

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

**Date of meeting:** 20 July 2018

**Subject:** Portsmouth BookFest 2018

**Report by:** Director of Culture and City Development

**Wards affected:** All

**Key decision:** No

**Full Council decision:** No

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**1. Purpose of report**

To update the Cabinet Member on the 2018 Portsmouth BookFest and to outline recommendations for the 2019 Festival.

**2. Recommendations**

**2.1 To utilise Arts Council England funding to develop the Portsmouth Short Story Competition.**

**2.2 To deliver a second Publishing event following the success of the 2018 event.**

**2.3 To utilise Arts Council England funding to develop audiences both in Portsmouth and further afield, building a visible publicity campaign.**

**2.4 Develop more events and workshops for young people**

**3. Background**

**3.1** Portsmouth BookFest was launched in 2010 by Portsmouth City Council 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.

**3.2** 2018 was the eighth 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 and writers' groups. This year the University offered valuable support by providing venues and speakers.

**3.3** For the last three years, BookFest has also presented a writing competition for ages 16+ 'The Portsmouth Short Story Competition'.

The Competition aims to promote local writing. Announcing the shortlist and winner at the BookFest launch event each February provides a wonderful focal point for the launch event and gives local writers the chance to read their work aloud and have it recognised.

- 3.4** The Festival meets city aims and objectives by attracting visitors to the city and thus helps 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.
- 3.5** In early 2018 Portsmouth City Council Library and Archive Service was awarded £140K for a major project called 'Portsmouth Stories' which will run until March 2020. This project will encompass the Arthur Conan Doyle collection, Portsmouth Archives, Portsmouth Short Story Competition and BookFest and will present an opportunity to really develop the Competition and the Festival.

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

- 4.1** The Portsmouth Short Story Competition has made a positive contribution to recognising local writing talent in the city since 2015. Each year the Competition presents a different theme (with a Portsmouth connection) and invites entries from those who live, work or study in the city or can demonstrate a close personal connection to Portsmouth.

It is crucial that the competition continues to offer Portsmouth people the chance to have their writing assessed and recognised and to keep the competition as a local event because there are a number of national writing competitions already available to writers. However entry numbers could be higher and so the ACE funding will enable the Library and Archive Service to develop short story writing taster sessions across the city and a more advanced three part course to increase local writing confidence and encourage more entries.

- 4.2** This year BookFest presented its first Publishing Weekend, working with local authors to present two days of talks and workshops on editing, pitching, publishing, cover design and promotion. University of Portsmouth kindly provided sponsorship in the form of the use of the White Swan Building and technician support. The WSB was ideal for the event as it has a large screen, superb IT facilities and plenty of space and seating. The weekend gathered very positive feedback and the opportunities for discussion with authors highlighted the fact that this kind of support to local writers is much needed. The ACE funding will enable more writing workshops and support and we plan to host another Publishing event.
- 4.3** Ticket sales were down this year on 2017 from 945 to 600. This can be attributed to a number of causes:
  - 4.3.1** The snow affected events in the last three days of the Festival. This caused the cancellation of MysteryFest, which was likely to attract an audience of 50-80. The weather forecast in the week before also affected on the door ticket sales. Next

year's Festival will be moved back one week to increase the likelihood of better weather.

- 4.3.2** The Gruffalo was given a break this year as he had appeared at the Festival for the last two years. The Bookstart Bear tour, although popular, saw far less numbers attending than Gruffalo events in previous years. The Gruffalo will be returning in 2019.
- 4.3.3** Writers' workshops gathered wonderful feedback. However the nature of these workshops meant they were designed for smaller audiences. We will continue to offer these events as there is clearly demand for a smaller, supportive event environment for writers, however ACE funding will enable BookFest to present more large scale events with well-known authors too.
- 4.3.4** The limited budget available for publicity materials means the Festival was only really visible within the Library Service and local community centres, although social media was used effectively too. This year 71% of audiences were Portsmouth residents from the PO1-PO6 postcodes. 21% came from surrounding PO areas such as Fareham, Gosport and Chichester. The fact that the Festival attracts local residents is a real positive and meets one of the original aims of the Festival of attracting local people to book events. However there is some work to do on attracting more visitors to the city and it would be helpful to advertise the Festival further field with train station campaigns. This will require some budget and the ACE funds could help.
- 4.3.5** The Festival is very popular with the 50+ population. The Festival still struggles to attract audiences in the 18-40 age group and the ACE funding will enable the Festival to present more events that target this age group over the next two years. This year's graphic novel workshops attracted a younger demographic and BookFest will explore these options more for 2019.

## **5. Equality impact assessment**

- 4.1** Preliminary Equality Impact assessment is attached (Appendix 1)

## **6. Legal implications**

- 6.1** There are no legal implications arising out of the recommendations contained in this report.

## **7. Director of Finance's comments**

- 7.1** The 2017/18 the Bookfest event was held in January/ February 2018. Fewer visitors than originally anticipated attended the event due to the poor weather conditions. This resulted in a reduced number of tickets being sold and the event not being able to cover all of the costs. The final position of the event was a £2,100 loss.

- 7.2** ACE funding of £70,000 per annum for two years has been approved. The 2018/19 grant has already been received and will support the activities contained within the recommendations of this report.

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Signed by:  
**Stephen Baily**  
**Director of Culture and City Development**

**Appendices:**

**Appendix 1 - Preliminary Equality Impact Assessment**

**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>

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....

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