



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 28 November 2024

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

Cultural Strategy - Six Monthly Update

Report Author

Jade Porter, Arts and Cultural Services Manager

✉ jade.porter@southkesteven.gov.uk

Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the Cultural Strategy for South Kesteven, including progress with the accompanying Action Plan, and the achievement of Key Performance Indicators previously agreed.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 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.**

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Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?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 Should a bid to Arts Council be successful then the grant terms and conditions will need to be assessed and the receipt of funding be formally approved in line with the Council's Constitution and governance arrangements.

Completed by: Paul Sutton Interim Head of Finance (Deputy s151)

Procurement

- 1.2 The procurement process to secure a pantomime contract for the Guildhall Arts Centre is currently underway and the Cinema Programming Contract will be required to go out to tender before the end of the year.

Completed by: Helen Baldwin (Procurement Lead)

Legal and Governance

- 1.3 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: Graham Watts, Monitoring Officer

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 was developed during 2023. The draft Cultural 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 Cultural Strategy 2023 to 2026 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 were agreed against the key themes in the Cultural Strategy. It was proposed these Key Performance Indicators could be used to assess the implementation and effectiveness of the Cultural Strategy.

2.5 Since the adoption of the Cultural 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 and summarised below alongside the corresponding themes from the Cultural Strategy:

- A) Pay It Forward Scheme
- B) Outreach Activity
- C) Marketing
- D) Venues – Use of Space
- E) Bid to Arts Council England
- F) General Venue Updates
- G) Update on Key Performance Indicators

A) Pay it Forward Scheme

2.6 The Pay It Forward Scheme was launched in September 2023 and to date has received donations from patrons of the arts service in excess of £6900. 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 Since the last update, the following activity has been organised utilising the fund:

- Families and clients of 'Don't Lose Hope' in Bourne attended the 'Hey Beatles Performance at the Bourne Corn Exchange.
- 8 young people aged 8-14 attended Stamford Arts Centre Cinema to take part in an Art Pop Up session,
- A step by step art class was held at the St Barnabas Wellbeing Centre in Grantham, serving people who are experiencing grief.
- Arts Practitioner Martyn Bignell is currently delivering six activity sessions at Braeburn Lodge in the Deepings. The sessions, for residents in supported living including those living with dementia, are based around different themes and involve crafts, activities, games, and encourage conversation.

- Market Deeping Community Primary School will be attending the Guildhall Arts Centre pantomime in December 2024. 100 tickets are being provided free of charge for the students.

- 2.9 The use of the fund has received great feedback, some of the comments are noted below:

Art Class at Wellbeing Centre:

'Most of the people there are managing grief and although this is a unique journey for everyone, it is a benefit to escape from it for a few hours while the brain focuses on creating something as beautiful as these paintings.'

The artist who led the group was amazing and very patient. There were a few people that didn't feel they could paint the picture and were reluctant to do the more intricate steps. She explained that everyone's would be different and unique to them. She was right and the session resulted in some very proud people who couldn't wait to take them home to show their families and friends.

Thank you so much for the opportunity for doing this.'

Art Pop Up, Youth Group Cinema visits:

'Thank you once again for facilitating this for these young people. We have some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in the local area in our programme who are unable to access the arts/culture usually and experience considerable social ostracism and economic exclusion, so opportunities such as this are very meaningful.'

'Just wanted to drop a quick note with a very big thank you for last night's tickets. None of the group had been to the cinema - either ever or in a very long time, most of them had ever set foot in the arts centre.'

- 2.10 Further opportunities are being discussed with Inspire+ to provide interactive workshops at their Christmas Heath and Food camps.

B) Outreach Activity

- 2.11 The Council contribute just over £3500 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 with 13 performances taking place across six different venues within the district. The events planned include a range of drama, music and comedy. In the most recent health check report it has been highlighted that there is a desire to seek more locations in the Bourne and Deepings areas should this be possible. A copy of the health check report is provided at **Appendix One**.

- 2.12 The Music in Quiet Places programme was a success in the summer months of 2024, and planning has begun for the 2025 programme. The four music events take place in churches in rural areas of the district, in 2024 the locations were Barholm-on-Stowe (North Stamford), Long Bennington (North of Grantham), Aslackby (North of Bourne) and Thurlby (near The Deepings). The most recent series sold 424 tickets across the four events, with three of them being sold out which is an improvement on performance in 2023 when 355 tickets were sold, and in 2022 when 297 tickets were sold.
- 2.13 Thanks to a successful UKSPF bid, the Arts Team will bring Circo Rum Baba's show *The Whale* on tour across the District in early 2025. Audiences will be able to experience *The Whale* at Dysart Park in Grantham, The Rec in Stamford, The Red House Grounds in Bourne, and Jubilee Park in Deeping St James, from Friday through to Sunday with the events being completely free of charge. Inside the 18-foot whale, guests will embark on an immersive journey through an underwater world, encountering a diver, a leatherback turtle, and various sea creatures, while exploring the effects of plastic and litter on the ocean. This captivating show is not only visually engaging but also a powerful way to inspire young people to care for the environment.
- 2.14 A further successful UKSPF bid is supporting the *Our Place, Our Art* public art project which is launching across each of the four towns. An application process is currently taking place to secure professional local artists to lead the projects, with one artist being assigned to each town. Members of the local community in each town will be able to join workshops to collaboratively create a permanent public artwork that, not only celebrates their community and fosters creativity, but also brings together community ideas and efforts. The vision is to create something everyone can be proud of.

C) Marketing

Cultural Strategy Themes: Equality and Inclusion, Placemaking, Partnership and Collaboration, Cultural Venues and Programmes, and Value for Money

- 2.15 "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 town in locations like shops, cafes, and hairdressers, making them easily accessible for customers.
- 2.16 Launch days for venue brochures were trialled for the summer brochures in April 2024. Despite incentives being offered including vouchers and competitions, the data showed no increase in advance bookings or footfall on the day. In consideration of this brochure launches are now being supported by full-page advertisements in the relevant paper (Mercury/Journal), social media posts, and an e-shot to the mailing list.

- 2.17 Branding has been created across all three venues, with an ombre colour scheme attributed to each venue. This is reflected in What's on Guides, large print, and social media announcements and messages from the venues.
- 2.18 Alongside this, Guildhall and Stamford Arts Centres now have the 'What's On' diary 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.
- 2.19 The social media channels across the venues are not only used to promote shows, but are increasingly used to share non-promotional, engagement-focused posts. This approach leverages popular marketing tools like Facebook and Instagram reels, adding more video content that drives higher engagement and builds relationships with audiences, which hopefully translates into sales.
- 2.20 Social Media followers currently stand at:
- Guildhall Arts Centre Facebook: 6,200
Guildhall Arts Centre Instagram: 1,318
- Stamford Arts Centre Facebook: 9,200
Stamford Arts Centre Instagram: 3,300
- Bourne Corn Exchange Facebook: 2,200
- 2.21 The Guildhall and Stamford Arts Centres have historically used the Spektrix Box Office system for ticket sales. Events at The Bourne Exchange have now been added and are available through this system. This provides a range of reports, offering valuable data and insights into audience and marketing strategies for the Corn Exchange events. Consistently this data reveals the top four ways people discover arts service events: 1. Word of Mouth 2. Brochures 3. Website 4. Direct Email Notifications.
- 2.22 The Bourne Corn Exchange has now launched its own website, providing residents with a central hub to learn more about the venue. Previously its online presence was limited, and feedback showed that people found it challenging to access information on events and services offered at the Corn Exchange. With the new website visitors can now easily purchase tickets for events, and the venue can build a customer database to keep the community informed about upcoming activities. A regular local amateur dramatics group has recently moved over to the Spektrix tickets sales system to benefit from increased marketing and local presence.
- 2.23 To connect with underrepresented age groups, the two marketing officers recently attended Freshers' Day at Stamford College. Their focus was on promoting cinema events and the £5 ticket offer available to under 25s. The team successfully

encouraged over 150 students to sign up for our 'What's On' guides and marketing materials. These discounted cinema tickets aim to boost attendance among younger audiences at the venue.

- 2.24 Marketing strategies are continuously assessed using box office reports, QR code data, and feedback from our marketing questionnaires. Over the past year there has been a focus on re-evaluating available options to ensure the best value for money. Unfortunately, print ads in local newspapers have decreased in effectiveness over time, although they still serve well for press releases. Social media has proven effective, generating strong organic engagement, while boosted posts help extend the reach of sales-focused content. Flyer drops have also been arranged through the 'Links' Magazines which help the arts service to reach more houses outside of the town centres.
- 2.25 E-shots are direct emails sent to customers who have opted in to receive marketing materials. A combination of monthly updates for all subscribers, and targeted emails for specific segments, are utilised providing an effective way to inform and remind customers about upcoming events. Currently, the Guildhall email list includes 5,832 subscribers, Stamford Arts Centre has 11,871, and the newly established Bourne list has 196 subscribers.
- 2.26 The team are developing a marketing strategy for the venues that compiles the marketing and audience development activities undertaken by the team, the results we see from these, and potential future opportunities. It will also reflect on audience data and booking behaviours that are pulled from the box office system. The strategy will reflect on the importance of selling tickets and events, but also on brand awareness, building customer relationships, and raising awareness of the positive effects arts and culture has on quality of life. This work will be completed by April 2025.

D) Venues – Use of Space

Themes: Cultural Venues and Programmes, Value for Money, Equality and Inclusion

- 2.27 The venues have continued to host a wide variety of cultural activities through room hire bookings, including dance and youth drama classes, yoga/meditation, Tae Kwon Do, and dementia support groups. For activities that align with the Cultural Strategy and offer services not provided by the arts service, discounted rates are available on an individual basis.
- 2.28 The Guildhall Arts Centre recently hosted a workshop for free, organised by 'The Greater Lincolnshire Producers Network'. The workshop blended guidance with open discussions to explore the ethics and practical aspects of green fundraising. It covered foundational topics like understanding the Earth crisis,

and alternative ways to grow resources in environmentally friendly and ethical ways. This activity aligned with the Cultural Strategy by providing networking opportunities for local creatives, and was also a good opportunity to showcase the venue to people and companies who might be seeking venues in the future.

- 2.29 The Guildhall Arts Centre recently accommodated a free technical rehearsal in the theatre for a children's puppet show. In return for this, the company ran free workshops. This is an example of being able to trade space for time when it aligns with the Cultural Strategy and reaches target demographics.
- 2.30 Stamford Arts Centre joined the Northants and Rutland Open Studios Tour, hosting the exhibition free of charge. In return participating artists held public workshops as part of the event which was an excellent example of exchanging space for time. By joining this network the Arts Centre gallery gained substantial exposure, with the Gallery being prominently featured in the tour's brochure and marketing materials, attracting a high number of visitors throughout the event.
- 2.31 Bourne Corn Exchange recently hosted Barmpt Theatre, who had previously secured UKSPF funding through the Council. The venue was offered at no cost, using the event to promote bookings through our new website and attract young people and families to the space.
- 2.32 In addition to hosting arts activities, the venues are also utilised by businesses, local groups, and members of the public. All three venues regularly accommodate a variety of events, including parties, wedding receptions, wakes, conferences, and meetings. Room hire is continuously advertised through social media platforms and printed brochures.
- 2.33 Both the Guildhall and Stamford Arts Centres have coffee shops operating as tenants within their premises. These coffee shops benefit from the high footfall generated by events and frequently provide catering services for meetings and event bookings.
- 2.34 Digby's Coffee Shop, located within the Guildhall Arts Centre, also manages the events bar in the Ballroom and provides bar services for theatre performances.

E) Bid to Arts Council England

Themes: Value for Money, Placemaking, Equality and Inclusion

- 2.35 A consultation exercise has taken place to receive feedback from residents in Bourne and The Deepings, and artistic practitioners within South Kesteven to support a bid to Arts Council England. These areas were chosen as SKDC does not provide the same level of cultural opportunities as it does in Grantham and Stamford where there are traditional theatre venues. The Purpose of the consultation was to establish what arts and cultural activity already exists in

these areas, what activity residents currently travel to participate in, and what residents want to see more of in their local community. The consultation results are provided at **Appendix Two**.

- 2.36 The consultation has demonstrated the importance of providing arts activities and cultural events close to where people live should not be under-estimated. Perhaps not surprisingly, where people live correlates to the venues they visit. When asked about which of the venues they had visited, respondents were much more likely to have visited one of the Council's venues in the south of the district, than the north. The Guildhall Arts Centre in Grantham had been visited by 25 respondents -16.6% of the sample. Stamford Arts Centre had been visited by 157 respondents - 89.2% of the sample.
- 2.37 This was also the case when people were asked if they would be interested in taking part in more of the arts activities and cultural events listed, if they were available locally. The majority - eight out of ten respondents (159 or 80.7%) - said that they would.
- 2.38 A significant proportion of responses to the public survey were received from people from the Deepings and surrounding area – most notably from those who use the community library. Stressing the importance of reading as a cultural activity and the library as a venue where events could be provided, respondents using this facility were keen to promote the library as a community facility, and one where arts activities and events could be hosted, if funding was available.
- 2.39 Arts practitioners were in the main receptive to the idea of either extending their provision to include the areas of Bourne and the Deepings, or increasing the amount of provision in these areas. This is important as it illustrates a willingness by practitioners to improve provision in these areas – which if the application for Arts Council funding is successful will be important.

F) General Venue Updates

- 2.40 This year sees the introduction of a new, in-house pantomime for Stamford Arts Centre which has not hosted such an event since January 2022. The Venue Manger, Phil Norton, has vast experience in producing pantomimes and family shows. Mother Goose consists of 12 performances leading up to Christmas Eve and is currently on sale and meeting sales targets.
- 2.41 The Stamford Arts Centre Cinema programme has now moved across to the Independent Cinema Office (ICO) who work with film distributors to arrange deals and contracts for runs of films. Working with the ICO, and moving to monthly programmes, has enabled Stamford Arts Centre to show films closer to the release date and films are now being shown two weeks after release instead of

four weeks under the previous arrangement. This partnership has also allowed the arts centre to benefit from national marketing for films, and already an increase in ticket sales is being seen.

- 2.42 Due to the ICO's extensive contacts they were able to arrange for a preview screening for Stamford Art's Centre's 30 Years of Cinema Celebrations. The screening of Conclave was supported by two security guards for the evening and was shown the day before the film was released in America, and one month before the UK release. The evening showing sold out and was accompanied by local Artist Karen Neal running a fun, film themed craft workshop.
- 2.43 In July, Councillors were invited to tour all three artistic venues. The Councillors that attended got to see a little about how each venue worked, visiting the theatres as well as the other spaces within the venues.
- 2.44 Unfortunately, since early October the Guildhall Arts Centre ballroom has been temporarily closed whilst repairs are undertaken to the roof. Room hires have been relocated within the building wherever possible. Repairs to the ceiling and roof are expected to be completed by the end of December 2024.
- 2.45 Alongside these works, sections of the Guildhall Arts Centre roof are being repaired and restoration work is taking place to the clocktower. The work is anticipated to take about six months, the contractors aiming for completion by April 2025.
- 2.46 Stamford Arts Centre now has a modern lift for customers with limited mobility, replacing the previous one which had been decommissioned on health and safety grounds. The new lift was completed and became operational in October 2024, restoring access to the theatre and cinema for wheelchair users and those with mobility needs.
- 2.47 Efforts in programming and marketing are clearly making a positive impact on sales, and the team is continuously considering ways to offer diverse events that appeal to all, without oversaturating audiences or spreading attendance too thinly across events.
- 2.48 Bourne Corn Exchange has had the signage removed and replaced to ensure the building has a strong identity. The wording 'Bourne Corn Exchange' along with the SKDC logo is now front and centre, with the other services the venue hosts being listed below. There are four service boards containing opening hours and contact information at the entrance with information pertaining to the Library and Customer Services, Town Council, Registrar and Corn Exchange.

G) Update on Key Performance Indicators

2.49 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 first meeting is set for Monday 9 th December 2024 for creatives across SK to meet, network, and collaborate. The groups will aim to meet four times a year, once in each town, to facilitate creative conversations.
Placemaking	Number of outreach events held or supported by the Arts and Cultural Services team	Kesteven and Grantham Girls' School 6 th Form students studying performing arts attended the Guildhall for a career's day, touring the venue, watching technicians work and doing a question and answer session with staff. They went on to meet 'Hotbuckle' touring company who also hosted a Q&A with them.
		Plans are underway to host the Whale in four locations across the district as mentioned in the body of this report, as well as the Public Art project.
		The Pay it Forward Scheme has also allowed for outreach activities to take place, as well as bringing people into venues. (See Section A).

		Music in Quiet Places sold 424 tickets across the four events in 2024.
		Funding is being allocated to Rural Touring Scheme providing events in rural areas of SKDC – (See Section B)
Attendance Numbers at Venues		<p>For the same time period (January to end of October) the Arts Centres sold:</p> <p>Guildhall 2023: 15494 tickets Guildhall 2024: 19251 tickets (24% increase)</p> <p>Stamford 2023: 27172 tickets Stamford 2024: 29310 tickets (7% increase)</p> <p>Bourne: No comparison is available as the system has only just started being used. 13 events have been programmed this year with 994 tickets sold through Spektrix.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	Social prescribing service established and residents engaged	Work is being undertaken with Inspire+ to look at funding activities through HAF Camps
	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.
		The Cinema offering at Stamford has seen the addition of Audio Description Equipment, meaning visually impaired and blind audience

		members will have the story narrated to them through a set of personal headphones, in between dialogue in the movie.
		A bid has been submitted to further install 'Watch Word', a tool which provides customers with a set of glasses that display captions, widening their film choices and the showings they are able to attend as they no longer need to rely on captioned screening showings.
	Take Up of Rural Touring programme across district	The Scheme continues to be extremely well supported in South Kesteven with 13 performances taking place across 6 different venues within SK during programme year October 2024 – May 2025
Value for Money	Amount of external funding secured to support the service	UKSPF Grants have been successful to support outreach events and also Audio Description equipment to support the cinema service
		Consultation for Deepings and Bourne is completed and will be used to form the basis of an Arts Council Projects bid.
	Amount of subsidy required to support the service	This is under review and information will be available at the end of the financial year.

Cultural Venues and Programmes	Number of volunteering hours engaged in delivery of Arts and Cultural Events	Since the beginning of this financial year the total number of volunteer hours at the Guildhall Arts Centre have been 767 hours, between 41 volunteers.
		Stamford Arts Centre will be introducing volunteers in time for this year's newly established pantomime, to assist with cinema and eventually live performances moving forwards.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1. The report provides an update on work being undertaken since the adoption of the Cultural Strategy and Key Performance Indicators.

4. 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.

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. Background Papers

- 6.1 Cultural Strategy 2023-2026 report to cabinet published:
[Cultural Strategy 2023 to 2026.pdf](#)
- 6.2 Cultural Strategy Key Performance Indicators – Report to Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee, published 5 September 2023, available online at:

<https://moderngov.southkesteven.gov.uk/documents/s38848/Cultural%20Strategy%20KPIs.pdf>

7. Appendices

- 7.1 **Appendix One:** Health Check Report from Live and Local Rural Touring Programme
- 7.2 **Appendix Two:** Report outlining the results of the consultation on arts and cultural opportunities in Bourne and the Deepings.