



**THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY**  
(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Equality Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

**Title of meeting:** Culture and City Development Decision Meeting  
**Subject:** BookFest 2019  
**Date of meeting:** 19 July 2019  
**Report by:** Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services  
**Wards affected:** All

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**1. Requested by**  
Cabinet Member for Culture and City Development

**2. Purpose**

2.1 To update the Cabinet Member on the success of the 2019 Festival.

**3. Information Requested**

**3.1 Background to BookFest**

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.

3.1.1 This year's event was the ninth festival and since 2010 it has developed into a festival that hosts events with bestselling authors and speakers and supports local writing talent and creativity through a programme of events across a two-three week duration. It now sees collaboration with the University of Portsmouth, local writing and spoken word groups in Portsmouth and the Southern Hampshire region and a number of local venues.

3.1.2 The festival meets City aims and objectives by attracting visitors to 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. It contributes to the local economy by encouraging skills and confidence in local people.

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### **3.2 Ticket sales increase**

In 2019 BookFest saw an increase in ticket sales of 55% on public events after lower ticket sales in 2018. This could be attributed to a number of reasons:

- a) The Library and Archive Service was awarded £140k from Arts Council England in 2018 for the City of Stories project and BookFest benefitted from extra funding by being able to present more events - a total of 37 events were hosted this year as opposed to 33 in 2018 and 25 in 2017. BookFest presented a strong programme with a very wide range of events. It was also fortunate to secure some big names this year with Simon Brett at MysteryFest and former MP and bestselling memoir writer Alan Johnson attracting two hundred people. As with the Lord David Owen event in 2017 audiences really appear to enjoy the opportunity to hear speakers who have had interesting careers and been prominent public figures.
- b) This year the weather was better than 2018 with no snow storms disrupting travel.
- c) Increased use of social media was made this year with almost daily tweets to advertise events and generate interest.
- d) Early years events continue to be extremely popular with the Gruffalo tour sold out at nearly all nine library branches and there are plans to host more early years events in 2020.

### **3.3 Statistics and feedback**

#### **3.3.1 Ticket sales**

As mentioned above ticket sales were up on 2018 by 55% from 600 to 930 people attending public events. The highest attended events were Alan Johnson at 200, MysteryFest at 50 and the Gruffalo tour which saw 200 attend. Talks with local interest are particularly popular and BookFest saw high attendance at events which explored local figures and authors such as Robert Dolling (65 people attended this talk), HG Wells and Rudyard Kipling.

#### **3.3.2 Audience data**

It's been possible to analyse audience data from the feedback forms we received although it's worth noting that feedback forms were not collected at the Gruffalo events.

##### **Areas:**

- 73% of audiences came from the PO1-PO6 area.
- 16% came from PO postcodes PO7 and above
- 10.5% came from outside of the PO area with GU and RH being the most common postcodes. This tells us that although BookFest does attract



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audiences from further afield it is very much a local book festival. This reflects the fact that BookFest does not advertise widely outside of the city although programme leaflets were delivered to locations in Havant, Fareham and Petersfield. To advertise beyond the city would require a significant financial investment in railway station campaigns.

**Ages:**

We know that the high attendance at Gruffalo events means that a high percentage of total audiences for BookFest (70%) were in the 0-10 years old age category. Outside of Gruffalo the biggest age group attendance is in the 50+ age range. BookFest struggles to attract audiences in the 20-50 age group and this will be addressed in 2020 with more events aimed at this age group.

**Gender:**

63% of audiences were female, 31.5% male and the rest preferred not to say. BookFest always sees more attendance from females although this year has seen a much larger attendance from males - this was due to the Alan Johnson event which saw a high percentage of males as well as the local history talks and MysteryFest which traditionally attracts more males than other events.

**Diversity:**

85.5% of audiences gave their ethnicity as 'White' on evaluation forms. BookFest clearly has more work to do in engaging more audiences from diverse backgrounds. This year's City of Stories work is seeing the Library and Archive Service engage with people from a range of backgrounds through targeted project work with identified communities.

**3.4 Feedback**

Feedback on events was exceptionally positive this year with no events rated as 'poor' and only two feedback forms where events were rated as 'fair' meaning the rest were rated 'excellent' or 'good'. This reflects the quality of the speakers and the smooth running of the events run by library staff and volunteers.

Some feedback was given that attendees would like to see refreshments offered at all events. Currently refreshments are offered at longer running events. This can be put in place but is likely to require a slightly higher ticket price being charged to meet costs. Alternatively where the event is held in a venue with a café the café can be open to serve audiences.



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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:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>