

<b>ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS</b>
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1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet member for Cultural Services and Sport</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> December 2009</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Rotherham Children’s Book Festival</b>
4.	<b>Programme Area:</b>	<b>EDS</b>

### 5. Summary

Rotherham Children’s Book Festival is a borough wide annual literature festival programmed for children, young people and their families, and uses libraries and other community spaces as venues. The aim of the Festival is to inspire creative reading and writing and encourage a love of books amongst the young and those who care for them. An overarching objective of the Children’s Book Festival is to build audiences for literature.

### 6. Recommendations

- **That Cabinet Member endorses a commitment in principle to sustain and develop Rotherham Children’s Book Festival**
- **That the Library and Information Service continues to explore sponsorship options**
- **That this report is received**

## 7. Proposals and Details

- Rotherham Library and Information Service endorses and acknowledges the value and beneficial effect of reading through the support of live literature events and activities and recognises the importance and positive effect of such activity in furthering the aspirations and contributing to the well being of Rotherham's young people and their families.
- The Festival encourages the recognition of the value of reading, and shows how opening up reading choices can help give young people the confidence to try something new, learn new skills and make discoveries. The Festival offers the opportunity for families to attend events, share stories and experience reading in new ways. Festival activities target children and young people in an age range from pre - school to sixteen and their carers.

### 7.1 Background

- Rotherham Children's Book Festival grew out of an initiative from a Maltby community group who had visited the successful Northern Children's Book Festival in the North East. They liked what it had to offer and wanted us to replicate it here in Rotherham. The first events happened at Maltby library in 1998 and 1999 and the involvement of local schools was sought.
- Because of the success of these early events, Arts Council funding was secured in 2000 to support the festival for a further two years with an attached project worker. As a result of this, Rotherham Library and Information Service was able to roll out the festival to community libraries across the borough. In order to sustain the good work and in recognition of its success the festival was corporately funded from 2004. The festival has thus become a celebration of books, reading and stories and has evolved and diversified to include visits from authors, illustrators, storytellers, poets and other artists. Notable visitors have included; Gervaise Phinn, Ian McMillan Benjamin Zephaniah, Michael Morpurgo, Jacqueline Wilson, Berlie Doherty and Tony Ross.
- We have over the last nine years continued to maintain a varied and diverse programme of events across 16 community library sites and some community venues. Considerations are given to the theme, format, placing and cultural relevance of events so as to suit the needs of particular target groups and communities. Author talks and the media of music, dance and drama have been used to promote reading and creative writing and Rotherham's libraries have been the primary venues.
- The Children's Festival promotes the widely recognised view that live literature events often encourage and inspire young people to read more widely and engage with books. It also promotes Rotherham Libraries as places where they can do that. Evaluations over successive years have made us aware of the children and young people who, as a result of

visiting a Festival event, have read more widely, have borrowed more library books or have decided to try writing their own material. Many comments demonstrate that they have been hooked into reading through festival events and that their impressions of libraries as a result are more positive.

- The Children's Book Festival has been the catalyst for spin off projects such as an occasional anthology of creative writing by young people in Rotherham. This has been produced through a partnership between the Schools Effectiveness Service and Rotherham Library and Information Service and is entitled 'From Where We Stand'. A recent publication 'From Where We Stood' has been commissioned by the 'Inspire Rotherham' initiative and brings together the best of the earlier anthologies.

## 7.2 Current situation

- The Children's Book Festival is programmed and organised by a small Reader Development Team and is supported through the community library network. When compared with the delivery of similar events in other authorities this demonstrates good value for money.
- The events provide the opportunity for young people and their carers to see and speak to real authors and hear about their work. Audiences can witness literature in performance which for some is the catalyst to realising that reading and writing books is something that they too can enjoy and indeed do for themselves. Festival events now use more community venues taking library services to where people are and the annual programme always includes public facing events and activities.
- We have in recent years worked alongside and built relationships with other partners including;

The Schools Library Service  
The Schools Effectiveness Service  
Rotherham Children's Book Award  
Museums, Galleries, Heritage  
Theatres  
Green Spaces  
Community Arts  
The Get Real Team  
Rotherham United Football Club  
Philip Howard Books  
Games Workshops

- Through the evaluation process, the Children's Festival events and activities can be seen to have a positive effect upon the lives of children, parents, teachers, authors and staff. An evaluation of each Festival is carried out using the 'Inspiring Learning for All' model recommended by The Museums Libraries and Archives Council. Recent developments, in line with corporate requirements for consultation and evaluation

processes, will enable the data collected to be seen more widely. One of the values of the ILFA model of evaluation is that it enables consideration of the qualitative experience of visitors to the festival. The results have clearly shown that learning is occurring in our libraries outside of formal learning environments and that reading for pleasure is often of key importance to that engagement.

- The creation of a diverse and meaningful programme of events and activities takes some considerable time, thought and experience. As an example, the programme for 2009 included the presence of the mobile library in Clifton Park which was used as the base for a 'Rhyme Time' session. Sixty people attended, 34 of whom were under 5. Library staff facilitated parachute games and a musical story time that featured a book celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' by Eric Carle. This was followed by a 'Mini Beast Hunt' session in the undergrowth, lead by Clifton Park Rangers. Later on in the day, parents and children joined library staff, rangers and local storyteller Matt Laurie and his flute, for a musical story walk through the park.
- The key themes of walking for health, creating an awareness of nature and environment, listening to music and reading for fun were all encompassed in these sessions
- Another session saw the Performance Poet Benjamin Zephaniah hold a thought provoking and inspiring session with fifty year eight students and their teachers at our Central Library, where he recited poems and talked about his life and experiences as a poet.
- Annapurna Dance Company came into libraries to perform to audiences of primary children and told traditional Indian stories using dance as their inspiration.
- We have seen consistent results with regard to feedback from teachers and others who visit Festival events. Over 90% of them say that the children who attend Festival events feel more positively about libraries, reading and other people.

#### **Quotes from those who attended**

*'It made me more aware of authors I had not heard of before.'*  
(teacher)

*'It was interesting to see which children were engaged and asking questions'*  
(teacher)

*'I learned that reading can get you somewhere'*  
(student KS2)

*'I learned that reading is better than watching TV'*  
(student KS 2)

*'I enjoyed seeing the children's enjoyment in learning'  
(parent)*

*'Rotherham libraries look after writers who visit. That's not just me talking but other writers I know. The staff are always informed and friendly and more than that, they are enthusiastic about what they do. From a writer's point of view, they pick you up from the station, they make you a brew, they advertise your events and are full of positive comments. I like Rotherham a lot!!'  
(Poet Craig Bradley)*

- Number of attendees in 2009. Around 3,500 children and adults.
- Number of Author / Performers            21
- Number of public facing activities        49
- Number of sessions to invited schools audiences    53

### **7.3 Future Proposals**

- It is our intention to sustain and develop the Festival into the future. Books, reading and stories will be a pivotal focus for the development of all Festival activities. The continued engagement of current partners and the investigation of new partners will widen libraries, schools and community involvement.
- The Increased involvement of the Schools Library Service in Festival activity will promote Rotherham Children's Book Festival to a wider audience and will help frame the content and relevance of events.
- Increased family reading activity and public facing events in libraries will encourage participation in local cultural activity.
- 2010 will be our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and will take place at the end of June and last for around one week.

### **8. Finance**

The festival budget has remained constant since 2004, despite increasing costs. It currently stands at £12,000 with the requirement to bid for support from the corporate promotional budget. This sum also helps to cover a small amount of reader development activity during the course of the year. This year £4,000 was allocated to the Festival from the corporately managed marketing budget. Any spending promoting the Festival needs to be taken from this corporately managed budget.

Sponsorship options to contribute to the funding of the Festival need further investigation.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

**9.1** All Festival events are risk assessed in accordance with RMBC Risk Management Policy and aim to provide – Best value.

**9.2** The uncertainty of rising costs of authors and expenses, and pressure on available staff time could signal an inability to build on and sustain current levels of programming and attendance.

**9.3** Increased use of Community venues could be similarly challenged.

**9.4** The ability to programme in advance is affected by budget restrictions and uncertainties.

**9.5** The requirement to bid for corporate marketing money to finance the promotion of the Festival introduces a further element of risk.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

**10.1** Rotherham Children's Book Festival contributes towards the seven themes within the Corporate plan.

- Rotherham Learning  
'Rotherham people will be recognised as being informed, skilled and creative.'
- Rotherham Achieving  
'contributes to the cultural life of Rotherham'
- Rotherham Alive  
'People will be able to express themselves and have opportunities to be involved in a wide range of high quality cultural, social and sporting activities'
- Rotherham Safe  
'Environments, people and businesses will be protected and nurtured.'
- Rotherham Proud  
'The borough will have a positive external image.'

### **10.2 Rotherham's Community strategy**

- Rotherham Alive  
'Improve the life chances of children and young people.'  
'Enhance opportunities for involvement in the cultural activities.'
- Rotherham Achieving  
'Raise quality of life and living standards.'

- Rotherham Learning

‘Encourage more local people to become involved in learning.’

## 11. Background Papers and Consultation

- Rotherham Library and Information Service Plan
- Review of Rotherham Children’s Book Festival 2007
- Inspiring Learning For All - a self-help improvement framework for museums, libraries and archives  
<http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/>

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