

Agenda item 6

For decision: Frome Literacy Action

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Summary

This report sets out the background to the creation of Frome Literacy Action and the key findings and proposes action plan agreed in consultation with the National Literacy Trust.

It is recommended that councillors agree that FTC continues to coordinate and service Frome Literacy Action, who will deliver a series of actions, through the allocation of staff time and expert fundraising support over the next three years to ensure its success in increasing local literacy levels.

Background

One in six adults in Britain has a literacy level below that expected of an eleven year old. People with this low level of literacy are more likely to struggle in school, find it harder to gain qualifications and employment and are more likely to live a shorter and less healthy life. As parents, people with low literacy skills often find it more difficult to support their children's education and therefore contribute to intergenerational cycles of low literacy.

The causes of low literacy are complex, linked to disadvantage and affected by attitudes and behaviours as well as skills and knowledge.

Locally, we know from consultation with key statutory and voluntary agencies, employers and schools that low levels of literacy are an issue in our community. The Citizen's Advice Bureau, Job Centre Plus, Frome Community Education and health visitors, among others, report people having trouble understanding important letters, written information such as packs for new parents or completing forms and applications.

Frome schools also identify intergenerational low literacy levels as a significant challenge.

Frome Literacy Action

Continuing low levels of literacy is an issue that could undermine our adopted strategic aims of wellbeing, prosperity and environmental sustainability/resilience. We therefore convened a group of interested parties to consider a possible town wide response to the problem.

Frome Literacy Action includes the heads of English at Oakfield Middle school and Frome College, the headteacher of Trinity First School, Frome Community Education, The Library Service Development worker, Hunting Raven Bookshop, Somerset Skills and Learning, Children's Centres and Get Set Services, the CAB and Fair Frome. The group is coordinated by Frome Town Council.

Frome Town Council commissioned the National Literacy Trust to:

- explore the challenges faced in Frome related to literacy and education;
- reach agreement on the priority areas for Frome (geographic, demographic, partnership);
- prioritise a limited set of actions and activities to respond to the priorities;
- agree measures and means of demonstrating impact.

A full day workshop facilitated by the National Literacy Trust took place with all partners in Frome in November 2016. The full report can be found in Appendix 1.

Key Findings

The National Literacy Trust endorsed our whole community approach. '...raising literacy levels needs an approach which recognises and responds to the social and cultural factors contributing to low literacy, by working in partnership with organisations that reach the people in greatest need.'

They emphasised that increasing levels of literacy is a long-term community endeavour and that we should look at ten year targets rather than expect immediate results.

It was agreed Literacy Action Frome will work collectively to:

1. raise awareness of the importance of literacy and the availability of support;
2. support schools in their drive to raise literacy levels;
3. widen the partnership which has founded Literacy Action Frome (including employers and Frome Medical Practice);
4. deliver a media campaign 'Frome Reads' to change attitudes to literacy and create a town-wide identity which can be used to 'badge' literacy activities undertaken by partners.

The proposed outcomes are:

1. increased literacy levels;
2. reduced 'man-hours' required by front-line and voluntary services as a result of low literacy;
3. a wide range of diverse partners who have embedded improving literacy as part of their normal working practices;
4. increased take up of literacy offers – library membership, participation in training programmes, numbers of book clubs and reading groups.

These outcomes will be achieved through the delivery of a series of actions coordinated by Literacy Action Frome, serviced and coordinated by FTC and delivered by all of the partners including FTC.

The year one action plan is detailed in the audit in Appendix 1. This is a working document, evolving and developing as the partners identify their own actions and elements are delivered.

To date, Frome Reads has attracted direct financial support from Frome Rotary Club, in kind support to develop and create the brand and logo, and has been well received across Frome.

Recommendations

1. Adopt the approach outlined in the report
2. Adopt the Actions as detailed above
3. Continue to allocate staff and fundraising resources to continue to develop the work of Frome Literacy Action
4. Report back to the Committee at its meeting on 19 November