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Title of meeting:	Culture, Leisure and Economic Development Decision Meeting
Subject:	Bookfest 2022
Date of meeting:	29 July 2022
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 2022 Festival and the return to in person events following the Pandemic.

3. Information Requested

3.1 Background to BookFest

3.1.1 Portsmouth BookFest was launched in 2010 by the Library and Archive 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.

3.1.2 The festival hosts events with bestselling authors and speakers and supports local writing talent and creativity through a programme of activity across a two-three-week duration. It sees collaboration with the University of Portsmouth, local writing and spoken word groups in Portsmouth and the South Hampshire region and several local venues.

3.1.3 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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3.1.4 2022 was the eleventh festival and marked the return to in person events following the Pandemic. The 2021 festival had been delivered entirely online and was very successful, so it has been interesting to see how audiences have responded to in person events again. Some events were still offered online, responding to feedback from some attendees last year that they prefer to attend events online due to commitments and responsibilities at home or access issues.

3.2 Statistics and feedback

3.2.1 Ticket sales

A total of 740 tickets were sold for events. This was down on the previous three years (2021:1004, 2020: 1358 and 2019: 930) but an increase on 2018 (600). The fact tickets sales were slightly lower this year was not a surprise to the Library and Archive Service as the Omicron variant arrived in December and so some people were still worried about attending in person events in February and early March. However, of those who did attend many verbally expressed how pleased they were to be attending events in libraries and venues again. In fact, it was interesting to note that ticket sales were far higher for the in- person events than the digital events, suggesting that people are tiring of online events.

Of the events offered this year, the highest tickets sales were for David Lammy, Celia Clark's talk on Portsmouth, local author Pete Adams, Around the World in 10 Books and MysteryFest.

3.2.2 Audience data

It has been possible to analyse audience data from the feedback forms we received although it is worth noting that feedback forms were not collected at all events, including the Zoom events.

3.2.3 Areas:

- 48.2 % of audiences came from the PO1-PO6 area. This is comparable with previous festivals.
- 5.25 % came from PO postcodes PO7 and above
- 5.25 % came from outside of the PO area with SO (Southampton and Winchester area) being the most common postcodes. This tells us that although BookFest does attract 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 transport and tourist hub campaigns and paid for social media targeted campaigns.



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3.2.4 Ages:

The following statistics show the breakdown of ages that attended BookFest events.

0-10	7.50%
11-20	5.50%
21-30	4.20%
31-40	8.40%
41-50	6.30%
51-60	7.30%
60+	29.40%
Prefer not to say	31.50%

3.2.5 BookFest continues to be a festival that attracts a high number of attendees in the 60+ age bracket. This figure reflects the availability of this audience age group to attend events at different times of the day and week and very much reflects the picture nationally of attendance at arts and cultural events. This year we saw less attendees than previous years in the 0-10 age group and this is because we did not host a Gruffalo or book character event this year. The 7.5% who did attend though very much enjoyed the storytimes that were on offer and the 11-20 age group attended and enjoyed the Octopus Medicine writing workshops that took place, with some incredibly mature and imaginative writing being produced. Around The World In 10 Books continues to be an annual event that attracts a wide range of ages.

3.2.6 BookFest this year was mainly a female audience with 51.5% of evaluation forms stating 'female' and only 11.55% stating 'male'. However, it is worth noting that 36.5% of respondents did not give their gender so it is misleading to assume the festival was predominantly female. It was also noted at the David Lammy event that there was a high number of male attendees. To attract more men to Bookfest events we plan to continue to offer events that promote current affairs and provide debate as it is in those areas that we've seen higher male attendance.

3.3 Diversity

- 92% of attendees described themselves as 'White', 'White British', 'White English' or 'British'. There was a small number of responses from attendees describing themselves as 'Asian and English', 'White Asian', 'Black African', 'Mixed race', 'Romanian' and 'Eastern European'.
- BookFest has been working hard to make the festival more accessible by presenting a more diverse range of speakers and authors. The David Lammy event drew a more diverse audience and this year the University presented an event called 'Diverse Voices' which celebrated Portsmouth writing from different communities. Around the World in 10 Books event contributes to making the festival more diverse in that it promotes an interest in reading books from across the globe.
- This is a good start, but BookFest has more work to do on talking to different communities about the events they would like to see in future years and this

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needs to be done by working in partnership with groups the Service accesses through other activities and events.

3.4 Feedback

Feedback about the quality of the events and what the audience gained from the events was very positive:

- The series of screen writing workshops run by a local author were particularly appreciated:

"just to let you know that I really enjoyed this afternoon at Carnegie: the really committed facilitator did a great job thanks for the opportunity".

"I have learnt a lot on how to give a character an edge and how props could really elevate the script."

- Writing workshops continue to be very popular in general with excellent feedback about Lucy Flannery and Scott Pack's workshops.
- The David Lammy event was a high-profile event which attracted lots of attention and many attendees verbally expressed how much they had enjoyed the event and most also purchased David's book. *"Fascinating event: great to meet David and have a chance to discuss current issues"*. The University of Portsmouth partnered BookFest on this event and kindly provided an excellent lecture theatre and audio system on the evening.
- Audiences would like to continue to attend writing workshops, with good attendance and feedback at all the workshops offered.
- They greatly enjoy events about the local area or local people (Celia Clark's talk on Portsmouth, the talk on Julia Margaret Cameron and Pete Adams the local crime/thriller author were all very well attended and saw enthusiastic audiences).
- Political figures continue to be popular - David Lammy's event followed on from the hugely popular Alan Johnson event in 2019 and the Lord David Owen event in 2017. Audiences really enjoy the chance to ask questions and debate.
- The children's offer should continue to be expanded as it is clear there is real demand for activities and events, and it is planned that the 2023 festival will devote the whole of the half term week to children's events and workshops.

3.5 Staff support

This year the Service Development Manager was supported by a Library Assistant for ten hours per week. This proved to be very beneficial to the Manager and to the

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festival as the Assistant was able to ensure leaflets were distributed widely around the city and to focus on the social media promotion - something that is becoming more and more important to spend time on to increase the festival's reach.

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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:

Title of document	Location