

Title of meeting: Culture, Leisure and Sport Decision Meeting

Subject: BookFest 2017 Update Report

Date of meeting: 21 July 2017

Report by: Director of Culture and City Development

Wards affected: All

1. Requested by
Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport

2. Purpose

2.1 To update the Cabinet Member on the success of the 2017 Portsmouth BookFest.

3. Information Requested

3.1 Background to BookFest

- 3.1.1 Portsmouth BookFest was launched in 2010 by the Library Service working in partnership with independent bookseller The Hayling Island Bookshop with the aim of promoting reading for pleasure and encouraging attendance at book events by those who might not ordinarily attend book events.
- 3.1.2 2017 was the sixth festival and since 2010 it has gone from strength to strength. It now sees collaboration with Portsmouth University, Portsmouth Writers' Hub and a number of local venues.
- 3.1.3 Originally the festival ran every October/November but in 2016 the festival was moved to February/March. This move took place because BookFest was in competition with too many other high profile events and festivals happening in the autumn in the city and beyond. The move has seen real benefits for the festival and for the last two festivals a real increase has been seen in attendance figures.
- 3.1.4 The festival meets City aims and objectives by attracting visitors to visit the city and thus helping promote the Great Waterfront City as a destination. It also encourages reading for pleasure in local children and adults, helping to increase their skills. The festival also supports local writing talent, contributing to the local economy and assisting those wanting to become writers.

3.2 Ticket sales increase

In 2017 BookFest saw another increase in ticket sales of 15% on public events. This could be attributed to a number of reasons:

- a) The February/March period seems to attract more people to book events as Bookfest has seen an increase for both the years it has been held in the February/March period.
- b) Working with the Portsmouth Writers' Hub has given increased exposure for BookFest. The Hub has hundreds of members and can circulate news of the festival widely to writers and writing groups.
- c) The involvement of Portsmouth Writers' Hub, Portsmouth University and local authors from just beyond the Portsmouth area has also enabled BookFest to present a wider range of events, including writing workshops, themed evenings and even yoga for writers!
- d) BookFest was fortunate to secure some big names this year with Graham Hurley at the Portsmouth Coppers event and Lord David Owen. Lord Owen's event was not about current politics as such as it focussed on his book about the Second World War but the audience certainly enjoyed the chance to ask him many questions about current affairs during the question period.
- e) Early years events continue to be extremely popular with the Gruffalo tour sold out at nearly all nine library branches. BookFest aims to capitalise on the popularity of early years events by presenting a series of Teddy Bears' Picnics in 2018. These events are crucial in encouraging the benefits of reading from an early age.

3.3 Audience areas

- 76.5% of ticket buyers lived in the PO1-PO6 area.
- 11% of ticket buyers came from PO areas outside of the main city such as Emsworth, Waterlooville, Fareham and Gosport.
- 7% of ticket buyers came from outside of the PO area with audience members from Southampton, Petersfield, Isle of Wight, Winchester and beyond in Surrey.
- BookFest really does seem to be truly a local event for local people but there is also scope for more promotion outside of the city to contribute to the Great Waterfront City campaign and to build on the success of other high profile events in the city that attract audiences from beyond such as the Americas' Cup and Victorious Festival.

3.4 Ages of audience

- 62.5% of the audience were aged 0-5 reflecting the large numbers attending the Gruffalo events in libraries.
- 17% were aged 60 or over.

- Less represented were the 10-30 years' old age category and BookFest aims to encourage more attendance from this age group in 2018 by presenting workshops such as a graphic novels workshop.

3.5 Male/Female ratios

69% of the ticket buyers were female. It could be that more women bought tickets and brought men along to events as we saw more men attending events this year at the Lord Owen event and Portsmouth Coppers.

3.6 Popular events

Aside from the Gruffalo Tour which saw a total of 230 children attending across nine libraries, the highest attendance at BookFest events was at Portsmouth Coppers, which was sold out at 90 attending, Polly Morland's Metamorphosis at 80 attending and Lord Owen which was sold out at 85 attending.

Smaller events were no less appreciated however and the writing workshops with Dr Alison Habens from Portsmouth University were particularly well received as were Andy Steele's Little Characters workshop for children at Southsea Library and the popular Valentine's Day Massacre with Portsmouth Writers' Hub.

3.7 Schools Library Service programme

The Schools Library Service also hosts a programme of events to coincide with BookFest. This sees popular children's authors visit schools to talk to pupils about their books. These events help promote reading for pleasure to children and have a wide reach. In 2017 a total of 1,309 pupils attended these events.

3.8 Feedback

3.8.1 The writing workshops were very well attended and appreciated at this year's BookFest and BookFest will present more of this type of event in 2018.

3.8.2 2017 saw the highest rates of audience satisfaction at BookFest with 97% of audiences rating events as 'excellent' or 'good' - an incredible achievement and proof of the quality of speakers and events this year.

3.8.3 BookFest also received some feedback for areas for improvement next year which will be taken into account. Audiences said it would be good to know the duration of the event before buying tickets to help with parking. Audience members also wanted to see refreshments available to purchase at all events. There was also some feedback from authors about the difficulty of the Library Service having just one microphone for panel events. This has now been rectified as a Pulse Megamouth system has been purchased - this portable sound system has both a microphone and a lapel microphone and will be easy to transport between venues.

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Signed by:
Stephen Baily
Director of Culture and City Development

Appendices:

A: Portsmouth BookFest 2017 programme leaflet

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