

Agenda item:

Title of meeting: Culture, Leisure and Sport Decision Meeting

Date of meeting: 7 February 2014

Subject: Portsmouth BookFest Report

Report by: Head of City Development and Cultural Services

Wards affected: All

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To inform the Cabinet Member of the success of the 2013 Portsmouth BookFest and to make recommendations for some changes to the festival.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the 2014 BookFest focusses on two or three larger scale events with bestselling authors and celebrities and smaller scale events organised with help from the community.**
- 2.2 **That an online ticketing system is identified as a matter of urgency for the 2014 Bookfest.**
- 2.3 **That involvement with the planning and the running of the festival from the local community and previous event attendees is continued.**
- 2.4 **That BookFest actively seeks external funding and sponsorship to deliver events by specified authors**

3. Background

3.1 Portsmouth BookFest has now been running for three years and has become a significant feature of the Portsmouth Cultural calendar. 2013 was the most successful year yet in terms of audience numbers with 1,150 people attending the public events and 1,477 children attending the schools events. The schools events also saw their biggest numbers of book sales with 534 books sold (0.36 books bought per child). This success can be attributed mainly to three high profile events with popular authors- Michael

Morpurgo (which generated an audience of 800), Dame Jacqueline Wilson (audience of 300) and CSI Portsmouth (audience of 120, which could have sold much more).

- 3.2** The festival has generated much publicity for the City both locally and further afield over the last three years. This year 91% of audiences came from Portsmouth area (postcode PO so this does include Gosport, Waterlooville etc.) and 9% of audiences from further afield. Jacqueline Wilson, Michael Morpurgo and CSI Portsmouth were the most successful in attracting audiences from outside the area with audiences coming from Surrey, Essex, Hertfordshire, London and Wales for these events. 16% of the CSI audience came from outside the PO area.
- 3.3** Attracting local residents to book events remains an important aim of BookFest and although numbers were smaller for other events, it was very encouraging to see different groups at these events and this was attributed mainly to publicising by the groups who ran the events. Dave Allen's two events- Pompey Pop and History of Hampshire County Cricket - saw more men at book events than in previous years. The Firestation Bookswap on Tour also saw more local younger people attending and the Portsmouth Writers' Hub Day of the Dead - an evening of ghost stories at the Square Tower- saw a mixed audience with again more young people attending. The key to attracting more mixed local audiences is in involving the community in the organisation and publicity of the events themselves. Although 91% of audiences came from the PO area, areas of inner Portsmouth (such as Charles Dickens area and Landport) were very poorly represented so it is important to build on these local contacts to encourage access. The Portsmouth Writers' Hub were very successful in generating audiences for their event with their local contacts. Dr Dave Allen's contacts also promoted the events and Dr Allen himself became a strong advocate for the festival.
- 3.4** Involving the local community also involved promoting local writing talent more and BookFest was particularly successful with this aspect in 2013. BookFest was proud to promote Will Sutton- formerly a dedicated audience member and now a published author. Will was guest author at Firestation Bookswap and Day of the Dead and his enthusiasm for the Festival saw him write a song for the launch, be one of the judges for the first Portsmouth First Fiction Award and promote the festival tirelessly. The promotion of local writing is key to making residents feel more involved in the festival and in encouraging talent to flourish.
- 3.5** Audience satisfaction with events and venues was very high with 96% rating events as 'excellent' and 0% as 'poor'. Audiences also enjoyed the opportunity to experience different local venues. The Square Tower remains a popular venue for medium sized events, the National Museum of the Royal Navy were very generous in their support of CSI Portsmouth this year - it was the first time we hosted the event in the Museum and it received much positive feedback. We struggle to host more events in the north of the city as there is a lack of larger sized venues there.

- 3.6** 69% of audience members who returned evaluations are library members and this is encouraging because it demonstrates that libraries are proving a good medium for promotion and it confirms a link between library use and attendance at literary events.
- 3.7** Some of the medium scale events were harder to sell and as a result we made a small net loss of £800 after all of the costs were paid. The medium scale events- published, fairly known authors- are very difficult to sell in Portsmouth and we recommend keeping these to a minimum in future so that we do not pay lots of costs on events that do not pay for themselves. Both the celebrity authors and the local authors sell well because the publicising in the case of the celebrity authors is very easy as these are such big names and in the case of local writers they have their own local contacts for publicity. As a festival we have also recognised that we have some work to do on making the festival more visible in the city. Online booking is also crucial in enabling people to buy tickets at a time that is convenient to them.

4. Reasons for recommendations

- 4.1** Over the last three years we have found that events with big name authors sell very well and that local community events are also popular because of the involvement of the community. Of the big name authors Jacqueline Wilson (800 people over 2 visits), Michael Morpurgo (800 people) and Andy McNab (over 100) have been our biggest selling single author events. Local community events such as this year's Day of the Dead- arranged and publicised by the Portsmouth Writers' Hub- attracted an audience of approx. fifty. It is much harder to sell medium popularity authors so with this in mind we recommend focussing on two or three big names for 2014 with small scale events organised by local people/groups. This will enable the committee to put their energies into securing bigger names and making sure the Festival is widely publicised.
- 4.2** It is vital that an online ticketing system is identified for BookFest as a matter of priority. Currently our tickets are sold over the telephone (which can only be manned Monday-Friday 9-5) and in libraries which have much longer opening hours but rely on the customer living in the city or being able to visit a library. We wish to maintain the flexibility of offering both telephone and sales in libraries (this also helps fulfil the aim of increasing library use) but in a time when people expect to be able to book tickets from the comfort of their own home at a time convenient to them, not having an online booking system is causing a hindrance and making the festival seem old fashioned. This year we received feedback on Twitter from customers and authors confused about why they could not find a link to buy tickets from the BookFest website. In order to increase ticket sales and move the festival into the future an online booking offer must be available.
- 4.3** 2013 was the first year we involved the local community more actively in BookFest. A group was made up of previous event attendees who had expressed an interest in helping at future festivals. Learning and Engagement

Manager Dave Percival met with the group on a regular basis to give support in generating ideas for events, writing pitches to publishers and planning the events. This help and input has proved very valuable as it has meant that local authors have been able to showcase their work. These group members often have a wide range of contacts so can spread the word about the festival and they also bring valuable help and expertise to the events themselves.

- 4.4 As identified in 3.7 and in 7.1 a small loss was made this year. By attracting sponsorship for specified events we will avoid a future loss. Sponsorship will also help the festival secure larger name authors and celebrities because they often require a fee. CSI Portsmouth has seen successful sponsorship for two years which has helped with costs.

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

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment is not required as recommendation does not have a negative impact on any of the protected characteristics as described in the Equality Act 2010.

6. **Legal Implications**

- 6.1 To ensure adequate Public and Employee Liability Insurance in place to protect against compensation claims made by attending public (as well as employee, helper or volunteer) for accidental bodily injury and damage to the event.

With regards to the online ticketing system, consideration be given to the Distance Selling Regulation under the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulation 2000 where there is a requirement to provide information about the services to customers and their cancellation rights. Although some contract for services such as event tickets cannot be cancelled by customers simply because they change their mind.

7. **Head of Finance Comments**

- 7.1 The 2014 Book Fest event generated income of £6,200 and incurred expenditure of £7,000. The projected net outturn at this stage is a loss of £800 which has been funded from the Library budget. This does not take into account the staff and support service costs associated with the event or the secondary income generated.

Research is being carried out to identify an online booking system that can manage the complexities of the BookFest events. Early research indicates that a commission charge of 6% would be payable on each ticket, however, other suppliers to the one currently being explored may charge differently. The cost of online ticket sales will be recovered through an increase in ticket prices.

It is anticipated that the proposed introduction of the online facility for the purchase of tickets, the revised format for next year's event and increased promotion will enable the event to realise a surplus in 2014.

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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:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport on 7 February 2014

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Signed by:
Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport