

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE AND LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Economic Development, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday, 25 February 2020 at 5.30 pm at Southsea Library.

Present

Councillor George Fielding (in the Chair)

Councillors Frank Jonas BEM
Hugh Mason

6. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

These had been received from Councillors Jeanette Smith (work commitments) and Robert New (who was unwell).

7. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

Councillor Hugh Mason declared that he holds his ward surgeries at Southsea Library; this was not a pecuniary interest in relation to this meeting.

8. Minutes of Previous Meeting - 20 January 2020 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the EDCL Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 20 January 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

9. Review: Engagement with Culture and Leisure - widening social participation in Portsmouth (AI 4)

Prior to the formal meeting, the panel members were given the opportunity to have a tour of Southsea Library with Lindy Elliott, the Library and Archive Services Manager at 5pm. Members were familiar with the public areas of Southsea Library but were taken to see the first floor climate controlled storeroom, which was mainly archive area with a space for volunteers to work and the quarantine room. This stored many of the City's historical records, including minute books, newspapers, military and other records (the photographic store was off-site) with the cataloguing facility being based at the Central Library. These were a useful resource for researchers. Consideration was being given to how to preserve digital records. The Museums and Archives Services work in collaboration.

The public meeting commenced at 5.30pm in the café area, with the Chair welcoming members of the public who were present and they were given the opportunity to participate. Some library users had commented that they had not been able to attend due to the time of the meeting and some had sent their comments in to be reported by a fellow user. The Chair explained that this was one of several culture and recreational sites due to be visited by the

panel and the intention was not to look at closing the library (as some users were worried about in their representations) but to look at wider social access to culture and leisure facilities.

Lindy Elliott, Library and Archive Services Manager, explained that she job-shares with David Percival. Ms Elliott gave a presentation, firstly setting out the Southsea Library Weekly timetable (which was illustrative and not typical of all the libraries), which included events such as:

- Rhyme times in English, Spanish, French and with the Vision & Hearing Team
- Mah-Jong, Scrabble
- Knot and ropework, Art Club (in liaison with Highbury College), Crochet
- lunchtime writers (once a month)
- Storytime (run by volunteer June)
- Coding Club and IT class
- Councillor Ward Surgeries

The library tries to facilitate what the public wants and additional activities include:

- Friends of Southsea meetings and events
- charity events (including the Stroke Association)
- Children's activities every half term
- Meetings and production of a children's newspaper
- 3 reading groups (meeting every 4 weeks) - with over 30 supported reading groups through all the libraries

Value and Purpose

These include:

- Early child development and parenting support
- School Readiness (including speech development)
- Literacy (and sometimes English is not a first language)
- Lifelong Learning
- Health and Wellbeing (PCC's Health & Wellbeing fund wellbeing books)
- Social and community cohesion, bringing people together
- A city of cultural breadth, innovation and aspiration

Core Library and Archive Offers

There are 3 main strands:

i) School Library Service

This is a traded service with schools to supply their libraries through the book loan collections and project collection supports the curriculum.

This also includes:

- Digital Books and services
- library set up and support
- Additional incentive – Reader development, encouraging children's progress

ii) Archive and History Centre

The Library Services is accredited by the National Archives and statutory service, and is a statutory service.

Security of Collections - a repository for the history and memories of the city.

Conservation of collections - with the need to ensure storage is in the right climate for maintaining records (and are not subject to mould etc)

Access to collection - it is a challenge to keep archives secure but be able to be used and accessed without being damaged (such as parish records) - there is a move towards digitalising but this is a huge task.

iii) Public Libraries

Providing a statutory service for all ages abilities and cultures for:

- Universal Offers defined by Libraries Connected
- Reading
- Culture and Learning
- Information and digital - more reference books were now on-line and access to computers was a key role in a community building
- Health and wellbeing

This all showed how the role of the library had evolved in a digital age and whilst there were still some quiet areas, the aim was to encourage all ages to use the facilities.

The service was involved in **events** such as the Portsmouth Book Awards (3500 children take part with a presentation event at the Kings Theatre). There are also literature quizzes, a programme of meet the authors and involvement in BookFest and running the Summer Reading Challenge to encourage reading 6 books over the summer holiday, with the winners being invited to Southsea Castle.

The Archive and History Centre also has public involvement through digitalisation, public lectures and in supporting people with genealogy, tracing their family trees

Volunteering and Conan Doyle

Ms Elliott reported that there are over 200 volunteers- which is the equivalent of 10 full time staff, who give a range of assistance across the libraries helping with cataloguing, at events, delivery of books to the house-bound. Some offer their own activities - such as story time, rhyme time in different languages. The library also has a Friends Group, whose members are great advocates of the library offers.

Laura Weston, Education and Outreach Officer for the Conan Doyle Collection then explained how volunteers have been involved since the Sharing Sherlock Project started in 2013. The initial target was to recruit 20 volunteers to help catalogue the vast collection, and with Heritage Lottery

funding 28 were engaged to deliver a diverse programme of events. 3 of the volunteers still remained working with her.

The benefit of volunteering was two-way with development of skills (such as computing and coding) and gaining confidence (some had mental health and learning difficulties) before leaving to find paid employment elsewhere. The Lily and Lime café at the Central Library trains people with learning difficulties. The opportunity also gave a sense of routine and combatted social isolation. Volunteers could be shared between library sites. One case study highlighted was of an individual who catalogued magazines and had improved his literacy through the placement. Some volunteers were linked to the University of Portsmouth, with social media students gaining experience and could get a reference as an outcome. Volunteers could also develop to become members of staff.

Working with volunteers also need staff input to managed and ensure they feel supported for their development to education or employment. There is liaison with the Waterfront Garden Centre which has volunteer gardeners, to look at working up a more formal programme of supportive development.

Access

There is a good geographical spread - there are 9 libraries with only parts of Drayton, Anchorage Park and Eastney which are over 20 minutes' walk away from a site. There is a mobile library which covers these areas.

No Fines and Reservation fees - these had been removed for children for several years and now extended to adults to make book use as easy as possible. There had been a trebling of the number of books moving around the city.

Web presence - the library service is developing its own website.

Digitisation and virtual offers - this includes audio books being available on line and music streaming. There is a move in how the services are used with access to these overnight.

At Home Library services - delivering books to the housebound.

Support for different abilities and Autism Hampshire have a presence in the Central Library as well as Dementia information being available there.

There is **targeted support** for the vision impaired with braille services, visually impaired reading and self-help group and helpline. There is also Eye2Eye Newsletter and supportive technology assistance.

There is a new **homelessness officer** in post through Adult Social Car, who helps signpost to other support available, working in partnership with other agencies.

Evolving Access - for future consideration

a) Locations

Libraries need to be in places people gather - this had traditionally been retail centres, but it was asked is the role of libraries to support shopping areas? There is a movement towards **co-location**, looking at suitable services.

b) Facilities

Libraries provide toilets, baby changing facilities, need to welcome breast feeding, have comfy chairs - all of which will encourage people to meet there, to be social hubs. Some include café areas (Central Library and Southsea Library).

c) Partnerships

There is partnership with other Culture & Leisure services as well as inviting partnerships with external cultural providers. There are bid opportunities to mutually benefit such as 'Portsmouth Creates' which has been supported by PCC and Victorious. Relationships with schools is also important to the future of the library.

Feedback from residents

As this was a public meeting, 'Nick' made a representation on behalf of himself and other users who had contacted him to be a spokesperson (as the timing of the meeting meant some could not attend); the points raised included:

- A lot of parents come to Southsea Library to get to know each other and it can be respite for parents and carers who can be stressed or feel isolated
- It is a social meeting point, regardless of income, with access to computers and bringing their children into contact with books and encouraging children to socialise too
- One mother commented on the library bringing life to the precinct, especially at a time when 2 major stores had closed
- Rhyme time helps children develop their English language
- Books on parenting were available and the staff made families feel welcome; it is a happy, friendly place
- People of all ages and nationalities mix here

'June' also wished to pay tribute to Angela Gonzalez as the library manager (and manager of the South Group Libraries of Southsea, Beddow and Alderman Lacey libraries) for bringing enthusiasm and enabling such a range of activities to take place, as well as hosting charity events. Councillor Mason commented that the Southsea Library's strength is that is a community facility.

The Chair thanked the public, Lindy, Angela and Laura for their input, and asked if there are **barriers to access**? It was felt that Southsea Library is a good example of how libraries can work. The staff help facilitate the community to use the services. Decisions should be based on how services are located and co-located to be places for people to gather.

Not all families want to be engaged in reading and there are parts of the city that are less successful in this social inclusion such as Paulsgrove and

Charles Dickens. At Paulsgrove there are physical constraints with the library building and so it has more limited facilities. Some of the library buildings suffer from being less modern and can feel more intimidating. The panel members were aware of more modern community facilities that were well used such as the John Pounds Centre and felt that this should be replicated in existing buildings that people are using, where possible. The Southsea Library was seen as a template for what can be achieved as a community hub.

The meeting concluded at 6.50 pm.

Chair