

Title of meeting: Culture, Regeneration and Economic Development Decision Meeting

Subject: 2024 Portsmouth School Library Service Update

Date of meeting: 11 October 2024

Cabinet Member: Councillor Steve Pitt

Report by: Director of Culture, Leisure and Regulatory Services

Wards affected: All

1. Summary

Portsmouth School Library Service (SLS), is a Traded Service of Portsmouth City Council and part of the wider Portsmouth Library and Archive Service. Schools subscribe on the basis of a two-year service level agreement.

2. Purpose of report

- 2.1 Following the appointment of a new School Library Service Manager in April 2024 and the launch of the 2024-26 SLA, this report provides an update to The Leader on the current position of the service, including the level of 'buy-back' from schools in the city.

3. Background

- 3.1 Unlike the public library service in the city, Portsmouth SLS is funded directly by subscribing schools who purchase services under a two-year service level agreement. The 2024-26 service level agreement has been purchased by all primary and secondary LEA and Academy schools in the city. In addition, a city independent school and six West Sussex secondary schools, also subscribe. This level of 'buy-back' is extremely high and does not reflect the national picture of school library services.

3.2. Service Level Agreement

The service level agreement covers a period of two school academic years. The content of the agreement is overseen and reviewed by a steering group that meets twice annually, with a membership of the SLS Manager, a Primary and Secondary School Headteacher, Portsmouth City Council's Head of Sufficiency and Resources (who manages Traded Services) a teaching lead in either literacy or English, a member of library staff from a subscribing school and the Library and Archive Service Manager.

This group plays a critical function in ensuring the SLS continues to meet the needs of its customers, responding to feedback and also horizon scanning so the very latest developments that can support the school curriculum and reading for pleasure are being include in the service level agreement (see Appendix 1, featuring some feedback from SLS customers and stakeholders).

- 3.3 Physical books, eBooks, eAudiobooks and other material are loaned to schools with an allocation based on pupil numbers. One of the reasons the service is so highly regarded is the speed and responsiveness to the individual needs of schools, many receiving stock throughout the school year, often tailored to curriculum requirements and individual pupil requests. Schools are also able to exchange up to sixty per cent of their SLS loans during the year, so their libraries can keep up to date with curriculum changes and reflect changing tastes in recreational reading (see Appendix 2 which gives performance statistics on book loans).
- 3.4 Portsmouth SLS also offers school professionals advice on their library design and layout and also supports continuing professional development of staff, offering training and support with Library Management System Software and annual conferences for primary and secondary school librarians.
- 3.5 One of the key features of the Portsmouth SLS service level agreement is that it offers an annual programme of reader development activities which are designed to create maximum excitement and enthusiasm around reading. These include the Portsmouth Book Awards, where children in three different age categories - Year 1; Year 5 and Years 7/8 - read from a shortlist of titles and vote for their winner. Each year up to 4000 children in nearly 50 Portsmouth schools take part, with well over a thousand Year 5 pupils attending their Celebration Event at Kings Theatre.
- 3.6 The SLS also offers an annual Literature Quiz for pupils in Years Five and Six in primary schools and Years Seven and Eight in secondary schools. Participating teams read books in advance of the quiz by four guest authors, who also attend, answering questions based on the books and are also tested on their wider knowledge of books. Book token prizes are awarded to round winners and the children get to take home a signed book by one of the visiting authors, so they are rewarded for their participation, even if they do not get to take home the winning trophy.
- 3.7 Nearly 10,000 pupils also engage with the Portsmouth SLS 'Meet the Author' programme, which brings notable children's authors to schools in the city, inspiring and encouraging children to read more and improve their writing skills (see Appendix 3, which gives performance statistics for these reader development activities).
- 3.8 In recent years, Portsmouth SLS has been partnership working with other PCC departments including the School Improvement Service, delivering an annual Big City Read for Year 6 pupils and in partnership with Early Years, a list of ten recommended picture books for parents to read with children before they start school. SLS supports public libraries in the promotion of the Summer Reading Challenge and in the last two

years, with additional funding from UKSPF, has held two mass participation reading events with Year 1 pupils in College Park and Victoria Park

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

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Performance figures 2022/2023 and 2023/2024

Appendix 2 Performance figures for reader development activities

Appendix 3 Feedback and comments on SLS activities

Appendix 1

Feedback and comments on Portsmouth SLS and their activities

"That was the best thing I have ever been to in my life!" - Year 5 pupil after the Book Award Ceremony at the Kings Theatre

" We very much enjoyed taking part and would always love to welcome authors for visits to our school."- Primary school KS1 teacher

"A huge thank you for everything you have done this year. The school library service has made such a difference to the school and the breadth of books that the school can now access". - Primary English Lead

"A big thank you to you and all your team. All your hard work to promote and encourage young readers is priceless". - Junior school English Lead

"A huge Thank You to the entire SLS team for always providing such a fabulous service. You are all such a supportive, knowledgeable and friendly bunch :) Here's to many more interactions in the next academic year! "- Junior school librarian

" As always, thank you for all your hard work in putting together the Year 1 Picture Book Awards, the children and staff thoroughly enjoy taking part!"- Year 1 teacher on Year 1 Picture Book Award

"The children have really enjoyed listening to and sharing the stories with one another". - Year 1 teacher on Year 1 Picture Book Award

"Please can I say a BIG thank you to you all for your amazing services while I have been at the school for the last 9 years" - Primary Deputy Head

"Sincere thanks for all your help and support throughout the year" - Secondary School Librarian

"If you work in a school in Portsmouth and don't already sign up for School Library Service, then you really should talk to your SLT and fix that! Portsmouth Book Award was a highlight of my week last week! Thanks to the dedicated staff at SLS" - Primary School Librarian posting on X (Formally Twitter)

"Thank you for another year of above and beyond support and kindness, I couldn't survive without you" -Secondary School Librarian

"Please keep up all the great work you do promoting reading for pleasure, and thank you to the children of Portsmouth and Portsmouth SLS for making me feel like a rock star today" - winning author Year 5 Book Award

"Thank you so much for organising events for children who love reading. My daughter spends a lot of time being dragged along to basketball matches to watch her brother play. Well, this week she had her time to shine as she was in the winning team for the Secondary Literature Quiz and she won her round at the Portsmouth School's Spelling Bee. She said it has been the best week of her life!" -Parent of a pupil

Appendix 2

Performance figures 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 to date

Performance factor	2022/2023	2023/2024
Number of SLS books in schools	69,845	71,176
Percentage of SLS books exchanged during the year	37%	36%
Books issued	44,035	42,254
Books selected by SLS and issued	30,038	31,696
% of issues selected by SLS staff	68%	75%
SLS staff level	3 FTE	3 FTE

Appendix 3

Performance figures reader development activities 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 to date

Performance factor	2022/2023	2023/2024
Number of author/illustrator events organised by the SLS	30	33
Number of children attending Meet the Author events	12,644	13,208
Number of schools involved in Meet the Author events	40	48
Number of children participating in Portsmouth Book Awards for Year 1, 5 and 8/9 pupils	3,761	3,870
Number of schools participating in Portsmouth Book Awards	67	68
Number of children participating in Y6 Big City Read	2442	2704
Number of schools participating in Y6 Big City Read	36	40
Number of children participating in Literature Quizzes	308	362
Number of schools participating in Literature Quizzes	30	36

