



**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>	Library Outreach Team Update
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	17 November 2023
<b>Report by:</b>	Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services
<b>Wards affected:</b>	All

---

**1. Requested by**

**2. Purpose**

**2.1** To explain the role of the Library and Archive Service's Learning and Engagement Team and update the Portfolio Holder on how the team's work feeds into the Libraries Connected Universal Offers and the Portsmouth City Council Corporate Plan.

**3. Information Requested**

**3.1 Why is there a Learning and Engagement Team in the Library and Archive Service?**

**3.1.1** The Learning and Engagement Team is essential to service development. Without the outreach and development work the team does the Library and Archive Service cannot identify potential users, build relationships with service providers in the city, discover why people stop using libraries and what the barriers to usage might be, coordinate a diverse range of events that support the day-to-day frontline activities and deliver externally funded projects.

**3.1.2** There is a responsibility for Libraries and Archives to do this work to ensure they remain relevant and accessible to residents and visitors to Portsmouth. There is also a statutory duty to ensure the Service meets equalities law and meets the needs of people with protected characteristics.



## **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)**

**3.1.3** The team's work is critical to all of this, and it is essential they have the capacity and time to deliver this work, especially given that the frontline teams do not.

### **3.2 Who are the Learning and Engagement Team?**

The team is made up of highly knowledgeable staff with a combined experience of almost one hundred years working in libraries or working with communities and delivering outreach.

#### **3.2.1 The team:**

- Volunteer Futures Project Officer - is a two-year Arts Council England funded post of £130k to manage the Volunteer Futures project for the Culture and Regulatory Service. The remit of this role is to extend volunteering to groups who may not normally have the opportunity to volunteer and to ensure a city-wide approach to volunteering.
- Vision Impairment Officer: works to support people with print and vision impairment across the city through one-to-one support, classes, groups and workshops and supporting other Council services.
- Learning and Outreach Officers (x 2): work out in the community delivering books to housebound people, supporting volunteers, visiting schools, nurseries and groups, arranging and delivering workshops and managing, delivering, and supporting outreach projects and events. Both officers also have an important role in leading children's services in libraries- managing and delivering the Summer Reading Challenge each year and managing and selecting children's stock.

### **3.3 The Universal Library Offers and Corporate Plan**

The recent Libraries for living, and for living better report by Libraries Connected, Arts Council England and others (Appendix A) estimates that the Library Services in England can generate social benefits to their communities to a value of at least £3.4bn per year - at least six times their annual running cost. These benefits come from the positive and beneficial work libraries do in several areas which can link to into the Libraries Connected Universal Offers for Libraries and the Portsmouth City Council Corporate Plan 2023-24. The national library offers aim to connect communities, improve wellbeing, and promote equality through learning, literacy and cultural activity and act to underpin everything public libraries do, providing a



## **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)**

benchmark as to what libraries should be delivering. The Corporate Plan prioritises a city vision that focusses on a healthy and happy city; a city of lifelong learning; a city rich in culture and creativity; a green city; a thriving economy and a city with easy travel. The work our team does in these areas delivers the Offers and City Vision in the following ways:

### **3.3.1 Culture and creativity**

- BookFest - the yearly Portsmouth BookFest is managed by the Service Development Manager with the Learning and Engagement Team. It is a three-week festival of events and workshops aimed at increasing access to books and reading with a specially dedicated children's week. The festival includes many cultural events presenting authors, facilitators, book characters and the chance to hear informative events with debate.
- Art and crafts workshops - libraries play a crucial role in maintaining access to arts and crafts for children during school holidays and in providing opportunities for adults to benefit from learning new skills and meeting new people at the clubs and workshops.
- Libraries of Sanctuary application and events - the team are leading an application for Portsmouth Library and Archive Service to become a Library of Sanctuary, providing welcoming spaces, outreach activity and signposting for asylum seekers and refugees.

### **3.3.2 Health and wellbeing/A healthy and happy city**

- Wellbeing zones - all libraries stock a wide range of books and information on health and wellbeing topics, coordinated and purchased by the Learning and Engagement Team. The Wellbeing Zones empower customers to support their own health and wellbeing and relieve pressure on busy health services.
- Workshops and talks - The team have organised talks for the public and practitioners to support the Wellbeing Zones. Successful events have included talks on Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and on Autism.
- Hosting social and support groups in libraries - The team successfully applied for funding from The Reading Agency to develop Reading Friends

groups in the city. The team are supporting a very successful group at Cosham Library with the aim of helping people make social connections



## **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)**

through reading and another group has started in Southsea Library. In addition to Reading Friends, the team support the reading groups service, buying book sets for the service and starting and supporting new groups. For some attendees the reading groups provide a vital support to their wellbeing, making new friends, having the chance to express themselves through the topics the books cover and during the pandemic, the groups valued the chance to meet online.

- Volunteering - The team support many volunteers to develop new skills and volunteering can greatly enhance wellbeing. The Volunteer Futures Officer has recruited a wide range of volunteers to support a host of library activities. The volunteering in a supportive environment has increased the volunteers' confidence and in some cases is the only activity they have been able to leave the house for.

### **3.3.3 Information and digital/Lifelong Learning/A thriving economy**

- IT workshops - The team set up and manage several IT workshops run in partnership with local learning providers. These workshops support essential IT learning, particularly amongst those who may not be confident using computers, as well as more creative sessions on using IT to support photography or socialising. The team have also supported job seekers back into work through help with using job seeker websites and creating CVs. The team also set up Code Clubs to support young peoples' IT progress.
- 60+ festival workshops - the team put on several successful workshops and sessions for the 60+ festival aimed at increasing confidence in using library digital services and taking part in fun learning opportunities.

### **3.3.4 Reading**

- BookFest - aims to make reading and book events accessible to residents. This is largely achieved through making ticket prices affordable (with discounted options for some events), using a wide range of venues not necessarily associated with books, through family friendly events and by presenting a diverse range of speakers.
- Book promotions - the team works with the Information and Learning team to present book promotions that mark important dates in the calendar such as Black History Month, LGBTQ+ History Month, Pride Week and Refugee Week.



## **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)**

- Bookstart - this is a National scheme that the team deliver locally to provide book packs and library information to children in need across the whole city.
- Housebound Library Service- the team deliver books to the housebound throughout the whole city with the support of volunteers - a vitally important service to those who are unable to visit libraries.

### **3.3.5 Vision and print impaired peoples' promise**

- The Vision Impairment Officer supports a wide range of people with vision and print impairment. She offers one to one support - from assisting those who have been newly diagnosed with a vision impairment to those needing ongoing support. She provides IT classes on how to use VI software, Braille translation and advice on using the latest equipment. A successful VI reading group takes place weekly where members listen to eAudiobooks. Many clients are referred for support from other Council services.

### **3.3.6 Children's promise**

- Summer Reading Challenge and SRC+ - a large part of the team's work is in the management and delivery of the Summer Reading Challenge. This yearly initiative aims to increase children's confidence with reading during the school summer holidays and helps them to keep reading during the long break. The team coordinate a huge programme of promotion in the run up to the holidays visiting every school in Portsmouth to give talks at assemblies, using newsletters, press and social media to promote the Challenge, recruiting young volunteers to assist in libraries during the holidays and crucially, to run the Summer Reading Challenge + - a programme of activity that invites schools to nominate pupils who may not have the opportunity to participate in the Challenge during the holidays and instead support them to complete the Challenge in term time.
- Children's books - the team purchase children's books for the Service. This is an important role to ensure stock is carefully selected that meets the needs of local children and families and presents a diverse breadth of reading topics and different voices.
- Activities and events - the team support the frontline library teams to deliver children's activities and events in libraries. In 2021/2022 this included a Reading Agency funded STEM project called Reading Sparks. The team delivered some highly successful STEM based activities and workshops in libraries and beyond including slime workshops, space and the solar system.

### **3.3.7 A Green City/ A city with easy travel**



**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)**

- Public Libraries are the ultimate book recycling centre- borrowing rather than purchasing books is better for the environment and saves money. This has further been enhanced by the availability of an eBook service for customers which is available 24/7 from the comfort of home.
- Portsmouth residents are never further than a 20- minute walk from a library meaning that the use of transport is minimised. The Mobile Library very successfully covers areas where residents have further to travel for services such as in Eastney, Drayton and Farlington. The Library Service also offers free reservations so that residents can have books from other libraries delivered to their local library.

.....  
 Signed by  
**Stephen Baily**  
**Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services**

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - Libraries for Living and for Living Better

**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