



NOTICE OF MEETING

CABINET MEMBER - THE LEADER (CULTURE, LEISURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO)

FRIDAY, 28 JULY 2023 AT 10.00 AM

COUNCIL CHAMBER - THE GUILDHALL, PORTSMOUTH

Telephone enquiries to Lisa Gallacher, Local Democracy Officer - Tel: 023 9283 4056
Email: lisa.gallacher@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

If any member of the public wishing to attend the meeting has access requirements, please notify the contact named above.

Membership

Councillor Steve Pitt (Leader)

Opposition Spokespeople

Councillor Russell Simpson
Councillor John Smith

Councillor Mary Vallely

(NB This agenda should be retained for future reference with the minutes of this meeting).

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Deputations by members of the public may be made on any item where a decision is going to be taken. The request should be made in writing to the contact officer (above) by 12 noon of the working day before the meeting and must include the purpose of the deputation (for example, for or against the recommendations). Email requests are accepted.

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence**
- 2 Declarations of members' interests**
- 3 Bookfest 2023 (Pages 3 - 6)**

Purpose

To report on Bookfest 2023, including the wide-ranging events that were delivered in-person and online, audience data, staffing and volunteering and plans for next year.

4 Cemetery Memorials Management Policy (Pages 7 - 12)

Purpose

To advise the Cabinet Member on the updated Memorial Safety Policy to be implemented in Portsmouth's cemeteries.

5 Countryside Officers update (Pages 13 - 26)

Purpose

To appraise the Cabinet Member of the key work progressed by the Countryside Team over the past year.

6 Portsmouth School Library Service (Pages 27 - 34)

Purpose

To provide The Leader with an overview of Portsmouth SLS, including funding, performance, resources, reader development activities and strategic partnerships.

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Agenda Item 3



THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

Title of meeting:	Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting
Subject:	Bookfest 2023
Date of meeting:	28 July 2023
Report by:	Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services
Wards affected:	All

1. Requested by

1.1 Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development

2. Purpose

- 2.1** To report on Bookfest 2023, including the wide-ranging events that were delivered in-person and online, audience data, staffing and volunteering and plans for next year.

3. Information Requested

3.1 Background and Overview

2023 was the thirteenth annual Portsmouth BookFest and marked a return to an almost entirely in-person festival following the pandemic.

A three-week festival was presented across a wide range of locations in Portsmouth, from Wymering to Southsea. Following feedback from the previous year to continue to offer a small selection of online events, we presented two events using the Zoom video conferencing platform.

The Hayling Island Bookshop continues to be the partner bookseller and the festival continues to aim to increase engagement with book and writing events to residents and visitors to the city, particularly to those who might not usually attend book events.



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3.2 Events

3.2.1 Audiences appeared to be delighted to be attending in person events again with audience satisfaction at most events very high and audiences taking the opportunity to contribute to events, sharing their own memories and experiences.

3.2.2 Children's Week This year for the first time the first week of the festival was dedicated entirely to children's events for the half term holiday and this was a great success with almost all the events fully booked and receiving positive feedback. Children's Week saw engagement from children and families across the whole city with events held at Cosham and North End Libraries as popular as similar events in the south of the city. The Gruffalo tour attracted a diverse audience and 121 children, and their parents/carers attended.

3.2.3 For the first time we offered rap workshops as part of an Arts Council England funded project led by a partner organisation. The workshops saw an enthusiastic response from local young people who gained confidence throughout the session to perform their poetry and rap to each other. This positive collaboration with local rappers Majid and Rishky has led to further collaboration on events for Refugee Week in libraries in June 2023. We plan to continue to offer a Children's Week at future festivals and remain committed to engaging older children and young people in the programme.

3.2.4 Adults' Programme Attendance at the adults' programme was generally high. The most popular event was the talk delivered by former Channel 4 and ITN journalist, Jon Snow. This event at the Eldon Building which was fully booked with a capacity audience of 200 people. Events with a local theme were also very popular. The Road to Karachi event (about the Portsmouth cookery school of the 1980s) was fully booked and the events about the Hovercraft and the first Isle of Wight festivals were also extremely popular. Former Portsmouth resident, Graham Hurley also had a very high attendance with an audience of fans packing the Menuhin Theatre. Writing workshops continue to be popular with high attendance at most of the workshops. The ghostly writing workshop at Wymering Manor was particularly successful with writers relishing the chance to write in such an unusual location.

3.2.5 Online events Despite audience feedback in 2021 and 2022 to continue with online events, we found audiences harder to engage in both of our online Zoom events. It seems audiences are less interested in attending online events now the pandemic has ended. Having said that, online events can present a chance to feature authors who may not be able to travel to Portsmouth and give us the opportunity to offer events to those who may be housebound so it will be something we continue to explore and offer, albeit on a smaller scale.



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3.3 Audience demographics

3.3.1 Audience location: The festival remains overwhelmingly a local festival, with 91% of audiences who provided feedback living in the PO postcode area. Of the PO postcodes, PO6 (Cosham, Drayton and Farlington) were most represented, followed by PO4 and PO5 (Eastney and Southsea). It's been pleasing to see events attended by more people from the north of the city than in previous years. This may be due to a greater range of events taking place in the north of the city such as the Wymering Manor event and the children's events in Cosham and North End Libraries. 9% of audiences came from areas outside the PO area with Southampton, Guildford and Brighton being quoted and even as far afield as Reading and Cambridge. It's unsurprising that most of the audience live in the city as we do not have budget to advertise widely outside of the city. However, we do make maximum use of our social media to reach audiences further afield.

3.3.2 Audience ages: As we have seen with previous festivals, the largest demographic of audiences for BookFest are in the 60+ category. However, we have seen this year a notable increase in the numbers of people in the 31-40 and 41-50 age groups. Looking at the data it seems some of the writing workshop attracted a younger audience, as did the Jon Snow event. Attendance in the 11-20 age group was also higher this year due to the wider range of events on offer for this age group at the Children's Week such as the rap workshop and the writing workshops.

3.3.3 Audience gender: BookFest events continue to be attended by more people who identify as female rather than male. There has been a notable increase in the number of people who identify as male attending events this year. Men were particularly drawn to the events about Arthur Conan Doyle, City Space, Iconicon (architecture), the Hovercraft, Jon Snow and the Isle of Wight Festival and we will continue to offer events that may attract a male audience.

3.3.4 Diversity: We continue to work hard to present more diverse events. This year the rap workshop and the Jon Snow event attracted a more diverse audience, and the LGBT panel event was also very popular.



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3.4 Staffing and volunteering

The festival is a key activity for libraries and one that a relatively small group of staff manage to put together, working hard to ensure audiences and authors enjoy their events. As it continues to be very staff intensive, we continue to look at ways we can most effectively manage events. This year we were delighted to support many local authors with events but found ourselves to be juggling sometimes three or four hour events in one evening. Next year, we plan to bring the local author events into one weekend so that we can ensure we have enough staff resource to manage events. We are also tremendously grateful for all the support that volunteers give us and seek to grow the number of volunteers in 2024.

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Signed by
Stephen Baily
Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory 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

Agenda Item 4



THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

Title of meeting:	Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting
Subject:	Cemetery Memorial Management Policy
Date of meeting:	28 July 2023
Report by:	Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services
Wards affected:	All

1. Requested by Councillor Steve Pitt

1.1 Purpose

To advise the Cabinet Member on the updated Memorial Safety Policy to be implemented in Portsmouth's cemeteries.

2. Background

2.1 Historically there have been several accidents in cemeteries around the UK, some of which have resulted in fatalities, due to memorials being unsafe. Whilst there have not been any fatalities in Portsmouth, it is prudent to formally adopt a memorial safety procedure. The procedure outlined in this report has been updated in consideration of professional standards (see 2.3 below) and also benchmarked against the adopted procedures of other local authorities.

2.2 Any memorial purchased and erected on a grave space is owned by the registered grave owner and it is that person or persons who are ultimately responsible for its upkeep and maintenance. Whilst the memorials are the responsibility of the registered grave owner, Portsmouth City Council has a responsibility for ensuring that its sites are safe for both staff to work in and for the public to visit.

2.3 The Memorial Management Policy sets out the actions the Council will take to ensure its cemeteries remain safe. All works carried out are following guidance from The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management ("ICCM") and in accordance with good industry practice. The order of works to be carried out will be determined by a site-based risk assessment with higher priority areas being undertaken first.

3. Memorial Fixing

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- 3.1** All memorials over 24.5 inches in height must be fixed to, and fully compliant, with the current British Standard (BS8415). This also extends to ANY memorial over 24.5 inches that is being re-fixed following an interment or removal for any other reason.
- 3.2** The key requirements are that memorials must be fixed to an approved and suitable foundation and must be further secured using an approved locking or anchoring system. Further details on the materials and methods used for fixing and re-fixing of memorials can be found at www.bramm-uk.org.
- 3.3** Any re-fixing or repair works to memorials must be completed by a British Register of Accredited Memorial Mason ("BRAMM" - or other equivalent scheme). Temporary works to make memorials safe and remove the risk of danger will be undertaken by trained cemetery staff or registered memorial masons as required.
- 3.4** All memorials in Portsmouth Cemeteries have been fitted using the current approved anchoring/locking system since 2012 and are checked within twelve months following installation.

4. Memorial Inspections

- 4.1** All memorials over 24 inches in height in all cemeteries will be inspected by trained staff at least once during a rolling 5 year period to assess their safety. This will be done through both a visual assessment and a basic hand test to determine if there is movement in the memorial and to what extent.
- 4.2** Prior to any inspections being undertaken notices will be placed around the cemetery to notify the public accordingly.
- 4.3** Memorials under 24 inches in height in all cemeteries are deemed as "low risk" of causing injury and will be checked on a visual basis only.
- 4.4** The individual undertaking the assessment will make the decision on the memorials overall safety based on a dynamic risk assessment for which they have been trained. Once inspected each memorial will fall into one of three categories, detailed as follows:

RED – Memorial is unsafe and poses a risk and will require immediate attention to make safe and/or protect from the public.

AMBER – Memorial is safe but there are minor concerns and it should be reassessed in 12 months' time to ensure it has not deteriorated further.

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GREEN – Memorial is Safe and should be re-inspected in 5 years as part of the next round of inspections or as part of any other check that may occur, for example when checking memorials around a planned burial ahead of excavation of the grave.

4.5 Staff undertaking the inspections will record the details of every memorial and an assessment of its safety using the categories above. These details will be recorded onto the Bereavement Services administration system. The details will include:

- Date of Inspection
- Name of Inspector
- Grave Identification (Section and Number)
- Safety colour of memorial (red, amber, green)
- Details of any actions taken

5. Actions Post Inspection

5.1 Should a Memorial be identified as RED and fail the inspection, staff will need to take immediate action to make that memorial temporarily safe or cordon it off until permanent repairs can be made by the grave owner. These actions will be based on several factors and the best solution will be administered by the memorial inspection team based on their assessment of the memorial and the surrounding area. Any works will be undertaken by registered memorial masons as required. These actions may include:

5.1.1 Laying the memorial flat – This will be the preferred course of action and in most cases this will invariably be where a memorial can be laid down on or within an existing kerb set so as not to cause a new trip hazard. A notice will be placed near to the memorial advising that such action has occurred.

5.1.2 Staked and Banded – The memorial will be fastened tight to a wooden post which will act as a temporary support. The banding will also hold a warning notice. The stake and band will be re-inspected every 12 months to ensure neither have deteriorated.

5.1.3 Monolith Conversion – This involves digging out a depth roughly one third of the overall height of the memorial from the last joint in order that it can be sunk into the ground and made safe. The memorial will have a suitable material wrapped around the part under the ground and a memorial warning notice will be added to the grave.

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Due to foundations, it may be necessary for the memorial to be moved slightly forward into the grave space to avoid existing foundations.

5.1.4 Cordoned Off – In some cases it may be necessary to cordon off a particular memorial or an area containing several memorials due to their safety. Warning signs will be attached to any cordon placed around a memorial or group of memorials.

5.1.5 Removal – In extreme cases it may be necessary to remove a memorial from the grave and place into storage if none of the above options are suitable.

5.2 All of the above are regarded as ‘Temporary Fixes’ and should not be seen as a permanent solution to deal with an unsafe memorial - the intention is to reduce or remove the risk of a memorial causing harm or damage to someone.

5.3 Very large memorials, those over 8 feet will be visually assessed and if any concerns are recorded the memorial will be cordoned off and if it is safe and possible to do so the cemetery staff will carry out works to ensure the memorials are safe. If the cemetery staff are not able to make the memorial safe, arrangements will be made for a specialist contractor to undertake an inspection and provide a detailed report including costs and options to make safe.

6. Informing Grave Owners

6.1 The cemeteries team will endeavour to contact the grave owner where any action has been taken due to a memorial failing a safety inspection. Correspondence will only be sent providing that the grave owner is not recorded as being in the grave or if it is apparent that the registered address no longer exists. For any memorials over 50 years of age, no correspondence will be sent but a notice will be left on the grave space for a period of not less than 12 months.

6.2 For any memorial that fails an inspection that has been installed within the previous 6 years, the service will contact the memorial mason directly to request repairs be made to ensure the memorial is fully compliant with BS8415.

6.3 Following adoption of this policy by the Council, the service will:

6.3.1 communicate the policy on the Council website;

6.3.2 inform customers in the post burial information pack;

7. Grave Owners Responsibilities



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- 7.1** The registered grave owner has a responsibility to ensure the memorial is made safe through being properly re-fixed to the current BS8415 standard and works must be undertaken by a qualified and BRAMM registered Memorial Mason. *'Do it yourself'* repairs by families will not be permitted.
- 7.2** All costs associated with organising a memorial to be repaired, including the reversal of any works undertaken by Cemetery Services staff, remain the responsibility of the grave owner.

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Signed by
Stephen Baily
Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory 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

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Agenda Item 5



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(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

Title of meeting:	Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting
Subject:	Countryside Officers update
Date of meeting:	28 July 2023
Report by:	Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services
Wards affected:	All

1. **Requested by** the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development.

2. **Purpose:** to appraise the Cabinet Member of the key work progressed by the Countryside Team over the past year.

3. Information Requested:

3.1. The Council's Countryside Officers have a remit to manage several key natural sites throughout the city. As identified in the Council's draft Parks Strategy [Parks Strategy draft 2022.pdf \(portsmouth.gov.uk\)](#), these sites play a central role in the provision of green and open space in the city and offer several benefits to residents of and visitors to Portsmouth. The management of the countryside sites complements the city vision, *Imagine Portsmouth 2040*, by contributing to 'green city', 'healthy city' and 'lifelong learning' objectives. There is a natural arc of countryside sites, from Mountbatten via Hilsea Lines following down the eastern side of the city, taking in Tangier and Baffins, Milton Common, Fort Cumberland and Eastney Beach. In addition there are numerous countryside 'pockets' within the predominantly urban areas of the city.

3.2. The work of the Countryside Officers balances other workstreams that the Council is undertaking to promote and protect our environment, through other portfolios such as the portfolio for Climate Change and Greening the City and work across the Council being undertaken by other departments, including: Regulatory Services (air quality), Public Health, Greening and Climate Officers. For example, Public Health are currently looking to introduce a cross cutting working group to deliver a Greening Infrastructure Delivery Plan, comprising Parks, Planning, Strategy



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(Climate), Transport, Housing and external stakeholders, which will be a sub-group of the Climate Programme Board.

3.3. The Countryside Officers sit within the Parks Service and form a diverse team with a broad range of skills, experience and specialist knowledge:

3.3.1. Countryside Officer (inner city)

The officer for the inner city has a degree in botany and zoology, together with postgraduate level qualification in wildlife management and conservation. They have worked in local authorities in the north-east of England and conservation charities before coming to work for Portsmouth. They have a particular interest in enhancing and promoting biodiversity, particularly through outdoor education opportunities. The officer is a member of the Countryside Management Association.

3.3.2. Countryside Officer (Baffins and Milton)

The officer for Baffins and Milton has a degree in ecology. They initially volunteered at Hilsea Lines, then worked in environmental education for an activity centre. They previously held the role of Countryside Officer for an organisation which served a local authority in Kent before coming to Portsmouth. They have a particular interest in botany and orchids together with public engagement opportunities. The officer is a member of the Countryside Management Association.

3.3.3. Countryside Officer (Portsdown)

The officer for Portsdown has a degree in botany and in M.Sc in ecology and is also a Member of the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management. Prior to university they worked as an agricultural contractor and in Environmental Health. They volunteered for the jointly funded Portsdown Hill Countryside Management Project that preceded Portsmouth unitary authority arrangement. They progressed to a paid post as Project Officer for the PHCMP, then Countryside Officer following the change to Unitary status. They have a specialist interest in restoring biodiversity to a wider environment.

3.3.4. Countryside Officer (Hilsea Lines)

The officer for Hilsea Lines is educated to university and postgraduate level. They initially worked for the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (now



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[TCV | The Conservation Volunteers](#)) and they are a specialist in volunteer training. They have worked as a Countryside Officer at local authorities in Shropshire and Fareham, before coming to Portsmouth. The officer is based at Hilsea but covers other sites such as Fort Cumberland.

3.4. The work of the Countryside team can be subdivided into three workstreams:

- 3.4.1. Site Biodiversity
- 3.4.2. Volunteer Engagement
- 3.4.3. Outreach and education opportunities.

3.5. Site Biodiversity

Several themes emerge from an exploration of the biodiversity management for all the sites. The restoration of species rich grassland is important for biodiversity outcomes, together with light penetration and a protection and development of the reedbed wetlands environment. To allow wildlife to move freely, habitat connection is key together with supporting local species and provenance. The work undertaken to improve the sites also enhances the visitor experience. Spending time in the city's parks and open spaces will benefit the health and wellbeing of visitors of all ages and abilities.

3.5.1. **Portsdown Hill** is of considerable ecological significance, due to its calcareous (chalk) grassland, with 55 hectares of the Council managed land designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The non SSSI part of the site is also managed sympathetically to wildlife to complement and extend the wildlife of the SSSI. Calcareous grassland is a Priority Habitat recognised by the Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP). There are Priority Habitats both on and off the SSSI, bringing visual and biological diversity to the area. It is unusual to have a site of such rich biodiversity directly adjacent to an urban area which includes numerous species of butterfly, moth, ladybird, grasshopper, cricket, beetle, bee, wasp, fungi and spider, together with amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals and hundreds of flowering plants.

3.5.2. The Countryside Officer implements a management plan to maintain the calcareous grassland. This includes undertaking a balance of scrub control to maintain the biodiversity of the grassland habitat, but also make the site more accessible for visitors. The scrub control and limited mowing operations also generate organic material which is incorporated into tree planting areas. For



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scrub control, the aim is to mimic grazing, by undertaking 'conservation grazing' where possible, borrowing livestock.

- 3.5.3. Some areas of heavily mown grassland have been removed from the committed mowing regime to allow it to flower into the summer. This benefits pollinators and the many invertebrates that are associated with taller grass communities. In the autumn the grass is cut and cleared to maintain botanical diversity by preventing the build up of a thatch of vegetation and excessive soil nutrients that encourage dominant grasses. Repeated annual clearance reduces soil fertility and thus increases the number of plant species. A mosaic of grassland and scrub habitats is achieved to maximise the variety of light and moisture regimes. An example of biological enrichment is the re-emergence of the Lizard Orchid, an endangered species (listed as a Schedule 8 species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act).
- 3.5.4. A species rich grassland, such as that found at Portsdown, has many deep rooted perennial plants and is a good sequester of carbon.^{1 2} The Countryside Officer at Portsdown has also undertaken the control of invasive species, such as cotoneaster and holm oak as such species prevent native plants from flourishing and their associated insects are lost as a result.
- 3.5.5. Tree and hedge planting has also been undertaken, as part of an integrated and considered approach to connect habitats. For example, scrub plants in grassland have been relocated to form hedges. When increasing biodiversity, a regenerative approach has been undertaken, by using seed from elsewhere on the Hill. Local plant provenance is important, as it maintains local ecotypes adapted to the area which the insects are adapted to feeding on. This keeps the genetic 'local' code (standardising will weaken the existing flora).
- 3.5.6. The Countryside Officer, with volunteers and ecological consultants, undertakes regular monitoring to record wildlife. This includes butterfly transects from April to September which is reported to the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme³ and a bumblebee transect from March to September. The officers also use iRecord⁴ for plant species which feeds into a national database which is verified by relevant experts.

¹ [Carbon Storage and Sequestration by Habitat 2021 - NERR094 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk/nature-conservation/science-research/carbon-storage-and-sequestration-by-habitat-2021)

² [Grassland | The Wildlife Trusts](#)

³ [Welcome to the UKBMS | UKBMS](#)

⁴ [Home | iRecord](#)



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- 3.5.7. Continued engagement is also undertaken by the Countryside Officer with other agencies, for the purpose of protecting the rich biodiversity of the site. This includes work with utility companies to mitigate damage associated with large infrastructure projects down to vegetation clearance near power cables. It is important to consider the Hill as a geographical unit and protect the entirety of the site and the Council have a legal requirement to protect the SSSI. The site benefits from an Environmental Stewardship agreement, for arable reversion to species rich grassland in the Top Field and other Council sites including Farlington Triangle, Fort Cumberland and Milton Common. The SSSI and adjacent sites are in a Countryside Stewardship agreement. Other successful grant applications have been made for equipment and projects.
- 3.5.8. **Baffins Pond** site comprises both amenity close cropped grass (some exempt from cutting October to March for the benefit of overwintering Brent Geese) together with wild areas surrounding the pond comprising reedbeds, herbaceous plants and trees, a small orchard, secondary woodland fragments and a wild meadow. The marginal habitat of reedbed and marsh surrounding the pond supports a rich diversity of flora and fauna at the site and planned management is undertaken to maintain and improve this. Whips (young trees) have been planted to the east of the wildflower meadow and form part of the management plan. Consideration is underway for further areas of wildflower meadow to be created in balance with the need for sports and recreation amenity grassland. Staggs Wood comprises secondary deciduous woodland and contains a strong population of ramsons and Spanish bluebells, the bluebells being a non-native species. Scrub across the site provides valuable nesting ground for bird species. Priority species at the site include both brent geese and three types of pipistrelle bat.
- 3.5.9. The pond itself is a delicate ecosystem; as a closed water source, high nutrients in the water can be fatal to dogs, fish and waterfowl. This is because some algae species promoted by the high nutrient are toxic, not the nutrients themselves. The high level of nutrient is exacerbated by artificial feeding of the waterfowl. The lack of inflow means the pond is prone to low oxygen levels, which can also cause death of waterfowl. The Countryside Officer continues to maintain the measures in place to mitigate the risks to the pond ecosystem. This includes artificial aeration systems together with maintenance of the reedbeds which are a natural bioremediation for the nutrient levels.
- 3.5.10. The Countryside Officer is seeking to improve the quality of the wetlands; the reedbeds, sedges and grasses around the pond for the benefit of the habitat



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structure which promote species including the Marsh Marigold and Water Mint. This also makes the pond more aesthetically pleasing.

3.5.11. For the wildflower meadow, work is underway to reduce the nutrient rich grassland (as with the other sites). The first year of an annual cut (reduced regime) saw a reduction in tussock grass with some wildflowers starting to come through and should see a year-on-year improvement.

3.5.12. **Milton Common** comprises rough grassland, amenity grassland, scrubland and wetland/reedbeds and includes a good diversity of species. There are over 140 bird species (including transient visitors), over 22 species of butterfly and many invertebrates including types of wasp, damselfly, grasshopper and cricket and hundreds of moths. Mammals at the site include hedgehog, shrews, voles, foxes, rabbits and bats. The site has designation as a Site of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC). The Countryside Officer undertakes various activities to manage the area for the promotion of biodiversity outcomes. This includes activities such as the spread of the cutting times of the grassland, to promote the development of a diversity of grass species which has included bee orchids in the past. Grassland is not cut in May or June, to minimise disturbance to nesting birds. Scrubland is also managed to produce a varied environment, to appeal to a broad range of species.

3.5.13. Scrubland presents a limited habitat and therefore the correct proportion of scrub is important to enable wildlife to thrive. Currently the Common presents around 44% scrub and the management plan indicates to reduce this to 20%. Too much scrub also forces the wildlife closer to the urban area. Where brambles have been reduced and the seed bed recovered, benefits have included the Bee Orchid, Tufted Vetch and Wild Marjoram.

3.5.14. The site was used in the 1960s as a municipal refuse site and as such there are some exposed concrete blocks. By managing these and bringing them together in piles, they support reptiles, amphibians and small mammals.

3.5.15. The site also contains reedbeds which provide habitat to both aquatic invertebrates and breeding and roosting sites for several birds. The boundary reedbeds at the pond helps protect the pond environment and the reedbeds hold the life of the pond, by providing habitat for nesting birds and insects. As a previous landfill site, the reedbeds also provide bioremediation by extracting nitrates and filtering out heavy metals that could have been leaching from the landfill.



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- 3.5.16. **Hilsea Lines** has incredibly rich ecology for an urban area, with high species numbers for plants, birds, butterflies, flies, wasps, bees and ants, moths, dragonflies and damselflies. An added dimension is brought to the site in that it is a Scheduled Monument and Conservation Area, listed with Historic England, having been constructed originally in the sixteenth century to guard the crossing at Ports Creek, the current lines being finished in 1871.⁵
- 3.5.17. The Lines comprise a mosaic of habitats: woodland, species rich grassland, wildflower meadow, and wet environments (Hilsea Moat and Ports Creek). The overall objective of the management of the site is to improve and manage the ecological diversity. The site contains a population of White Letter Hairstreak butterflies which feed on the Elm trees. However, the trees are infected with Dutch Elm disease and die when they get older. By introducing a phased coppice regime, a proportion of the Elm is retained for use by the butterfly. The site is also managed for Ash dieback, which is a well-known concern at many wooded sites in the south-east. The management of Ash dieback and other invasive non-native species is a significant cost to the UK public sector.⁶
- 3.5.18. The meadows at Hilsea Lines were previously grazed. These are now managed by an annual cut and collect which lowers the nutrient level allowing more of the less invasive meadow species to grow. In recent years this natural regeneration has led to hundreds of Common Spotted Orchids and has thinned out the common grasses for a broader biodiverse meadow. Areas of natural grassland have an important role to play in carbon capture as indicated above regarding other sites.
- 3.5.19. Over 7 kilometres of pathways have been completed, with a hardcore surfacing which has made the pathways more level and accessible. This has directed users towards the main path and vegetation has started to grow in from the edges, making the pathways much more aesthetically pleasing. The tree line has also been thinned, which has allowed more light through, which, together with the development of an under-canopy of hazel trees and field maple, has allowed more insects and birds to thrive. Without the management regime, the woodland floor becomes dominated by ivy. Lighter pathways also increase the sense of safety for visitors.

⁵ [Hilsea Lines, Non Civil Parish - 1001861 | Historic England](#)

⁶ [Japanese knotweed and other invasive species may be costing UK £4bn a year | Invasive species | The Guardian](#)



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- 3.5.20. The Countryside Officer and volunteer team have also developed habitat piles which provide refuge for the beetle population. The site management is also considering work to expand the reedbeds, which are both a good species habitat and provide oxygen to the water.
- 3.5.21. The site has seen considerable littering improvement following the introduction of wire mesh bins.
- 3.5.22. The **inner city** Countryside Officer seeks to prioritise wildlife improvement works for biodiversity outcomes at Portsmouth City Council parks and open spaces within the predominantly urban areas. The purpose is to continue to connect habitats to allow wildlife to move between inner city green pockets. The below table summarises recent biodiversity projects undertaken at city areas:

Location	Actions
Stamshaw Park	Areas identified for no mow, replacement of damaged trees.
White Cloud Park	Areas identified for no mow, scrub planting, hedge planting.
Gatcombe Park	Areas identified for hedgerow, native wildflower planting and seeding, scrub planting.
Tipner Coastal Walkway, Mountbatten	Revised maintenance management plan (to allow for native planting), addition of scrub, removal of dense nettles to create wildflower friendly areas.
Alexandra Park	Areas identified for hedgerow. Creation of wildflower corridor of no mow area along verge.
Highgrove open space, Drayton	90 metres of hedgerow and wildflowers planted, working collaboratively with the Landscape Architect team.
Bridge Road, Hilsea	Areas identified for no mow, scrub planting.
Victoria Park	Working with the project team to advise on biodiversity enhancement. Butterfly transect survey established.
Orchard Park	Hedgerow planting.
Fratton Bridge	Planting of native cherry tree and hedgerow (with art commission and interpretation board).
Cosham Library garden	Proposal for planting of hedgerow, wildflowers, no mow area (with activities for children).



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3.6. Engagement of volunteers

- 3.6.1. Volunteers are an essential part of the service for many of the sites, contributing significantly to the site management outcome in return for physical and mental wellbeing benefits and an opportunity to focus their interest in nature. The total recorded volunteer hours for the Countryside team for year 2022/2023 is 10,808 hours, which equates to 5.6 full time equivalent over the year.
- 3.6.2. Volunteers bring skills, experience and enthusiasm and develop a sense of community ownership with the site through the operation of a co-production working model.
- 3.6.3. At **Hilsea Lines**, there are 3 types of volunteer groups engaged:
- 3.6.3.1. Volunteer work party: Several individuals have been engaged in this group for many years. They undertake tasks at the direction of the Countryside Officer, including fencing, pruning, clearing and pathway construction. This has provided opportunities to both bring back into use previous skills gained during employment, together with learning new skills. The volunteers themselves enjoy being out in the fresh air working together, making a difference, exploring their interest in nature and for the most part, are appreciated by the public. Contractors are brought in on occasion to undertake tasks, where this is proportionate to the risk level.
- 3.6.3.2. Volunteers from Interaction: Portsmouth Interaction ([Portsmouth Interaction - BH Live Active](#)) forms part of the BH Live offer to support those experiencing poor mental health. Hilsea Lines supports a group of conservation volunteers via Interaction referral. Activities undertaken include litter picking, maintenance of way markers and low level strimming, thereby building confidence and new skills.
- 3.6.3.3. Volunteer wardens: Over the years the Countryside Officer has built up a relationship with several interested persons local to the area. These individuals have taken on a volunteer warden responsibility, which includes litter picking and reporting any concerns or issues identified on site to the Countryside Officer.



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- 3.6.4. The **inner city** Countryside Officer is developing a core city wide volunteer group. Many of the biodiversity projects they have undertaken have involved volunteers, including the Tipner Coastal Walkway, the Victoria Park butterfly transect, working with the Orchard Park community group and the Cosham Library community. The officer has also been supporting the Friends of Old Portsmouth Association by advising and assisting with small conservation projects including the correct native planting requirements for raised planters in the area. Work has also been undertaken with the Portsmouth Climate Action group of community volunteers, at Marine Court green space. Such projects are working well on a co-production model, increasing the sense of community ownership and pride in local place.
- 3.6.5. There are two distinct groups of volunteers at **Portsmouthdown**:
- 3.6.5.1. Volunteer work party attends the hill every week and undertakes tasks such as pruning, litter collection, fence construction and repair and planting. There is a subgroup of this group which comprises mostly retirees, and conservation students from the agricultural college. The subgroup take on tasks in their own time as 'volunteer operatives' to enable them to follow larger tasks through to completion.
- 3.6.5.2. The volunteers at Portsmouthdown also have the opportunity to be engaged with the outreach programme via Friends of Portsmouthdown Hill. This has included 'thank you' events including outings to other managed sites such as the Slindon Estate.
- 3.6.6. The volunteer programme at **Milton Common** includes scrub clearance in the winter and grassland management in the summer. There is also activity to rake and pile small sections of the chalk bund (resulting from the former landfill site), which, being calcareous, can support a diversity of species.
- 3.6.7. Baffins Pond Association is a self-run organisation which has been promoting and protecting the area for several years. The Countryside Officer for **Baffins** has started a volunteer group which complements this through a conservation volunteers group. The winter programme for the volunteers comprises wetlands and meadow clearance, with summer activities including sweeping and edging. The conservation volunteers for Milton and Baffins mostly comprise retirees and individuals working part time, together with shift workers. Corporate volunteer days have also been held at these sites.



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3.7. Outreach and education opportunities

- 3.7.1. Outreach and education can include the provision of learning opportunities for people of all ages either through activities, formal talks or other forms of promotion and publicity. The outdoor environment provides an ideal education setting and many local schools have been engaged with the service, together with education partners outside the school setting such as the museums and libraries of the city.
- 3.7.2. The Countryside Officer for **Portsdown** is ex-officio on the committee for Friends of Portsdown Hill⁷. There is a regular programme run by FoPH to promote the care and enjoyment of the site, which includes walks and events in the summer months and visiting speakers for talks in the winter months. Undertakings by FoPH include completing a historical walk guide and interpretation boards.
- 3.7.3. The officer has also undertaken talks to other external groups including the Portsmouth Beekeepers, local gardening groups and Inner Wheel Club. Outreach for younger audiences has included bughunts, school visits and working with Cumberland House.
- 3.7.4. **Hilsea Lines** provides several education opportunities. The site offers two week placements to students from Sparshott College which forms part of their agricultural course. It also provides work placements to year 10 students. Several volunteers (not students) have moved into job roles with the Council's Grounds Maintenance service.
- 3.7.5. The Lines also facilitates a Forest School environment together with a dipping pond (both facilities having been constructed by the volunteers). There are woodland trails available and the site is accessible by radar key activated gates if required.
- 3.7.6. At weekends and during holiday periods, activities are also run for family groups. The Countryside Officer is currently engaged in a project to convert one of the casemates into an education room which will enable the expansion of the educational opportunities on offer.
- 3.7.7. Activities at Hilsea, such as tree planting, have included invitations to the local community to take part.

⁷ [Friends of Portsdown Hill : Home](#)



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- 3.7.8. The Countryside Officer for the Lines offers bespoke walks and talks when requested. This has included offers for Sustrans (Home - Sustrans.org.uk), the military academy, business away days and students. The Officer has also promoted the Lines on BBC Radio Solent.
- 3.7.9. The **inner city** Countryside Officer has undertaken several projects with local schools. The project at Peronne Road Hilsea is engaging with Highbury Primary School to plant wildflower seed together after collecting it at Hilsea Lines. Wildflower planting at Long Curtain Moat was undertaken with the local school to the area, St. Jude's Primary. Craneswater School were engaged to provide artwork for the Canoe Lake Interpretation Board which focuses on educating the local community and visitors about the swan diet. The café were also engaged in this project together with Cumberland House and the Mobile Library, and a self-led children's trail is being developed for the summer.
- 3.7.10. The inner city Countryside Officer has developed children's activities as part of community outreach events. This has included working collaboratively with the Library Service at last year's Summer Reading Challenge event to promote pollination through children's activities and craft. A further event was held in Victoria Park reading the children's book '*Tidy*' by Emily Gravett and holding a subsequent scavenger hunt. A '*Love Our Pollinators*' event was held in conjunction with Cumberland House Museum where numerous stalls included a bee workshop, the presence of the local beekeepers' association and children had the opportunity to create seed bombs.
- 3.7.11. Further collaboration with Cumberland House Museum has included a '*Coastal Celebration*' event, which brought together groups including Hampshire Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Friends of Langstone Harbour, Final Straw and Solent Bird Aware. This included talks and workshops for families and those with a coastal interest with the aim of bringing more awareness of the coastal environment.
- 3.7.12. Outreach by the inner city Countryside Officer has also included talks to Friends of Portsdown Hill and RSPB Portsmouth about the role of the Countryside Officer and the rationale behind particular projects. The officer also set up and maintains a social media presence on Instagram, Nature of Portsmouth <https://www.instagram.com/natureofportsmouth/>.
- 3.7.13. The Countryside Officer for **Baffins** and **Milton** has given talks and promotional material to organisations including RSPB Portsmouth, Milton



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Neighbourhood Forum and Friends of Portsdown Hill. They have also been present at local events including Milton Picnic on the Green (organised by the Forum) which comprised a community event where the officer had a stall and collaborated with Cumberland House for material. Similarly, the officer has had a stall at Baffins Fun Day community event (organised by Baffins Pond Association).

- 3.7.14. Baffins Pond site also includes an artificial pond for dipping and education purposes. Reconstruction of this pond was completed in spring 2023 with a view to introducing flora at a future point.

.....
Signed by
Stephen Baily
Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory 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

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Title of meeting: Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting

Subject: Portsmouth School Library Service

Date of meeting: 28 July 2023

Report by: Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services

Wards affected: All

1. Summary

Part of the wider Portsmouth Library and Archive Service the School Library Service (SLS) is a highly regarded Traded Service of Portsmouth City Council.

2. Purpose of report

2.1 To provide The Leader with an overview of Portsmouth SLS, including funding, performance, resources, reader development activities and strategic partnerships.

3. Background

3.1 Funding of Portsmouth School Library Service (SLS)

The SLS operates on a cost recovery basis and obtains all its income by selling subscription services and additional services to schools. The majority of this is derived from the annual subscription to the standard service offered by means of a Service Level Agreement. This is overseen by a Service Review Group which has the following representation:

- Primary Head Teacher
- Secondary School Senior Leader
- Primary and secondary English leads
- Primary and secondary librarians
- Public Library and Archive Service Manager
- SLS Manager

3.2. Service description

The Portsmouth School Library Service (SLS) provides library services to local schools to promote high standards of literacy and learning in all key stages. This is achieved by:

- Access to books, through the provision of loans, eBook and eAudio platform and facilitating purchase via the bookshop
- Reader development strategies
- Library related advice, practical support and training

3.3 The service is made available to primary, special and secondary schools in Portsmouth and is also available to West Sussex secondary schools. The following subscribe:

- 100% buy in from Portsmouth primary and secondary schools
- Special schools
- Independent schools
- West Sussex secondary schools

3.4 The SLS is a reading focused service. The majority of activity is centred on the supply, exchange, organisation and promotion of high-quality books and resources to support the curriculum and pupils interests and reader development activities for schools.

4. Performance

4.1 Take up on all aspects of the service continues to be high. This is illustrated by increases in the size of the book stock, the staff hours spent in schools, the percentage of books exchanged and the number of children experiencing reader development events. (See Appendices one and two).

4.2 Portsmouth SLS is a highly regarded service by schools and this is evidenced by the rate of buy-back which is above the UL norm for school library services. Unlike public libraries, school libraries are not statutory and many local authorities do not have a school library service. Success in Portsmouth can be attributed to continuous positive feedback from SLS satisfaction surveys and ongoing informal feedback within the process of day-to-day engagement with school staff. (See Appendix three).

4.3 The SLS in Portsmouth is distinctively different from many others, in part due to the geographical nature of the city of Portsmouth and the close proximity of subscribers to the SLS Centre at Paulsgrove. This has enabled the service to ensure costs are kept low while a book stock of exceptional high quality and dynamic and responsive support is offered to schools. Our stock offer continues to be fresh and relevant because of our ability to replace a high number of books each year. Another distinctive element of the service is the range of pro-active reader development initiatives which are offered city wide. Strategies such as the Portsmouth Book Awards, Portsmouth Literature Quizzes, Meet the Author events, EYFS Read with Me Initiative and Year 6 Big City Read encourage reading, literacy development and celebrate the joy of reading for pleasure and learning. These initiatives are delivered in partnership with internal and external

bodies with shared agendas around reading, literacy, the promotion of books and positive educational outcomes for children and young people..

5. Portsmouth SLS Resources

- 5.1 Portsmouth SLS has a book stock of over 118,000 books providing schools with unique access to the very latest titles and responding rapidly to the changing needs of schools. Subscribing schools can exchange up to 60% of their titles every year ensuring that schools' stock enhances the curriculum and supports reading for pleasure. Book stock includes: board books, picture books, fiction for all key stages, non-fiction, single and dual language, Braille and large print, Dyslexia friendly and books pre-labelled for the Accelerated Reader scheme. The Service delivers and collects from schools on a weekly basis. Schools can visit the SLS Centre, email or telephone to select or request books. Alternatively the knowledgeable SLS staff can select books on the school's behalf.
- 5.2 Schools have access to the SLS eBook and eAudio platform with nearly 4,000 resources. Logins are provided for all pupils at Key Stages Two, Three and Four. The focus for this resource is reading for pleasure and the majority of the collection is fiction with some leisure non-fiction. This resource caters for those pupils who would prefer the convenience of reading on a device. A monthly eBook newsletter is sent to schools informing them of new titles added to the platform and usage by their pupils. Currently just over 80% of loans are made up of eBooks and just under 20% made up from eAudio books.
- 5.3 The SLS provides high quality texts to support literacy and learning. A range of books are available to support 'greater depth' in reading and writing and SLS staff advise school staff on suitable texts for year groups. The SLS has a large collection of books to support SEND and ELSAs who work in schools. These books provide invaluable support for staff working with these pupils. The SLS supports those schools using Accelerated Reader a reading programme that gives teachers the information they need to monitor students' reading practice and make informed decisions to guide their future learning. The SLS also works with Portsmouth School Improvement to support those schools who involved in Destination Reader, a pedagogical based approach to teaching reading through engaging daily, structured sessions that support children to read with greater understanding, enjoyment and purpose.
- 5.4 The SLS provides regular support and advice to all staff in schools through regular newsletters, network meetings, new book lists, parent newsletters. The SLS also provides training, advice and practical support with all aspects of running a school library and classroom collections.
- 5.5 An online bookshop gives schools the opportunity to purchase books at 30% discount.

6. Reader Development Activities

6.1 Portsmouth Book Awards

The SLS organises three book awards: The Year 1 Picture Book Award; The Year 5 Book Award and the Year 8/9 Longer Novel Award. The Year 1 and Year 5 Book Awards are designed as mass participation activities. In the region of 2,000 pupils take part in the Year 1 Picture Book Award every year which culminates with a visit to selected schools by the winning author and illustrator. The Year 5 Book Award involves over 1,500 pupils and culminates in an exciting celebration at The Kings Theatre. The Longer Novel Award involves around 150 pupils and culminates in a celebration at The University of Portsmouth Park Building involving the winning author. All three awards aim to promote reading for pleasure and broaden children's reading experiences.

6.2 Meet the Author/Illustrator events

The SLS organises an annual programme of author and illustrator events in schools. These events provide opportunities to and broaden children's reading experiences and provide inspiration for reading and writing both in school and at home.

6.3 Literature Quizzes

The SLS organises three Literature Quizzes: Portsmouth Junior Quiz; Portsmouth Secondary Quiz and the Chichester Literature Quiz. These events show case four authors and their books and provide inspiration for pupils for their own writing and further reading.

6.4 Read with Me Initiative

The School Library Service and Early Years Team have worked together to launch an early reading initiative that will span settings, parents and schools and create a bridge of learning. Ten carefully chosen core books form 'recommended reads' for pre-schoolers in their early years settings in the summer term. These books will then be available in public libraries and easily identifiable for families to borrow as part of the annual Summer Reading Challenge in the city and a range of materials will be available to parents to support them in understanding the importance of reading these books to their children. Children will then be able to access these same books as they start school in Year R.

6.5 Year 6 Big City Read Initiative

The Year 6 Big City Read started in 2021 and is a city-wide initiative open to all schools in Portsmouth. This initiative aims to: create a shared reading experience; promote book ownership; promote reading for transition and promote involvement in the Summer Reading Challenge. Each child participating is gifted a copy of the focus book by their school and pupils take part in a live stream event with the author.

7. Partnerships

- 7.1 The School Library Service works closely with other services and organisations supporting and promoting initiatives enabling schools have access to rich and varied resources to support literacy and learning. These partnerships include amongst others: The Public Library Service, School Improvement Service, Portsmouth Education Partnership, The National Literacy Trust, The University of Portsmouth, EMAS, Kings Theatre, The Hayling Island Book Shop, authors illustrators and publishers.

Signed by:

Stephen Baily

Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Performance figures 2021/2022 and 2022/23

Appendix 2 Performance figures for reader development activities

Appendix 3 Feedback and comments on SLS activities

Appendix 1

Performance figures 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 to date

Performance factor	2021/2022	2022/2023
Number of SLS books in schools	78,875	69,746 to date
Percentage of SLS books exchanged during the year	41%	37% to date
Books issued	47,105	42,164 to date
Books selected by SLS and issued	32,405	25,244 to date
% of issues selected by SLS staff	68.8%	59.9% to date
SLS staff level	3 FTE	3 FTE

Appendix 2

Performance figures reader development activities 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 to date

Performance factor	2021/2022	2022/2023
Number of author/illustrator events organised by the SLS	27	30
Number of children attending Meet the Author events	8,529	12,644
Number of schools involved in Meet the Author events	38	40
Number of children participating in Portsmouth Book Awards for Year 1, 5 and 8/9 pupils	3,435	3,761
Number of schools participating in Portsmouth Book Awards	61	67
Number of children participating in Y6 Big City Read	2670	2442
Number of schools participating in Y6 Big City Read	37	36
Number of children participating in Literature Quizzes	224	308
Number of schools participating in Literature Quizzes	24	30

Appendix 3

Feedback and comments on SLS and SLS activities

"Thanks for all your support and involvement" - Head Teacher

"Many thanks for all you do - we couldn't do it without this service!" - Primary school librarian

"A huge thank you for everything you have done this year. The library service has made such a difference to the school and the breath of books that the school can now access". - Primary English Lead

"A big thank you to you and all your team. All your hard work to promote and encourage young readers is priceless". - Junior school English Lead

"A huge Thank You to the entire SLS team for always providing such a fabulous service. You are all such a supportive, knowledgeable and friendly bunch :) Here's to many more interactions in the next academic year!" - Junior school librarian

"The children have enjoyed exploring new books and voting for their favourite!" - Year 5 teacher on Year 5 Book Award

"The children have really enjoyed listening to and sharing the stories with one another". - Year 1 teacher on Year 1 Picture Book Award