagement and increase networking support for local creative practitioners. It is anticipated that the Cultural Services team will play a significant role in promoting the Cultural Strategy and supporting activities to deliver strategic priorities. Chiefly, these priorities include Partnerships, Networking and Accessibility.

Engagement with cultural activities is constantly evolving. Changes to the way customers interact with cultural programmes, the significant impact of technological advances and constantly shifting demographic of the district, all indicate a need to take an objective look at the delivery of Cultural Services in South Kesteven.

With the arrival of Covid-19, Stamford Arts Centre, Guildhall Arts Centre and the Bourne Corn Exchange were temporarily closed during the 2020 national lockdown and services have been suspended in November 2020 as part of a second nationwide lockdown.

Proposals for a phased re-opening across all sites began over the summer months (once restrictions were lifted) but to date, full public access to the buildings has not been implemented.

An online programme has been developed and received high levels of interaction.

Income generation has been devastated throughout the current financial year and social-distancing restrictions make the restoration of most live and screened, auditorium-based events financially unviable.

The impact of ongoing restrictions into 2021 and continued uncertainty for income generation in 2021-22, has brought forward the urgency for a review of the service to identify options to explore the potential of more cost-effective methods of operating.

Taking all the factors highlighted above into account, the proposed review will ultimately seek to establish a service that is able to maximise revenue and streamline service delivery by utilising the resources, assets and skills of the team to provide a joined-up programme of high-quality regular programme of activities and events for all South Kesteven residents.

Exploring options to future-proof the council's commitment to cultural engagement will enable Cultural Services to provide an important role in supporting the recovery of the creative sector post Covid-19.

The project brief will include: Financial Performance and Staffing Review, Research and Consultation, Development of Strategic Objectives and options for future service delivery and the compilation of a Review Report and Presentation of Findings.

Special attention will be paid to future income generation, the development of the festival and events team, audience development and outreach and community programmes, delivered by a flexible, transferable team.

(3) **Reasons for Decision:**

The current reduced programme provides a rare opportunity to explore the service fully without the distractions of delivering the regular demanding schedule. Team members involved in the process will be able to dedicate the time required to provide evidence and supporting documents.

Whilst delivering an internal review would not incur additional costs, the full 360-degree scope of an external review would be significantly harder to achieve. It is widely accepted that implementing an internal review is extremely challenging whilst maintaining effective internal communications and co-operation within the team.

Working with an independent specialist provider will ensure an impartial and thorough review of the current service.

The study will take full advantage of the provider's wider experience and knowledge of the sector more broadly.

An independent review will be able to deliver recommendations based on examples of sector best practice and the most up-to-date understanding of future challenges to delivering effective and viable cultural services, particularly in response to Covid-19.

A commissioned review will encourage greater trust within the service team that the process is fair, that the findings have been independently assessed and recommendations are provided from a considered, neutral position.

Conflicts of Interest

(Any conflict of interest declared by any other Cabinet Member consulted in relation to the decision to be recorded).

None

Dispensations

(Any dispensation granted by the Monitoring Officer in respect of any declared conflict of interest to be noted).

None

Decision taken by:

Name: Councillor Adam Stokes
Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Date of Decision: 26 November 2020

Date of Publication of Record of Decision: 27 November 2020

Date decision effective (i.e. 5 days after the date of publication of record of decision unless subject to call-in by the Chairman of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee or any 5 members of the Council from any political groups):

5 December 2020