



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

**Date of meeting:** 19 October 2021

**Subject:** Portsmouth BookFest 2021

**Report by:** Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services

**Wards affected:** ALL

**Key decision:** No

**Full Council decision:** No

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**1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet Member on the success of Portsmouth BookFest 2021, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the festival and the first time events were delivered online.
- 1.2 To make recommendations for the future delivery of the festival.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Portsmouth BookFest continues to offer online events alongside the traditional in person events - event format to be determined by the location and availability of the author/speaker and the likely target audience groups for the event.
- 2.2 That Library Assistant staff time is put into supporting the Service Development Manager to expand the publicity of the festival and its social media presence and also assist with the administration of ticket sales.
- 2.3 That the festival aims to present a diverse programme of events each year reaching new audiences.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 In 2021 Portsmouth BookFest celebrated ten years of the festival with a diverse programme of events and welcoming back some of the most popular speakers from the last ten years such as Mark Billingham and Jim Al-Khalili. Due to the Covid 19 Pandemic it was decided to host the Festival entirely online, with Zoom used as the primary tool for hosting events.



- 3.2 Zoom worked extremely well for events with very few technical problems and audience confidence in using Zoom appeared to be high. The technology allowed BookFest to present a full three week programme of events and lots of positive feedback was received from attendees who were so pleased to be able to engage with the events whilst in lockdown.
- 3.3 Hosting events online meant the festival was able to reach those who might not ordinarily be able to attend events in person, those who live outside of Portsmouth and events in some cases also attracted audiences from as far afield as Canada, the USA, Germany and Israel. At the 'Around The World In 10 Books' event one of the authors was able to join from Canada. To the knowledge of the service, Portsmouth is the only Library Service to host a book festival online so far.
- 3.4 Ticket sales were reasonably high for most events and audience satisfaction was very high. Some of the higher profile authors would have seen a larger audience for an in person event where the audience would be able to purchase books with the author signing them.

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

- 4.1 There were many positive aspects to hosting events online. As outlined above reaching people who may not be able to attend events in person was a major advantage. The service received feedback from people who, in pre-Covid times, were unable to leave home due to caring responsibilities or disabilities. Online events also attracted higher profile speakers and authors, who were unable to travel to Portsmouth, more likely to attend. There is no doubt however that many people missed being able to attend in person and some events would have benefitted from the author in person, with books to buy and author signings. The service saw lower uptake at a few of the events with higher profile names that would usually attract high attendance figures.
- 4.2 Using Zoom created a more complicated ticketing system. Audiences do seem happy to pay for online events - it was found that £4-5 seemed to be the most popular ticket price range. Tickets for a £20 book deal ticket were hard to sell and the service understands that this was because people were less willing to pay for a ticket that included a book if they cannot meet the author in person and have the book signed. Tickets were sold through the usual Library Management system Civica Spydus and staff then needed to ensure every ticket holder had received the correct Zoom link for each event. This involved logging in to the ticket system and Zoom multiple times a day and until immediately prior to the event, creating a large workload for the festival manager who needed to spend time on administration rather than promoting the festival. Investing Library



Assistant time in aspects of the festival administration and promotion will mean there is more time for supporting authors and doing larger scale promotion.

- 4.3 The festival aims to reach those who might not ordinarily attend book events and this year - using Arts Council England funding in the last year of the City of Stories project - the festival was able to become more diverse with events with Lemn Sissay MBE and Professor Jim Al-Khalili, events about International Fiction and Drag Queen Story Hour. All of these events were well attended demonstrating an appetite for a wide range of events. BookFest will continue to work hard to engage diverse speakers and audiences.

## **5. Integrated impact assessment**

- 5.1 Integrated Impact Assessment attached at Appendix 1

## **6. Legal implications**

- 6.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

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

- 7.1 The 2020/21 Bookfest event was held in January/ February 2021. The event was able to cover its costs with a final position of a £774 surplus. Income compared to the previous year was reduced. Summarised as follows:-

	2019/20	2020/21
Expenditure	977	892
Income	(3,666)	(1,666)
Total (Surplus)	(2,689)	(774)

- 7.2 Any additional costs of staffing time will be met from within existing Library Service resources.



Signed by:  
**Stephen Baily**  
**Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services**

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - Integrated 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:

Title of document	Location

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

Signed by:  
**Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development**