



Tuesday 16 October 2025

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

Cultural Strategy Action Plan

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

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

Recommendations

The Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny 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.**
- 2. Agree to receive a report at the next meeting of the Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 'Thatcher Fest' including the costs incurred.**

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Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?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 There are no financial implications arising from this report. Activity is being delivered within existing budgets and financial performance is monitored on a monthly basis.

Completed by: David Scott – Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy s151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 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: James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager

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 (the Strategy) was developed during 2023. The draft 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 Strategy 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 Strategy. It was proposed these Key Performance Indicators would be used to assess the implementation and effectiveness of the Strategy.

2.5 Since the adoption of the 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 alongside other relevant updates:

- 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) Event Officer Role
- H) 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 totalling more than £13,200. 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:

- Children who are currently in foster care attended 'Persephone', a children's sensory performance about animals and nature in the Stamford Arts Centre Ballroom
- 'Sublime Science', a STEM based science workshop and performance was hosted at Inspire+ HAF Camps across all four towns, this included a workshop for the children in attendance. Approximately 210 children were engaged across the district.
- Teenagers from Art Pop Ups Youth Group attended the new Disney Lilo and Stitch Film at Stamford Arts Centre Cinema.

B) Outreach Activity

2.9 The Council contributes 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. The events which have taken place, and are planned, include a range of drama, music and comedy. The latest programme runs across 2025 and 2026, engaging 8 venues across the district with a total of 14 events. [Appendix One](#) provides a detailed report.

- 2.10 The Music in Quiet Places programme continues to be successful, with four events taking place across the district in rural churches. For the 2025 season, the locations were Hough-on-the Hill, Witham on the Hill, Folkingham and Greatford. The most recent series sold 495 tickets across the four events, which is an improvement on the performance in 2024 when 424 tickets were sold, and in 2023 when 355 tickets were sold.
- 2.11 Two family fun days were held in late August 2025 in Bourne and the Deepings. The Bourne Event was due to take place in the car park at the Corn Exchange, but due to the predicted wet weather, was moved inside.
- 2.12 The Bourne event consisted of:
 - Animal Club, an educational animal handling experience
 - Vegetable Critter Making with Joker Entertainment
 - Butterfly and Dragonfly crafts with Lincolnshire artist Hannah Peacock
 - Nature Lab, planting Lincolnshire wildlife seeds and using microscopes to inspect resin bugs
- 2.13 The Deepings event was arranged in conjunction with Deepings Library, who were hosting the Summer Reading Challenge, alongside Barmpot Theatre's 'To the Moon and Back', a short puppet performance inside the venue. For this day, the Council provided several activities on the Parish Council land opposite the library including:
 - Deepings Forest School, providing small craft activities and promoting their services to the community
 - Outwood CIC, creating wooden animals and teaching children basic woodwork and tools skills
 - Making Vegetable Critters with Joker Entertainment
 - Nature Lab, planting Lincolnshire wildlife seeds and using microscopes to inspect resin bugs
 - Craft activity including decorating sea creature themed pencil pots

2.14 Both days were marketed with the use of banners, posters on lampposts in the centre of each town, a press release from the Council's Communications Team, social media posts across the arts centre pages, listings on all three venue websites, as well as direct E-shots to family audiences.

2.15 The cost of the two days totalled just under £4,000 which was good value for money and offered free opportunities to children and their families. This has utilised the total outreach budget for the current financial year.

2.16 Both days were extremely well attended for the duration, with all the activities being consistently busy, sometimes with a queue to participate.

2.17 Staff ensured they spoke to as many attendees as possible throughout the day to get their feedback, some of which is captured below:

Bourne:

- Customers heard about the event through a range of channels, including social media and printed materials displayed around the town (banners, lamppost posters, flyers and posters).
- The QR codes included on marketing materials were highlighted as being particularly useful, as people often find it difficult to locate detailed event information.
- Many customers shared positive comments as they were leaving, with several expressing their appreciation for hosting the event.
- One customer remarked: *"Please continue to produce printed materials as I'm not on social media."*
- Attendees were satisfied with the balance between paid workshops/experiences (e.g. Animal Club at £8) and the free wraparound activities.
- Feedback included: *"It would be good to have more activities in Bourne. I don't drive, and the venue is within walking distance for most of the town. There isn't much available for mums to keep their children entertained."*
- Some families also mentioned that they were also considering attending the event in Deeping two days later.
- The range of activities successfully kept children engaged, with one family staying for almost three hours and participating in every activity.

- There was a noticeable absence of parents or guardians using mobile phones during the sessions – families appeared genuinely engaged.
- One customer commented that she often takes her grandson to free or low-cost local events, as he spends a lot of time with her, and found this type of activity particularly beneficial for them both.
- Another customer shared that they bring their child, who has autism, to smaller events like this, as larger-scale events with too much on offer can feel overwhelming.
- One attendee reported first seeing the event advertised on the Stamford Arts Centre website.
- Several customers also noted they had previously attended *The Whale* event earlier in the year.

Deepings:

- Outdoor activities were especially well received.
- One family shared their observation that there is currently a lack of arts-based activities for children in the Deepings.
- A customer praised the woodwork workshops delivered by Outwood CIC as an excellent idea, noting that children rarely have the chance to use tools such as hammers and nails.
- Another customer mentioned that they regularly use the library and enjoy the activities hosted there.
- Customers generally heard about the event via social media and the library's newsletter and email communications. Some did mention seeing the lamppost poster's throughout the town.

Thatcher Fest:

2.18 Through the Arts and Cultural Services Team, the Council have convened a group of stakeholders to mark the centenary of Margaret Thatcher's birth (13 October 2025). Between local groups, businesses and organisations, a week-long programme of events has been created in Grantham exploring her life, legacy, and the social, cultural and political history associated with her.

2.19 This has been a genuine collaboration and the groups involved include: Grantham Library, Grantham Museum, Grantham Civic Society, Grantham Labour Group, Christ Church, and Kesteven and Grantham Girls School. This approach lowers

risks to the Council in terms of delivery, financial exposure, and operational responsibility. It has also helped to activate community engagement, giving local groups the opportunity to participate, contributing to civic pride, heritage awareness, and local identity. It is intended to take forward this model of working and for the Council to deliver future festivals or events via coordination and partnership rather than direct delivery.

C) Marketing

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

- 2.20 "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 the towns in locations like shops, cafes, and hairdressers, making them easily accessible for customers.
- 2.21 Each venue has established branding, with large 'What's On' diary pages 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.
- 2.22 Across the venues, social media is being used not just for show promotion but also to deliver more interactive, engagement-driven content. More recently reels are being utilised to share short-form videos after events, which typically generates stronger audience interaction and helps nurture connections with followers. The aim is ultimately to drive ticket sales.
- 2.23 Social Media followers currently stand at:
 - Guildhall Arts Centre Facebook: 7,100
 - Guildhall Arts Centre Instagram: 1,535
 - Stamford Arts Centre Facebook: 9,700
 - Stamford Arts Centre Instagram: 4170
 - Bourne Corn Exchange Facebook: 2,600
- 2.24 The three venues use Spektrix as their box office ticketing system. This provides a range of reports, offering valuable data and insights. The top four ways audiences find out about events at the venues are:
 1. Word of Mouth, 2. Brochures, 3. Website and 4. Direct Email Notifications.

- 2.25 Hirers at Bourne Corn Exchange who choose to sell their tickets via the venue benefit from receiving marketing via our social media channels and being included on E-shots to customers on our database.
- 2.26 Stamford and Guildhall Arts Centres send monthly E-shots about upcoming events for all subscribers. Targeted emails are then sent to bookers based on their specific booking history to inform them of similar events they might enjoy. Currently, the Guildhall email list includes 9942 subscribers, Stamford Arts Centre has 12137, and the newly established Bourne list has 340 subscribers.
- 2.27 A Marketing and Communications Strategy was originally proposed for completion by April 2025. However, this has been delayed, whilst the core framework of marketing has been reviewed and new processes implemented over the past year. Marketing Officers are now in a position where tasks are scheduled and decision-making processes for events are underway. The Marketing and Communications Strategy is now expected to be written and finalised by April 2026.

D) Venues – Use of Space

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

- 2.28 The venues remain active hubs for a diverse mix of community and cultural activity through room hire arrangements. Events booked, range from dance and youth drama sessions to yoga, meditation, Tae Kwon Do, and dementia support groups. Where activities complement the Cultural Strategy, or bring opportunities beyond the core arts programme, reduced hire rates can be offered on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.29 Beyond arts programming, the venues are widely used by local organisations, businesses, and individuals. They frequently provide space for occasions such as parties, wedding receptions, wakes, conferences, and meetings. Promotion of room hire opportunities is ongoing, with regular visibility through both social media channels and printed brochures.
- 2.30 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 additional catering services for meetings and event bookings.
- 2.31 Digby's Coffee Shop, located within the Guildhall Arts Centre, continues to manage the events bar in the Ballroom and provides bar services for theatre performances. The bar in Stamford Arts Centre is managed in-house.

E) Bid to Arts Council England

Themes: Value for Money, Placemaking, Equality and Inclusion

- 2.32 A recent expression of interest was submitted to the Arts Council Creatives Fund, which was established to fund capital works in two strands, up to £1million and up to £10million.
- 2.33 The focus for the Arts Service became the roof works for the Gallery space which will require works to be undertaken within the next few years, and the potential addition of a lift to gain access to the upper floor offices, rehearsal studio and art room.
- 2.34 Due to the building's layout, installation of a lift would require the removal of a section of the roof and the addition of an external column to house the lift. These works are therefore interdependent and would be better undertaken concurrently.
- 2.35 Unfortunately the expression of interest was unsuccessful and the advice received was to not progress an application.
- 2.36 Other sources of funding will be explored if and when they arise. In the meantime, Officers are working with Property colleagues to plan the remedial works required to the Gallery roof.

F) General Venue Updates

- 2.37 Last year saw the first in house pantomime at Stamford Arts Centre, Mother Goose. The arts centre had not hosted a pantomime since January 2022. The feedback from the pantomime was extremely positive, with many families pleased there was a professional pantomime back at the venue.
- 2.38 This year's pantomime, Alice in Wonderland, is performing strongly, with ticket sales currently almost £2,000 ahead of last year's production of Mother Goose.
- 2.39 Stamford Cinema continues to see improved ticket sales with monthly programmes being programmed which is allowing films to be shown closer to release dates. The films to be shown in October have just been released and achieved just over £9,000 of sales within the first week.
- 2.40 Stamford Arts Centre is running the 'Into Film Festival' for the first time this November. This is a free, annual, nationwide celebration of film and education for 5-19 year olds. The festival aims to help educators bring learning to life for across the UK by inspiring young people to watch, understand and make films in new and creative ways.
- 2.41 The festival is being hosted at no direct cost to the arts centre, and all ticket bookings are entirely free to schools. The Into Film Festival programme features

thousands of film screenings, special events and previews, and includes interactive Q&A sessions with screen industry professionals, making it the perfect opportunity to support young people in enjoying the big screen experience. Stamford has one screening of David Attenborough's 'Ocean', and 'Kensuke's Kingdom' which has already been allocated to Billingborough School. The scheme is a great way to raise the profile of cinema within the arts centre.

- 2.42 The Guildhall Arts Centre's roof repairs are complete after the programme of works taking slightly longer due to additional works being required. These included the removal of the bell and turret for restoration works. The bell will be reinstated in 2026, with a function installed to allow the bell to be sounded on marked occasions.
- 2.43 Bourne Corn Exchange has recently had works completed to maintain and repair the drainage system to prevent recurring blockages due to the aged pipework.

G) Event Officer Role

- 2.44 A new Events Officer post has been created on a one-year fixed-term basis. This will provide maternity cover for the current Marketing and Events Officer, with the potential for the post to be made permanent subject to a successful budget bid for financial year 2026/27. The role will strengthen the Council's ability to deliver a high-quality, community-focused events programme in line with the Cultural Strategy and Corporate Plan.

The postholder will:

- Work directly with communities across the district to identify and respond to local cultural needs, particularly in areas with limited access to arts and cultural experiences.
- Use insight from the 2024 community surveys in Bourne and the Deepings as a baseline, ensuring programming reflects local aspirations and is spread across the district.
- Develop, manage, and safely deliver a wide range of cultural and community events that increase opportunities for engagement and participation.
- Support underserved areas of the district to ensure everyone has access to meaningful cultural experiences.
- Build strong partnerships with community groups, cultural organisations, and external providers to expand the reach and impact of Council-supported events.
- Promote events widely across multiple platforms, working closely with the Marketing team to maximise visibility, participation, and impact.

- Seek additional external funding opportunities to extend the programme's scope and sustainability.

2.45 This new post is designed to increase inclusivity, strengthen community identity, and raise the profile of arts and culture across South Kesteven. It provides an opportunity to test and demonstrate the value of a dedicated community-focused events function, with the ambition that, if successful, it will become an established role in future years.

H) Update on Key Performance Indicators

2.46 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	Since the last update, a second SK Creatives meeting was hosted and 18 artists from the local area attended. This was a significant increase from the first event. Two attendees subsequently hired the venue at an introductory rate to try and expand their businesses.
		The Arts Service has led on the Stakeholder group for 'Thatcher Fest', inviting and liaising with community groups and businesses to curate a series of events, providing a 'festival' feel. This approach has been received well by stakeholders and will be used as a model for similar future collaborations, including marking 300 years since Newton's death.

		Nature Day in Deepings was created in partnership with Deepings Library, and Deepings Forest School.
Placemaking	Number of outreach events held or supported by the Arts and Cultural Services team	The 'Into Film Festival' is due to be hosted at Stamford Arts Centre in November 2025.
		'Nature Makers' days were held in both Bourne and Stamford, providing free family activities
		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 495 tickets across the four events in 2024.
		Funding continues to be allocated to the Rural Touring Scheme providing events in rural areas of SKDC – (See Section B)
Attendance Numbers at Venues		For the same time period (1 st January to 15 th September) the Arts Centres sold: Guildhall 2024: 16,945 tickets Guildhall 2025: 16,283 Stamford 2024: 24,786 tickets Stamford 2025: 30,060 tickets Bourne 2024: 379 tickets sold through Spektrix. Bourne 2025: 810 tickets sold through Spektrix

Health and Wellbeing	Social prescribing service established and residents engaged	The Arts Service has worked alongside Inspire+ to provide Activities for HAF Camps using Pay it Forward donations
		Meetings have been set up with Lincolnshire County Council's HAF Camp Project Officer to establish partnership working on a wider level.
	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.
		Stamford Cinema now regularly uses the Audio Description and Watch Word equipment for cinema screenings, opening up accessibility to deaf and visually impaired audiences.
		Stamford Arts Centre continues to work with 'Watch Word' receiving updates on new products, and testing opportunities as we are their local venue.
	Take Up of Rural Touring programme across district	The Scheme continues to be extremely well supported in South Kesteven with fourteen performances planned to take place across eight different venues.

Value for Money	Amount of external funding secured to support the service	Future High Street Fund monies have been allocated to the Guildhall Arts Centre in order to improve the coffee shop furniture, aged curtains in the Ballroom, and provide a new theatre lighting desk to replace the current failing one to ensure the live programme of events can continue.
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 1137 hours, between 41 volunteers.
		Stamford Arts Centre held a volunteer information day in August 2025, and have had a series of volunteer applications through. These are currently being processed. Training will be undertaken to allow volunteers to commence work as secondary ushers.

3. Key Considerations

3.1. This report provides an update on work being undertaken since the adoption of the Cultural Strategy and the achievement of the agreed 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 and the accompanying Action Plan.

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.
- 5.2 It is important that the Council's arts service delivers value for money. Therefore, Members are requested to consider the effectiveness of the collaborative approach to 'Thatcher Fest' and the opportunities this presents for future events.

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** - Live and Local Rural Touring Report