

Agenda item: 

**Title of meeting:** Culture, Leisure and Sport Decision Meeting

**Date of meeting:** 13 December 2013

**Subject:** Creepy House - The Summer Reading Challenge

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

**Wards affected:** All

**Key decision:** No

**Full Council decision:** No

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**1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1** To inform the Cabinet Member on the remarkable success of Creepy House - the Summer Reading Challenge, 2013 and to make recommendations that will build on this success in future years.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1** That the Library Service should target those schools with the lowest participation levels in the Summer Reading Challenge and undertake interventions with those pupils in the summer term, specifically years 3 and 6. To achieve this, primary schools will be consulted at the next Primary Headteachers Conference, to seek agreement for additional resources to be allocated from the pupil premium. In the interim, the Library Service will engage in discussions with targeted schools.
- 2.2** That promotion of the Summer Reading Challenge continues to take place, delivered by Library Service staff in every Portsmouth primary school, during the summer term.
- 2.3** That the Library Service recruits twenty five per cent more young people as volunteers to support library staff in delivering the Challenge in 2014.

**3. Background**

- 3.1** The Summer Reading Challenge is an annual event run in 98% of public libraries in the UK. Children aged four to eleven can take part and the aim of the Challenge is for them to read at least six books from their local library during the summer holidays.

- 3.2 Each year, the Challenge has a different theme, with accompanying materials. This year's theme was "Creepy House", with artwork by Chris Riddell. It has been Portsmouth Library Service's most successful Challenge to date, with 1526 children reading at least 9156 books over the summer holidays. The number of children completing the Challenge this year represents one in ten of all primary school pupils in the city and is nearly a twenty seven per cent increase on last year.
- 3.2 Working in partnership with Museum and Records Service, the annual winners' event once again took place in Southsea Castle on Saturday 28 September. Over 4500 children and their families attended to celebrate their success and be presented with certificates and medals.
- 3.3 The Challenge continues to become more successful each year. From 2008 to 2013 the number of children completing has increased by a staggering 120 per cent. Delivering these outcomes involves a substantial team effort from all library staff, with the stock team responding to increased demand for children's materials, the Learning and Engagement team enthusing children at school assemblies and groups and the frontline library staff and volunteers running the Challenge in branches and coping with increased footfall. In the ten weeks from the 6<sup>th</sup> July to 14<sup>th</sup> September, over 68, 000 children's items were borrowed from libraries in Portsmouth.
- 3.4 Whilst the Challenge is promoted as a fun, positive and free activity for children and families, there is hard evidence that participation also makes a significant contribution to literacy attainment. This year, the Institute of Education reported that children who read for pleasure are likely to do significantly better at school than their peers. In 2009, UK Literacy Association research showed that taking part in the Challenge helps prevent the summer dip in literacy skills, which is particularly damaging for disadvantaged children.
- 3.5 It should be no surprise that increased usage of libraries has a positive impact on literacy. A 2011 report from the National Literacy Trust showed that young people who use a public library are nearly twice as likely to be above average readers than those who don't. The Challenge has also been successful in engaging boys with reading, which has long been a concern and remains a significant issue. Last year, the National Literacy Trust reported on the reading habits of boys, revealing that only 1 in 4 read outside class every day.
- 3.6 Poor literacy will impact negatively on our residents' ability to engage with the generational aspirations of the city. This year's OECD skills survey ranked 16-24 year-olds in England as 22nd out of 24 countries in terms of literacy skills. Initiatives like the Summer Reading Challenge are a practical way that libraries can begin to reverse this trend.

#### **4. Reasons for recommendations**

- 4.1** The Library Service collects Summer Reading Challenge participation data from all LEA schools. There is evidence to suggest that there is a clear correlation between pupil attainment in Portsmouth schools and pupil participation in the Summer Reading Challenge. Using this information, we can work with those schools with the lowest figures, registering pupils from targeted year groups and help them complete the Challenge before the summer holidays. This could be undertaken with a combination of library staff visits to individual schools and book exchange visits to local libraries. In order to meet the costs of additional materials and staff time to support these interventions, the Library Service would need financial support from the targeted schools. If individual schools are in agreement, we would aim to seek funding from the Pupil Premium. This is additional funding given to schools so that they can support their disadvantaged pupils and close the attainment gap between them and their peers. Each school could provide additional rewards or other incentives as they see fit.
- 4.2** We have evidence from the schools that having a member of library staff talk about the Challenge in assemblies makes a significant difference, generating excitement and enthusiasm. Communication from Copnor Junior School states that having someone from public libraries - rather than the usual teaching staff - reinforcing positive messages about reading is very powerful. These school visits build on long-standing promotional activity, whereby invitations are sent to every primary school pupil, as well as letters of explanation to headteachers and parent/carers. Library staff first undertook a substantial programme of promotional visits in 2012 and the number of children signing up for the Challenge increased by nearly fifty per cent on the previous year. After visiting all primary schools in 2013, the numbers of children signing up increased again by nearly twenty six per cent.
- 4.3** Given our aim to increase participation and bearing in mind ongoing resource constraints, the use of volunteers is crucial to support library staff in delivering the Challenge. 2014 will be the fourth year that the Library Service has worked with such volunteers, of which the vast majority are aged 11-19 years old. The number of these volunteers has doubled since 2011. Portsmouth Library Service will be applying for a share of funding that has been allocated to The Reading Agency by the Cabinet Office. This funding will be used to further develop our Reading Challenge volunteer offer and increase the number of volunteers in line with the increase of those children taking part in the Challenge.

#### **5. Equality impact assessment (EIA)**

- 5.1** A preliminary EIA has been completed and there was found to be no negative impacts on service users.

**6. Legal Implications**

6.1 There are no legal implications to this report.

**7. Head of Finance Comments**

7.1 The summer reading challenge is undertaken as part of the core service offered by the Library Service and as such it is funded from the approved budget.

7.2 A bid for approximately £900 will be made to the Reading Agency to support and further develop this offer.

7.3 It will be necessary to charge schools if additional library support is required in order to increase participation in the Summer Reading Challenge.

7.4 Following the agreement of this proposal with Headteachers, further work will be carried out to ensure that the charge levied will recover the cost of providing this extra service.

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

**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:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>
Summer Reading Challenge Impact Research Report	<a href="http://readingagency.org.uk/">http://readingagency.org.uk/</a>
Boy's Reading Commission Report	<a href="http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/">http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/</a>
OECD Survey of Adult Skills 2013	<a href="http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/">www.oecd.org/site/piaac/</a>
Institute of Education 2013	<a href="http://www.ioe.ac.uk/newsEvents/89938.html">http://www.ioe.ac.uk/newsEvents/89938.html</a>

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/  
rejected by Cabinet Member for Culture Leisure and Sport on 13 December 2013.

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Signed by:  
**Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport**