



**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>	Bookfest 2023
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	28 July 2023
<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 Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development**

**2. Purpose**

**2.1** To report on Bookfest 2023, including the wide-ranging events that were delivered in-person and online, audience data, staffing and volunteering and plans for next year.

**3. Information Requested**

**3.1 Background and Overview**

2023 was the thirteenth annual Portsmouth BookFest and marked a return to an almost entirely in-person festival following the pandemic.

A three-week festival was presented across a wide range of locations in Portsmouth, from Wymering to Southsea. Following feedback from the previous year to continue to offer a small selection of online events, we presented two events using the Zoom video conferencing platform.

The Hayling Island Bookshop continues to be the partner bookseller and the festival continues to aim to increase engagement with book and writing events to residents and visitors to the city, particularly to those who might not usually attend book events.



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### **3.2 Events**

- 3.2.1** Audiences appeared to be delighted to be attending in person events again with audience satisfaction at most events very high and audiences taking the opportunity to contribute to events, sharing their own memories and experiences.
- 3.2.2 Children's Week** This year for the first time the first week of the festival was dedicated entirely to children's events for the half term holiday and this was a great success with almost all the events fully booked and receiving positive feedback. Children's Week saw engagement from children and families across the whole city with events held at Cosham and North End Libraries as popular as similar events in the south of the city. The Gruffalo tour attracted a diverse audience and 121 children, and their parents/carers attended.
- 3.2.3** For the first time we offered rap workshops as part of an Arts Council England funded project led by a partner organisation. The workshops saw an enthusiastic response from local young people who gained confidence throughout the session to perform their poetry and rap to each other. This positive collaboration with local rappers Majid and Rishky has led to further collaboration on events for Refugee Week in libraries in June 2023. We plan to continue to offer a Children's Week at future festivals and remain committed to engaging older children and young people in the programme.
- 3.2.4 Adults' Programme** Attendance at the adults' programme was generally high. The most popular event was the talk delivered by former Channel 4 and ITN journalist, Jon Snow. This event at the Eldon Building which was fully booked with a capacity audience of 200 people. Events with a local theme were also very popular. The Road to Karachi event (about the Portsmouth cookery school of the 1980s) was fully booked and the events about the Hovercraft and the first Isle of Wight festivals were also extremely popular. Former Portsmouth resident, Graham Hurley also had a very high attendance with an audience of fans packing the Menuhin Theatre. Writing workshops continue to be popular with high attendance at most of the workshops. The ghostly writing workshop at Wymering Manor was particularly successful with writers relishing the chance to write in such an unusual location.
- 3.2.5 Online events** Despite audience feedback in 2021 and 2022 to continue with online events, we found audiences harder to engage in both of our online Zoom events. It seems audiences are less interested in attending online events now the pandemic has ended. Having said that, online events can present a chance to feature authors who may not be able to travel to Portsmouth and give us the opportunity to offer events to those who may be housebound so it will be something we continue to explore and offer, albeit on a smaller scale.



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### **3.3 Audience demographics**

**3.3.1 Audience location:** The festival remains overwhelmingly a local festival, with 91% of audiences who provided feedback living in the PO postcode area. Of the PO postcodes, PO6 (Cosham, Drayton and Farlington) were most represented, followed by PO4 and PO5 (Eastney and Southsea). It's been pleasing to see events attended by more people from the north of the city than in previous years. This may be due to a greater range of events taking place in the north of the city such as the Wymering Manor event and the children's events in Cosham and North End Libraries. 9% of audiences came from areas outside the PO area with Southampton, Guildford and Brighton being quoted and even as far afield as Reading and Cambridge. It's unsurprising that most of the audience live in the city as we do not have budget to advertise widely outside of the city. However, we do make maximum use of our social media to reach audiences further afield.

**3.3.2 Audience ages:** As we have seen with previous festivals, the largest demographic of audiences for BookFest are in the 60+ category. However, we have seen this year a notable increase in the numbers of people in the 31-40 and 41-50 age groups. Looking at the data it seems some of the writing workshop attracted a younger audience, as did the Jon Snow event. Attendance in the 11-20 age group was also higher this year due to the wider range of events on offer for this age group at the Children's Week such as the rap workshop and the writing workshops.

**3.3.3 Audience gender:** BookFest events continue to be attended by more people who identify as female rather than male. There has been a notable increase in the number of people who identify as male attending events this year. Men were particularly drawn to the events about Arthur Conan Doyle, City Space, Iconicon (architecture), the Hovercraft, Jon Snow and the Isle of Wight Festival and we will continue to offer events that may attract a male audience.

**3.3.4 Diversity:** We continue to work hard to present more diverse events. This year the rap workshop and the Jon Snow event attracted a more diverse audience, and the LGBT panel event was also very popular.



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**3.4 Staffing and volunteering**

The festival is a key activity for libraries and one that a relatively small group of staff manage to put together, working hard to ensure audiences and authors enjoy their events. As it continues to be very staff intensive, we continue to look at ways we can most effectively manage events. This year we were delighted to support many local authors with events but found ourselves to be juggling sometimes three or four hour events in one evening. Next year, we plan to bring the local author events into one weekend so that we can ensure we have enough staff resource to manage events. We are also tremendously grateful for all the support that volunteers give us and seek to grow the number of volunteers in 2024.

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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