



To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 20th April, 2023.

Subject: Delivery of the Summer Reading Challenge in Coventry

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 The purpose of this Briefing Note is to introduce the Scrutiny Board to the Summer Reading Challenge, share some information regarding this year's activities and introduce the item on the Board's agenda for this meeting.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Board are recommended to note this report, and to provide any recommendations following the discussion with Library Service officers to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 The Reading Agency is a national charity whose main purpose is to support the promotion of reading as an activity to promote good health and wellbeing, and support people to tackle life's big challenges. For many years the Reading Agency's flagship project for children has been the Summer Reading Challenge (SRC).
- 3.2 SRC is delivered in partnership with public libraries, with the very vast majority of library services taking part to some extent. The programme is intended to act as a bridge for reading and learning across the main school holidays. The idea is that for children who maintain active reading over the holiday, their minds will remain active, they will be updating or improving their reading skills and will arrive better prepared for the new school year in September.
- 3.3 Each year there is a distinctive theme to the SRC designed by the Reading Agency, and this year the theme is "Ready, Set, Read!". The Reading Agency has teamed up with the Youth Sport Trust to design a challenge which "aims to keep children's minds and bodies active over the summer break, empowering young people to forge new connections with others and unleash the power of play, sport and physical activity through learning."
- 3.4 Children will be encouraged to make regular visits to their local library, register for the SRC, read 6 books from the carefully selected booklist and perform a series of activities to earn rewards (stickers, activity cards etc) eventually becoming a 'completer' and being rewarded with a medal. The objective is to "keep imaginations moving across the school holidays" and by participating children will have the opportunity to try new and exciting books, develop some new skills and hopefully find new interests which they can continue after completion of the SRC.
- 3.5 The SRC theme for 2022 was "Gadgeteers" which had a set of resources and characters, brought to life by children's writer and illustrator Julian Beresford, which helped children use their curiosity and wonder to understand the science behind a whole range of interests from fashion and technology to cooking and music. To support the 2022 SRC the Reading Agency made small grants available to library services to improve access and widen participation.

- 3.6 In Coventry we were successful in receiving some additional resources from the Reading Agency to facilitate a pilot project with a small number of Coventry schools. The Library Service approached 7 local schools and an officer was assigned to each to build a relationship with the school, either focusing on year 3 or year 1. The children all were offered a 'pilot scheme pack' which the officer offered to distribute to them. The aim was that we would visit the children in class a few times during June/July and that they visit their local library in the run up to the SRC.
- 3.7 The schools were chosen on a targeted basis working with Schools Improvement and Literacy Co-ordinators. Library managers found that they had to adapt their plans to fit the needs and capacity of the school staff. Some schools were difficult to communicate with, but others were very supportive, and staff noted new children visiting and joining the library and participating in the SRC.
- 3.8 Overall, both in Coventry and elsewhere numbers of children completing the SRC has fallen in recent years. Whilst in the mid-2010s Coventry would have 3,000+ children take part with more than half 'completing' the challenge, recent numbers are smaller with around 1700 children taking some part and around 800 completers. Factors influencing this include:
- Move to community managed libraries with some choosing not to take part.
 - Children's tastes change and the appeal of stickers etc change, more resources are now digital, including registration but there is a disconnect.
 - In previous years we had Young People acting as volunteers which due to pressure on staff time has not been continued.
 - Covid continued to be a factor last year.
 - Lifestyle factors and changing patterns of geographical movement of families during the summer holidays.
- 3.9 Whilst every participating authority is required to utilise the 'core package' of stickers / bookmarks etc, additional incentives are optional. This year Coventry Libraries will include prizes of children's footballs, rugby balls, perforated balls (for indoor use), throwing rings, hula hoops etc to build on a theme of getting active and continuing to participate in sports and physical activity. We will be working on cross-marketing with CVLife to encourage participation and will also be encouraging participation in online activities.
- 3.10 Total spending on the SRC is anticipated to be around £ 3,250 for the core materials, plus c £1,200 for the additional prizes / encouragements.
- 3.11 Further information regarding this years SRC and associated content can be found at:
www.sumerreadingchallenge.org.uk

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