



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: City of Stories Update

Date of meeting: 19 October 2021

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 update the Cabinet Member on the success of the three-year Arts Council England funded City of Stories project in the Library and Archive Service.

3. Information Requested

3.1 Background and award

3.1.1 At the end of 2017 Portsmouth Library and Archive Service, with the Conan Doyle Collection team, applied for Arts Council England funding for a large-scale two-year project that would centre on engaging local people with the Portsmouth Archive Collection and the stories within it, including the internationally famous Arthur Conan Doyle Collection. A big focus was on working with local partners and groups to reach hard to reach audiences and highlight the work of local artists.

3.1.2 An application was made for funding of £140,000, which would be supplemented by £3,000 funding from the Cultural Education Partnership and £45,300 funds from the Local Authority. Of the funding from the Local Authority, £20,000 was invested in creating a Local Portsmouth Writers' Room in the Portsmouth History Centre to showcase and preserve books by and about Portsmouth authors from Charles Dickens to authors publishing in the city today.



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)

The Service was delighted to hear in the spring of 2018 that we had been awarded the funding and work could start on the project, which initially was to run until 2020 but, due to the pandemic, ran until July 2021.

3.2 Aims and objectives

In the funding bid, the project aims and objectives were described as:

3.2.1 Proposed programme of activity to raise awareness and broaden participation with the archives using creative writing and literary engagement. The Service wish to use the depth of the archives to devise cultural activity with groups who do not currently engage. The heart of activity will be a programme of works under the City of Stories banner to support improving literacy, access to and awareness of culture through the provision of both mass participation and targeted work using archives and in particular the high-profile Conan Doyle collection. Sherlock Holmes is a global phenomenon - the most read work in the English language after the Bible. It is an extraordinary part of Portsmouth's heritage that Doyle started his career in the city and invented his most famous character whilst here. The project will provide Portsmouth with a greater awareness of and pride in the collection and ownership through shared creative endeavour. The legacy will be to instil a love of writing and understanding that inspiration can come from many different areas.

3.2.2 The key aims are:

- Celebrate Portsmouth stories from the archives
- Provide inspirational opportunities for people to learn from the archives
- To increase participation with archives by transforming means of access
- To raise awareness of archives and enhance the sense of ownership and community cohesion
- Increase the number and breadth of residents engaging with great writers and storytellers
- Embed partnerships between cultural partners and creative providers
- To build skills and resilience in staff and volunteers

3.3 Arthur Conan Doyle Collection activity

3.3.1 Portsmouth Library and Archive Service was bequeathed the Richard Lancelyn Green Arthur Conan Doyle Collection in 2004 and since then an enormous amount of work has happened to catalogue the Collection and to promote the Collection, making it accessible to both local people and international audiences. For City of Stories the focus was very much on connecting local people to the Collection and



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)

the Conan Doyle Officer, Laura Weston, devised a series of events and outreach activity which brought the Collection alive to new audiences.

- 3.3.2 Two Summer of Sherlock festivals took place in 2018 and 2019 where children and families took part in events and activities across a range of locations around the city including the Round Tower and the City Museum. Special effects make up, science workshops, theatre and Pompey in the Community delivered football and cricket workshops in the first Summer of Sherlock, and from those activities and their evaluations, this formed the second Summer of Sherlock events.
- 3.3.3 A challenge has been making Doyle's work accessible to children as the plots of some of the Sherlock Holmes novels can be very complicated. Some of the City of Stories funding was therefore used to create a comic book version of the first Sherlock Holmes story *A Study In Scarlet* (created in Southsea when Doyle was practising as a doctor here). A local comic book artist and writer were engaged to find a new way to tell the story with a diverse cast of characters. Copies of the Comic book were offered to schools within the most deprived areas of Portsmouth to support reading or SEND schools.
- 3.3.4 Splodge Designs worked with local community groups to create beautiful textile cubes. Textile cubes are six story cubes that depict clues, scenery, themes, tools and characters and the community groups who made them went on to use story cubes to write their own stories in additional workshops.
- 3.3.5 A Dancer in Residence was hired towards the end of the project to work with local young carers. The dancer choreographed a piece that saw the local dancers perform in key locations of Doyle's residency in Southsea. The young carers benefitted enormously from working closely with a choreographer and improving their confidence. Their efforts were recorded in a film, shown at the end of project celebration event.

3.4 City Archive Collection

- 3.4.1 In addition to the outreach activity that took part around the Doyle Collection, there was also a huge amount of activity that took place to engage local people with the wider Portsmouth Archive Collection.
- 3.4.2 A Poet In Residence was hired and she worked closely with the Rant Music Project to bring archives to the youth centres and inspire young people from Buckland and Paulsgrove to write songs and poetry based on what they found in the archive. Of particular interest were the photographs from the collection of Portsmouth in the Blitz. The young people involved produced some superb songs and poetry and were



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)

delighted to perform these in front of family, friends and key staff at the Charles Dickens Youth Centre in July 2019 and again at the celebration event in July this year.

- 3.4.3 The Poet In Residence also worked with adults and formed a creative writing group to help adults write poetry and prose about the Archive Collection, which culminated in a performance at Central Library in August 2019. Just some of the archives that were inspiring were photographs of the fairground, records from the Victorian Workhouse and photographs and adverts about local shops in the 1950s and 1960s.
- 3.4.4 An Artist In Residence also worked closely with the Collection and found much inspiration in the records about the development of social housing in Portsea in the Edwardian era. Abi Wheeler created textile artwork of workers' collars in the pattern of floorplans that was exhibited in the History Centre and later online.
- 3.4.5 Writer Nazneen Ahmed worked closely with local group Chat Over Chai to explore the concept of our own local archives and own histories.
- 3.4.6 Music reminiscence was a key element of sharing memories and archives in the early part of the project where groups got together and shared their memories of buying music at the Co-op in the 1960s and attending concerts in the city.
- 3.4.7 A number of exhibitions were displayed throughout the three years of the project. The History Centre team highlighted treasures from the Archive in 'Every Archive Tells A Story'. Exhibitions about the history of Baffins and North End were particularly popular in those local libraries.

3.5 Activity for children and families

- 3.5.1 As well as the Summer of Sherlock lots of activity for children and families took place in the libraries across the duration of the project. Local storyteller DD Storyteller took inspiration from real life stories from the Archive to reinterpret these as interactive stories for children at Central, Cosham and North End Libraries in early 2020. This included the story of a Victorian Portsmouth Policeman and the story of a sailor who had his trousers stolen in Old Portsmouth in the 18th century.
- 3.5.2 Branch story time sessions were hosted to engage children with storytelling. A writing competition also took place for children with an awards ceremony at Southsea Library in 2019.



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)

3.6 Activity for writers

- 3.6.1 A key part of the project was to work with local writers.
- 3.6.2 As well as the Poet In Residence activity outlined above, we were able to enhance the existing annual Portsmouth Short Story Competition by hosting classes on short story writing during the summers of 2018 and 2019, to help increase the confidence of those wishing to enter.
- 3.6.3 The service was able to use some of the funding to publish a book of shortlisted entries from the previous years' competitions and recognise local talent in this way. For the writers it was a huge confidence boost to see their work in print. BookFest was enhanced by the funding with a more extensive programme of events and a more diverse programme. Life writing classes were greatly appreciated by those wishing to record their own memories.

3.7 Celebration film and event

- 3.7.1 The last stages of the project were impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic meaning the service could no longer consider a large- scale celebration event. Instead it was decided to have a celebration film created of all the key achievements of the project. A film maker was hired to film key participants and the project managers to showcase all of the positive work that took place. The film became a real benefit to the project as it widened accessibility and can be used for future projects.
- 3.7.2 Staff also started creating events specifically for social media as the service were unable host in person events. This included online story times and online workshops on writing and illustrating.
- 3.7.3 The service were able to host a small in person celebration at Central Library in July 2021 where the film was also launched.

3.8 Legacy

There are a number of positive long- term benefits as a result of the City of Stories project that will continue beyond the life of the project:

- A local group for creative writing support in the History Centre's new Local Writers' Room has been created by the Poet In Residence.



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)

- The Portsmouth History Centre team have learned new skills in putting together exhibitions and will be continuing with this element, as well as developing outreach activity.
- Good links have been made with community groups and youth centres meaning that more work in these areas can take place in future.
- Library and Archive staff have completed filming for social media training and have gained essential new skills in hosting events online. The entire 2021 BookFest was hosted on Zoom and a programme of spring events was hosted on Facebook.
- The Service Development Manager Clare Forsyth and Conan Doyle Officer Laura Weston, who managed the project together, have developed extensive new skills in budget management, large scale project management, evaluation and working with community artists and performers. All skills that they can bring to other parts of the service. Laura Weston has already successfully led a bid for a new Arts Council England funded Doyle project.

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