

**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)**

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting
<b>Subject:</b>	Universal Library offers: Health and Wellbeing
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	8 February 2022
<b>Report by:</b>	Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services
<b>Wards affected:</b>	ALL

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**1. Requested by**

1.1 The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development

**2. Purpose**

2.1 To update the Cabinet Member on the continuing work undertaken by libraries that contributes to improving health and wellbeing outcomes for our residents.

**3. Information Requested**

3.1 Libraries Connected is a national charity and an Arts Council England funded Sector Support Organisation. It has a vision of 'an inclusive, modern, sustainable and high-quality public library service at the heart of every community in the UK'. To deliver this vision there are four Universal Offers that demonstrate the work that every public library service does to enrich the lives of individuals and their communities. These are Reading; Digital and Information; Culture and Creativity and the subject of this report, Health and Wellbeing.

3.2 Portsmouth Library and Archive Service has seen significant investment from partners over the last ten years. Libraries are viewed as a good place to deliver agendas around health and wellbeing as we provide a trusted offer in an informal, non-clinical space and a presence in different community locations. There is also a significant evidence base on the value of engagement with libraries. A report in 2015 found that being a regular library user is associated with a 1.4 per cent increase in the likelihood of reporting good general health. This was thought to have an average cost saving of £27.5 million per year for the NHS.

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- 3.3 From 2010 to 2017, Macmillan Cancer Support invested nearly £250,000 over six years, funding two library cancer support workers, providing advice and support and curating collections of information in all our buildings. The then Primary Care Trust also provided £26,000 of funding for a bespoke information hub to be installed in Central Library.
- 3.4 In 2018, libraries were awarded £174,000 as part of the Public Health Transformation Fund, which has funded full-time outreach activity, including drop-in sessions in branch libraries where the public can be given information, signposting and guidance if they have a health concern and the creation of a health and wellbeing zone on the first floor of Central Library and dedicated collections of books and other information in all library branches. Members of the public can also access an 'Information for Health' enquiry service by phone or email.
- 3.5 In 2019, Portsmouth City Council received government funding to address problems of rough sleeping and homelessness in the city, improving both day and night-time provision in the city. Before this funding there was a gap of several hours between day services and night services, leaving vulnerable adults with few options before night shelters opened. So, libraries were increasingly providing shelter for people in the late afternoons and early evenings.
- 3.6 With funding from PCC Housing colleagues, we were able to recruit a Community Development Worker, for one year, based in the Central Library and engaging with various members of the library team, HIVE staff and other colleagues within Portsmouth City Council, developing agreed priorities and work streams for the Rough Sleeping and Street Homelessness Advisory Group. Our worker was also liaising with a variety of service providers throughout the city, being an advocate for the safety and wellbeing of these individuals and working positively with staff throughout the Council. During the pandemic, library books and other items were made available to those homeless people who had been placed in hotels and other accommodation.
- 3.7 In March 2021, the charity Society of Saint James moved into Central Library, renting several rooms on the Third Floor. They provide advice and support to people experiencing homelessness, problems with alcohol, substance misuse and other complex needs. Their work complements that of the 'Pushing Change' recovery group, who have also been based on the third floor for a number of years. As well as Hive Portsmouth, who operate from several floors in the library, Autism Hampshire also rent office space on the first floor, providing information, advice and guidance by appointment.

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- 3.8 The Universal Health and Wellbeing offer is underpinned by a 'Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise'. According to the RNIB, 'the number of people with sight loss is estimated to rise to 2.7 million by 2030. By 2050, the current figure will double to over four million'. The promise recognises that libraries are a vital link for these people and that books and information should be made as accessible as possible. Portsmouth Libraries have employed a Vision Impairment Services Officer for twenty years. Her work has won the prestigious Chartered Institute of Library and information Professional's 'Libraries Change Lives Award' in 2003 and was nominated again in 2015. This work includes newsletters for the local blind and vision impaired community; Braille teaching sessions; IT support sessions with assistive software; reading groups and facilitating discussion and other social groups. Our Officer is also a named 'trusted assessor' for the Council's Adult Social Care sensory team, able to issue sensory aids to those in need. She also regularly arranges supplier exhibitions, showcasing all that is current in assistive technology to vision impaired residents.
- 3.9 'Reading Friends', an initiative to combat loneliness and isolation among adults, launched a first group at Cosham Library in September, with £10,000 of funding from The Reading Agency. Reading Friends gives opportunities for people to meet others, share their stories, make new friends and have fun, especially people who are vulnerable, isolated or at risk of loneliness. It creates social connections and takes a person-centred approach, building on interests and hobbies of the people involved to share stories. Delivered by volunteers and co-produced with the participants, Reading Friends meet regularly to chat and share stories in groups or one-to-one sessions.
- 3.10 The Home Library Service delivers books to the housebound. Supported primarily by volunteers, this is a real lifeline to some of the most isolated and vulnerable members of the community. In addition to this, regular book exchanges are made to twenty-five of the city's residential care homes.
- 3.11 Additional support was provided by Libraries in partnership with HIVE colleagues during the peak of the first lockdown of the pandemic. Volunteers made hundreds of deliveries of books; games; jigsaws and simple craft activities to residents of all ages, helping them keep occupied. Library outreach staff were able to make frequent wellbeing telephone calls to customers who would normally attend library groups. In order to support our aspirations for an alternative, more comprehensive and sustainable delivery offer, a funding application has been made to Arts Council England to help us realise these ambitions.

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- 3.12 Libraries play a crucial role in bringing people together and making them feel good about themselves and we provide a programme of activities to achieve this. Arts and craft engagement is seen as a significant boost to mental health and wellbeing. Regular activities for adults are programmed in our libraries, often delivered in partnership with Highbury College, these include various art workshops and craft courses. Some take place online, for example sessions on how to use Photoshop software.
- 3.13 There are twelve reading groups that meet in library buildings and many more that are run by volunteers in private homes, or pubs and other community settings. During the pandemic, many of these groups went online and provided welcome regular opportunities for people to socialise, as well as enjoying the shared experience of reading and discussing a shared book.
- 3.14 Libraries have worked with Museum colleagues for a number of years on Reminiscence Boxes, which are borrowed by community groups. These are themed and contain a variety of objects, clothing and information that is designed to stimulate discussion. The collections are currently being reviewed and funding is being sought to refresh the collections.
- 3.15 The Reading Agency has developed a number of collections of books over the years that may be useful to those suffering from mild to moderate mental health issues. There are collections for both adults and children and young people and a further collection to support families who may be living with someone with dementia. These books are available in all our libraries.
- 3.16 Before the pandemic, the Library and Archive Service had some of the highest levels of volunteer engagement in the authority. Whilst providing practical support to many of the initiatives outlined in this report, many of the volunteers have also expressed the importance their activities have on their own health and wellbeing. Rebuilding our volunteering post-Covid is a priority for the service and to this end, an application for Arts Council England's 'Volunteering Futures' will be submitted in 2022.
- 3.17 Portsmouth City Council is currently consulting on its 'Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2030' with a vision of 'a healthy and happy city, in which each person has the education, care and support they need for their physical and mental health'. It has identified a number 'causes of the causes', including tackling poverty; educational attainment and positive relationships in safe communities. All of the services offered in this report are provided free of charge to those that wish to use them. They are inclusive, in that anyone regardless of income can access them. In their well-established role of providing both formal and informal learning opportunities for all ages, public libraries and the School Library Service are directly supporting the

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raising of educational attainment in the city. Libraries are statutory community assets, actively bringing people together and promoting positive relationships amongst people from all backgrounds and cultures. The Library and Archive Service health and wellbeing offer, is therefore well-placed to be an integral part of realising the vision in this strategy.

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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>
The Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Public Libraries	<a href="https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The%20health%20and%20wellbeing%20benefits%20of%20public%20libraries.pdf">https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The%20health%20and%20wellbeing%20benefits%20of%20public%20libraries.pdf</a>
The economic impact of sight loss and blindness in the UK adult population	<a href="https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/research-reports/general-research/economic-impact-sight-loss">https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/research-reports/general-research/economic-impact-sight-loss</a>
Portsmouth City Council Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2030	<a href="https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/services/council-and-democracy/transparency/health-and-wellbeing-strategy/">https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/services/council-and-democracy/transparency/health-and-wellbeing-strategy/</a>