



Thursday, 11 December 2025

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

Review of 'Thatcher Fest'

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To provide 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.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the contents of the report and the success of the partnership approach in alignment with the Council's Cultural Strategy.
2. Consider the potential for this model to be developed for future cultural events and festivals.

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication? No

What are the relevant corporate priorities? Connecting communities
Enabling economic opportunities
Effective council

Which wards are impacted? **Grantham 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 The financial implications of this initiative are set out at section 2.22 of the report. This relates to direct costs only.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and 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 activity delivered by the Council's Arts and Cultural Service.

Completed by: James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 The Council's Corporate Plan (2024 to 2027) contains a key priority of Connecting Communities. This is underpinned by the ambitions to deliver and facilitate a sustainable cultural offer and to celebrate and promote the strong heritage and rich culture of South Kesteven.
- 2.2 To support the Council's corporate aims a Cultural Strategy (the Strategy) for South Kesteven was developed and adopted by Cabinet on 11 July 2023. The Strategy focusses on a collaborative approach to the delivery of culture across the district and includes the aim that the Council should use its 'convening power to bring organisations together'.
- 2.3 The 100th anniversary of the birth of Margaret Thatcher was identified as a significant opportunity to raise the profile of Grantham, attracting visitors to the area and securing media interest. Between April and October 2025, the Council facilitated a partnership approach bringing together multiple cultural and community stakeholders with the aim of sharing plans and activity.
- 2.4 Rather than producing standalone Council-funded events, this model aligns with the Strategy's focus on SKDC acting as a facilitator of cultural activity, taking a

partnership approach to opportunities rather than directly delivering the whole event.

This report has been summarised under the following headings:

- A) Delivery Model and Stakeholder Involvement
- B) Programming of Events and Audience Data
- C) Finances
- D) Marketing and Press
- E) Summary

A) Delivery Model and Stakeholder Involvement

Cultural Strategy Themes: Partnership and Collaboration, Placemaking, Cultural Venues and Programmes

- 2.5. The Arts and Cultural Services Team convened and chaired monthly meetings with stakeholders, supporting the creation of event content, marketing timelines, and shared objectives.
- 2.6. Participants attending the stakeholder meetings included: Grantham Civic Society, Grantham Museum, Union Street Gallery, Grantham Library (LCC), Kesteven & Grantham Girls' School (KGGS), Christ Church and The Reading Room.
- 2.7. The Council's role utilised existing infrastructure and budgets (arts centre marketing, box office and venues), while partner organisations independently delivered and staffed their events, creating a "low-risk, high-value" collaboration.

B) Programme of Events and Audience Data

Cultural Strategy Themes: Equality and Inclusion, Cultural Venues and Programmes, Health & Wellbeing

- 2.8. A diverse set of events were curated from the stakeholder meetings, a breakdown of the events is below:-

SKDC Arts Centre Programmed Events:

- Thatcher Queen of Soho
- Gyles Brandreth, Quite a Centenary
- Edwina Currie Talks
- Dr James Cooper, Reagan and Thatcher and the Cold War
- QR Code Posters around the centre of town linked to Notable Thatcher speeches, videos and articles.
- 'Share Your Story' Video display

Future High Street Fund Events:

- Sounds of the 80s in the Market Place
- The Iron Lady Film Screening

Other External Events:

- The Thatcher Years Walking Tour, Grantham Civic Society
- Living Above the Shop, Grantham Dramatic Society
- Behind the Bronze by Cllr Graham Jeal, Grantham Museum Talk
- From Shop Floors to Shaping Legacies, Grantham Museum Talk
- Alternative Voices, Charmaine Morgan
- We are not For Turning, Grantham Labour Group
- Union Street Gallery Thatcher Exhibition
- Design a Postcard, Union Street Gallery (supported by SKDC)
- Grantham in the 1920s, Grantham Civic Society
- Exhibition of Artifacts and Document, Grantham Library

2.9. The table below shows a breakdown of the data provided by ticket purchasers for arts centre events and those events who elected to sell the tickets through the arts centre box office system.

| SKDC Events: | | | |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Event Name | Location | First Time Bookers | % of bookers not from SKDC |
| Queen of Soho | Guildhall Arts Centre | 36% | 27% |
| Edwina Currie | Guildhall Arts Centre | 20% | 17.9% |
| Dr James Cooper | Guildhall Arts Centre | 31% | 22.8% |
| Gyles Brandreth | Guildhall Arts Centre | 12% | 12.2% |
| Iron Lady | KGGS | 13% | 9.2% |
| Other Events Sold through Arts Centre | | | |
| Event Name | Location | First Time Bookers | % of bookers not from SKDC |
| Walking Tours | Various Town Locations | 55% | 41% |
| Alternative Voices | Museum | 30% | 5.6% |
| Living over the Shop | Museum and Christ Church | 9% | 9% |

2.10. The data shows that not only did the events attract a high number of audience members that had not attended before, but Thatcher Queen of Soho and the Walking tours were attended by a high number of people living outside of the district.

- 2.11. Fifty-three customers across all the events sold (SK and non-SK) opted to receive further mailings from the Arts Centre.
- 2.12. The programmed events at the Guildhall Arts Centre covered a number of genres welcoming a range of audience members. Notably, *Thatcher Queen of Soho* would not ordinarily perform in a venue of the size of the Guildhall and typically is only available for a multi night run. The Thatcher Fest branding allowed the company to recognise the value of participating in Grantham's centenary celebrations.
- 2.13. Dr James Cooper provided a factual and historical talk about Thatcher and her relationship with America - particularly Reagan. Dr Cooper is a senior lecturer, who worked with the Council providing educational outreach activity from York University.
- 2.14. The Dr James Cooper and Edwina Currie talks provided the opportunity to engage students in free academic events. A total of 53 students attended from Priory Ruskin Academy, Kesteven and Grantham Girl's School, and Queen Elizabeth Grammer School in Horncastle.
- 2.15. Edwina Currie offered to host two talks after hearing about Thatcher Fest from an early press release and contacted the Council requesting to get involved.
- 2.16. Gyles Brandreth sold out quickly with his current tour celebrating the centenary of Thatcher, Winnie the Pooh and Queen Elizabeth II. The arts centre worked with local independent book shop *The Reading Room* to provide book sales for the event. Gyles took the time to sign and make dedications in the books and *The Reading Room* successfully made over 70 book sales.
- 2.17. Alongside supporting The Reading Room, local independent company *Cameron's Crafts* were approached to produce Thatcher merchandise for the week's events. These continue to be available for sale from the arts centre as part of the Visitor Information Centre offer.
- 2.18. Sound of the 80s was a free to attend music event featuring three local musicians singing 80s songs popular during the time Thatcher was Prime Minister. This event was also used as a platform to promote breast-cancer awareness, highlighting that her government introduced Britain's first national screening programme. Rachael Bradley (SKDC Officer) engaged directly with the public, utilising the pink refuse vehicle, to encourage self-check awareness. This event was provided as part of the Grantham Marketplace events and was funded by the Council's allocation of Future High Street funding.
- 2.19. The Iron Lady film screenings were a successful joint event between Kesteven and Grantham Girl's School and the Council. The school also displayed a number of photos and documents from Thatcher's time at the school for film ticket holders

to look at prior to the screening. These were also on display for the Civic Society's walking tours.

C) Finances

Cultural Strategy Themes: Equality and Inclusion | Value for Money | Economy and Growth

- 2.20. The collaborative approach for Thatcher Fest aligned closely with the Cultural Strategy's ambition around Value for Money and Partnerships, using shared resources to achieve economic impact, community benefit and sustainable cultural delivery.
- 2.21. The arts centres programming budget allowed for high-quality, high-profile events to take place as part of Thatcher Fest. The money spent was within standard budget allocation and no extra funds were spent or allocated to these events.
- 2.22. The table below shows the total expenditure and income for SKDC in relation to Thatcher Fest:

| SKDC Expenditure and Income | Expenditure | Income | Surplus or Deficit |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Arts Centre Programmed Events | £11,430 | £12,126.68 | + £696.68 |
| External Events (£1 ticket commissions) | - | £189.00 | +£189.00 |
| Merchandise | £161.00 | £191.00 | +£30.00 |
| Marketing Materials (flyers, posters, banners) | £538 | | |
| TOTALS | £12,129.00 | £12,506.68 | +£377.68 |
| Future High Street Fund Expenditure | Expenditure | Income | Surplus or Deficit |
| Iron Lady Film | £190.00 | £139.86 | - £50.14 |
| Sounds of the 80s | £4,740.00 | Free Event | - |

D) Marketing and Press

Cultural Strategy Themes: Placemaking | Cultural Venues and Programmes | Economy and Growth

- 2.23. There was intensive media coverage of Thatcher Fest including local and international coverage. ITN, BBC East Midlands Today, BBC Look North, ITV Calendar and Bauer Media were among the broadcasters visiting, as well as French and German TV channel ARTE. Reuters and the Guardian sent reporters and photographers, with BBC Online also running news articles about the week's events.
- 2.24. The Council's Communications Team managed media relations, linking press to other event organisers including Grantham Civic Society, The Reading Room, Grantham Library and Union Street Gallery.
- 2.25. Most event organisers utilised these high-profile press opportunities to market their wider activity and work.
- 2.26. The level of media coverage achieved was exceptional and exceeded what could have been secured through paid advertising.
- 2.27. The *Grantham Journal* published a press release and pictures about the Sounds of the 80s event that took place in Grantham Market Place on Saturday 18 October.
- 2.28. Television coverage started on Sunday 12th October with the regional politics shows on *BBC TV* showcasing the festival and events.
- 2.29. *Politics North (Look North)* carried a special report filmed in the Guildhall Ballroom, where a selected panel of guests discussed the legacy of the Iron Lady. Cllrs Ashley Baxter, Lee Steptoe and Gareth Knight were among those participating.
- 2.30. The programme then ran an item from the evening news earlier in the week discussing the Right to Buy council house policy introduced by the Thatcher government of the 1980s. Cllrs Virginia Moran and Charmaine Morgan contributed.
- 2.31. *BBC East Midlands* welcomed former Junior Health Minister Edwina Currie into the studio to talk about the commemorative events being hosted in Grantham. Cllr Steptoe was also invited and took part in an interview about the former PM.
- 2.32. After attending events during the week, a positive travel and tourism article focusing on Grantham was published in *the Telegraph*.
- 2.33. Cllr Baxter supplied an Opinion piece for *Big Issue magazine*, which has subsequently published an edition focusing on the legacy of Margaret Thatcher.

- 2.34. Cllr Baxter and Cllr Sarah Trotter were interviewed on the national *BBC Radio 5 Live* discussion show on Monday night.
- 2.35. *BBC Radio Lincs* featured Cllr Baxter in an interview on the breakfast show and in further bulletins throughout the day.
- 2.36. Officers from the Council's Arts and Cultural Services managed the physical marketing and print, designing the artwork and collating all event information from the various group to produce flyers, banners, bus station adverts and a section within the What's On Guide to cover the activities.

E) Summary

- 2.37. A debrief meeting was held with all participating stakeholders who reported good feedback from their audiences and participants.
- 2.38. Grantham Dramatic Society expressed that they enjoyed the freedom to be in creative control, which in their opinion was an improvement from what they felt was top-down engagement during previous festivals.
- 2.39. The collaborative festival model shows strong potential for upcoming district priorities, including celebrations around the 300th anniversary of the death of Isaac Newton in 2027.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1. Thatcher Fest successfully fulfilled multiple aims within the Council's Cultural Strategy whilst significantly enhancing and promoting Grantham and the district of South Kesteven.
- 3.2. The collaborative approach reduced the financial and operational risk to the Council and the Arts and Cultural Services budget and associated resources.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. No other options were considered. The 100th anniversary of Margaret Thatcher's birth presented a significant opportunity to raise the profile of Grantham and stakeholders agreed to work collaboratively to maximise this.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1. Members are asked to note the positive collaborative work and the benefits this provided. This approach created cultural confidence, ownership and buy in from the other partners and providers.