

**Title of meeting:** Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport

**Subject:** BookFest update

**Date of meeting:** 8 February 2013

**Report by:** Head of City Development and Cultural Services

**Wards affected:** All

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**1. Requested by**

Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport

**2. Purpose**

2.1 To update the Cabinet Member on the 2012 Portsmouth BookFest

**3. Information Requested**

3.1 Portsmouth BookFest 2012 was a great success with high audience attendance, high satisfaction with events and excellent feedback from authors and publishers.

3.2 Highlights:

- The audience attendance figures from previous years were maintained (2,196 people attended) with audiences mostly from Portsmouth but also as far afield as Berkshire.
- 50% of the audience who filled in evaluation forms had never attended a book event before
- 97% of audience evaluations rated the author as 'excellent'
- 84% of audience evaluations rated the venue as 'excellent'
- Schools Library Service saw 1,346 pupils meet authors at schools events
- The link between BookFest and Libraries was strengthened this year through more library based events and high publicity visibility in libraries.
- Cross service working enabled publicity to be far reaching and meant there was a programme of events that were held in exciting and unusual Portsmouth venues.
- The committee is already receiving offers from publishers for authors in 2013.

3.3 Mission statement:

A new mission statement for BookFest was developed this year in order to create a strong vision for future years:

“Developing Portsmouth as a great literary city by promoting reading for pleasure and inspiring new audiences”

This will be achieved by:

- Increasing use of libraries and other cultural service providers in the city.
- Supporting the visitor economy with a promotional campaign to regenerate the city as a destination
- Hosting mass appeal events to engage Portsmouth readers and visitors and support book ownership and lifelong learning
- Targeted events planned, promoted, delivered and evaluated by local community groups.
- Using a wide range of accessible venues across the city.

- 3.4 BookFest saw its link with libraries very much strengthened this year. 24% of the BookFest audience heard about BookFest in libraries.
- 3.5 30 % of the audience bought their tickets in libraries, with Central, Southsea and North End libraries proving popular venues for ticket purchasing. In 2013 libraries will continue to act as ticket points.
- 3.6 30-50 % of the audience used a library card discount to buy their tickets. This could tell us two things, which we need to investigate further in 2013 and find a more accurate way of recording the information. Firstly, it could be that people are joining the library service when they buy tickets, or it could mean that we are attracting people to BookFest who are already library members anyway. In 2013 our Box Office will record at the point of ticket purchase whether the buyer joined the library specifically to obtain their BookFest discount. Interestingly, CSI Portsmouth saw by far the most audience attendance from non-library members so we could argue that CSI is the most successful event in terms of attracting non-library users.
- 3.7 Ten of the programmed events were held in libraries this year and this aspect of BookFest can be extended next year. There was some feedback from audience members that some of the library venues need investing in - specifically mentioned was room F in the Central Library- a bright large space that accommodates sixty but is looking careworn. Southsea Library is a popular space for events with the Kate Mosse event a sell out, but we have identified that the gallery space needs some investment to make it a properly functioning event space.
- 3.8 The BookFest publicity campaign at regional train stations (funded by Visitor Information Services) has supported the visitor economy in promoting Portsmouth as a festival destination. This investment is worthwhile because it attracts the attention of authors and publishers who will then often contact the committee to offer authors for events. The committee has identified that we are struggling to attract audiences from the Isle of Wight, Chichester and Southampton areas so these areas will be specifically targeted in 2013.

- 3.9 The use of the Square Tower, Aspex, the Historic Dockyard and the John Pounds Centre for events also enhanced the tourist reputation of Portsmouth with 84% of audience evaluations rating the venues as 'excellent'.
- 3.10 This year BookFest was very successful in securing some big name authors with mass appeal. James Herbert, Kate Mosse and Andy McNab are all high profile bestselling authors and this was reflected in the high ticket sales for these events with James Herbert and Kate Mosse sell outs. For 2013 we aim to continue attracting 3 or 4 big name authors which will be the focal point of a festival made up of community led events, where the community plan and arrange events that they are interested in.
- 3.11 This year there was an exact split of 50% of audiences having attended book events before and 50% not having attended before in the evaluation form data we received. This figure shows real progress in meeting BookFest's aims of engaging Portsmouth residents in reading.
- 3.12 Because of the success of high profile events (and previous success with authors such as Chris Ryan and Jacqueline Wilson) we are now finding that publishers are approaching BookFest with offers, which is a fantastic achievement and a great sign that BookFest has become a festival to watch and take note of.
- 3.13 Lifelong learning is an important part of BookFest and audiences had the opportunity to learn at a number of events. Vintage Readers' Day saw audiences learn about Victorian Britain, how a novel is made into film and how publishers choose book covers. ReCraft gave the audience the opportunity to learn how to make things from unwanted materials. The Catherine Wilkins Comedy workshop gave young people the chance to try out their stand up skills. Our community focused events – "Writing through Cancer", with Chris Higgins, "An evening with Tamsyn Murray", organised by local teenagers, special "story playtimes" for babies and toddlers and a signed poetry evening generated some exceptional feedback from audience members. Those who attended the signed poetry event had found it to be a hugely enjoyable evening and gratitude was expressed for hosting this kind of event.
- 3.14 The BookFest programme for schools was accessed by 13 different schools that brought a total of 1,346 pupils to meet authors. They were:
- Simon Cheshire, who spoke to 593 junior school pupils from 5 schools.
  - The double act that is the Two Steves (Skidmore & Barlow), who spoke to 579 Junior school pupils from 7 schools
  - Chris Higgins, who spoke to 174 pupils at City of Portsmouth Girls' School.

The response to the sessions was very positive. Simon Cheshire's carefully measured presentation about a writer's life and how to approach the writing was well received and The Two Steve's brought an energetic road show full of humour and fun which was great reading motivation. Chris Higgins established a very good rapport with the Y7 group at CPGS and was able to give extended readings from some of her books. You could hear a pin drop.

Evaluation forms are still coming in but so far teachers and librarians are telling us that pupils found some motivation for writing and strong motivation for reading in attending the sessions. Also there are a couple of comments that suggest individual pupils may have had a "light bulb" moment where they have been "turned on" to reading for the first time because of the author they heard. This is very heartening.

- 3.15 BookFest made £2,770 in book sales this year, which was an increase on last year's figures. Book sales were high at CSI Portsmouth and Andy McNab. In 2013 we will trial an approach with one or two of the big names authors where we include a copy of the author's book in the ticket price. This kind of ticket offer is becoming increasingly popular for book events across the country as it satisfies authors and publishers that library and festival events do generate sufficient book sales. This kind of ticket offer will not be suitable for all events however and we will keep the community event tickets at very low prices to ensure the festival is accessible.
- 3.16 Arts Council funding gave BookFest great flexibility to extend the range of promotion – for example, a poster campaign at selected Bus Stops in Portsmouth - and produce excellent quality brochures. We were also able to trial marketing through social media for the first time. It also gave us the chance to develop the link between BookFest and local residents by hiring a part-time community development worker who was able to assist groups with running and promoting their own events. This has been key in ensuring we target our residents equitably, particularly those who might not ordinarily attend book events or engage with libraries and cultural service providers in the city. We were also able to gift tickets and books to those who might not otherwise be able to attend the events, for example Charter Academy pupils attended the Girls' Night In, Andy McNab and Tamsyn Murray events.
- 3.17 Cross service working has reaped rewards for BookFest and for the services working on it. Partnership with the Museum and Records service saw an appearance at the Charles Dickens Birthplace Museum by Lucinda Dickens Hawksley, his great-great granddaughter. Dickens storytelling sessions also took place at Fratton Community Centre to local residents, rounding off this year's bicentenary celebrations.

In partnership with New Theatre Royal, BookFest commissioned four short plays in response to the book "Jilted Generation" that were performed by local drama groups. In partnership with Aspex Gallery, pupils from St George's school took part in workshops to create their own superhero comics. These will be displayed in the Gallery in early 2013.

Appendices: None

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
BookFest evaluation data	W drive/CUL/Libraries/ BookFest

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Signed by  
**Stephen Baily**  
Head of City Development and Cultural Services