

Title of meeting:	Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting
Date of meeting:	8 February 2022
Subject:	Wild World Heroes: The Summer Reading Challenge 2021
Report by:	Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services
Wards affected:	ALL
Key decision:	No
Full Council decision:	No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet member on the Library and Archive Service's delivery of the Summer Reading Challenge in 2021; the number of children participating; the Winners' event at Southsea Castle and our involvement in a national pilot scheme to increase participation amongst disadvantaged pupils.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That in order to increase participation in next year's Summer Reading Challenge, especially by disadvantaged pupils, the Library and Archive Service applies for Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) funding in Summer 2022.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Summer Reading Challenge, delivered by public libraries in partnership with The Reading Agency, encourages reading for pleasure for children aged 4 to 11 over the summer holidays. The challenge reaches hundreds of thousands of children and last year, 587,267 took part across the UK.
- 3.2 Children are encouraged to read anything they like, stories, poetry, non-fiction, graphic novels, eBooks and eAudiobooks. The recommended number of books to read is six but in recent years, children have been given the opportunity to set their own reading targets. Children receive stickers and other incentives as they progress, being given a certificate when they complete the Challenge and an invitation to a special celebration event at Southsea Castle, where they can claim a medal.



- 3.3 The Challenge has a different theme each year. Last year, The Reading Agency partnered with World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The theme, Wild World Heroes, was aimed at inspiring children to explore ways of helping to save the planet. The challenge focused on action for nature and tackling real-world environmental issues, from plastic pollution and deforestation to wildlife decline and nature loss.
- 3.4 Given that the pandemic meant that library staff were unable to visit school assemblies towards the end of the summer term, a promotional video was made featuring pupils from Lyndhurst Junior School (now part of King's Academy College Park school). This was sent to all primary schools in the city with bookmark invitations and other promotional materials before the summer holiday.
- 3.5 The mobile library also attended a number of park locations in the city during the holiday, to promote participation in the Challenge, providing storytelling and other activities, delivered in partnership with Hampshire Wildlife and Wetland Trust. Families were also engaged with at a 'Play and Plants' community consultation event in Somerstown.
- 3.6 Children were once again given the option of participating online, recording their reading choices and unlocking rewards and other incentives. This hybrid approach clearly has advantaged during a pandemic but compared to last year, the majority of families participating preferred to engage with library staff in our buildings.
- 3.7 Wild World Heroes launched on Friday 10th July. In the following ten weeks up to the Winner's Event at Southsea Castle, just under 40,000 children's items were borrowed from Portsmouth Libraries. A total of 2770 children signed up to take part in the Challenge, either in a physical library or online and 1266 children went on to complete the Challenge. Physical library visits accounted for eighty per cent of these figures.
- 3.8 As a further incentive, School Library Service (SLS) also offered the top six schools (in terms of completers per number of pupils on roll) some book-themed beanbags as prizes for their school libraries. The top six schools were: Corpus Christi; St Jude's; Cumberland Infant; Mayfield; Southsea Infant and St Swithun's.
- 3.9 The local authority were beneficiaries of HAF programme funding in 2021. Libraries successfully applied for £5000 to purchase additional materials provided at a discounted rate by The Reading Agency as part of a national pilot with nine other local authorities to be targeted at disadvantaged pupils. These were distributed directly to HAF providers throughout the city, including the adventure playgrounds; leisure centres and other non-library settings so they could be offered to targeted pupils attending the summer holiday provision. Library staff also supported colleagues in the City Museum with their HAF provision.



4.0 Working in partnership with Museum colleagues, Southsea Castle proved a very popular location for the Winners' Event. Astute use of the entire site meant we could provide a number of activities, whilst still respecting limits on numbers and covid-security measures. Moving the medal gifting some way outside of the Castle avoided congestion in the courtyard area and allowed us to provide a storyteller; author Steve Cole and science workshops. Over 4000 children and families attended the event on Sunday 19 September, making it one of the largest family events of the year.

4. Reasons for recommendations

4.1 For many years, participation in the Challenge has been remarkably consistent, with generally twenty per cent of primary school age children signing up and around ten per cent going on to complete the Challenge. The pandemic has clearly impacted on participation in the Challenge over the last two years, although the number of completers was up twenty-five percent in 2021 on the previous year. As the Challenge is funded solely from library budgets, there is limited capacity to fund additional participation.

4.2 More intensive support to disadvantaged pupils is one way to increase engagement and improve literacy outcomes. To this end, in 2022 the Library and Archive Service will apply for HAF funding so we can deliver creative workshops (and food) from our larger buildings. We will also use the funding to purchase a smaller number of resources for non-library settings but be much more targeted with our approach. We will also be able to increase staff capacity for outreach in these locations, so families who may not habitually engage with libraries will be able to participate in more familiar settings. It will be a cross-authority approach to delivery, working more smartly and more effectively with partners in education, health, children's services and other settings, in order to make the Challenge a more inclusive activity.

5. Integrated impact assessment

5.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed for this report.

6. Legal implications

6.1 The provision of HAF funding for the Summer Reading Challenge will be subject to the terms and conditions of a grant determination made by the Department for Education in respect of the national HAF Programme.

7. Director of Finance's comments



7.1 The 2021 Summer Reading Challenge was delivered from within existing library resources.

7.2 It has previously been reported that the costs of this growing event have been increasing. The recommendation of securing additional HAF will ease the financial pressure of the 2022 event. Funding of the 2022 reading challenge will therefore be from existing cash limits and HAF funding.

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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

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Signed by:

Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development