

Literacy Action Frome
National Literacy Trust consultation

A consultation was carried out on 17 November 2016 by Jason Vit (Literacy Hubs Manager: National Literacy Trust) and a voluntary group consisting of experts in the fields of education, community engagement, adult learning and members of the council – know as ‘Literacy Action Frome’. A review of evidence was conducted to identify the root causes of low literacy in Frome and to devise and implement a response. The review has been augmented with input from members of Literacy Action Frome to provide context for the data. The National Literacy Trust was commissioned to support the review and project development phase; including the presentation of national data sets and examples of best practice.

The consultation set out to:

1. Explore (and unpick) the challenges faced in Frome related to literacy and education
2. Reach agreement on the priority areas for Frome
 - a. Geographic, demographic, partnership
3. To prioritise a limited set of actions and activities to respond to the priorities
4. To agree measures and means of demonstrating impact

Frome context

Frome performs at or below the Somerset average for main national indicators.

Attainment Indicators	Year	Frome	Somerset	England
Foundation Stage: % achieving a good level of development	2013/14	62%	62%	61%
Key Stage 2: % achieving Level 4+ in Reading, Writing and Maths	2014/15	73%	79%	80%
GCSE: % Students achieving 5+ A*-C inc English & Maths	2014/15	56%	59%	54%

Significantly it has been noted that 50% of young people starting at Frome College are below expected levels in literacy and require additional support.

A range of sources were used to help understand the underlying literacy challenges in Frome including:

- Frome Town Profile (Somerset Intelligence team at Somerset County Council, August 2016)
- Consultations with Literacy Action Frome (November 2015 & March 2016)
- [Indices of deprivation 2015](#)

<u>Key challenges identified in Frome</u>		
Low literacy among parents (including skills, knowledge, experience of schools) is a significant barrier to children developing the literacy skills they need	Literacy levels in the Roma and traveller communities (including settled) remains low and engagement with the communities can be difficult	Anecdotally there seems to have been a rise in the number of parents claiming to home-school their children when this is not happening, or not happening well enough
Multiple school transitions (First, Middle and Upper) have a dislocating effect on too many children and may contribute to lower attainment	Aspiration – rooted in educational attainment – is not strong enough with too many parents unable or unwilling to provide the level of support and encouragement which their children need to achieve their potential	Low literacy levels are intergenerational; with trend data suggesting that low levels of readiness to start school continue to impact pupil outcomes until the end of their education and beyond
Low literacy skills among adults impacts on access to services and support e.g. CAB, Job Centre, use of IT		

It may be helpful to view the challenges outlined above in an ‘Attitude, Behaviour, Skills’ (ABS) matrix. This is a way to break down negative outcomes and begin to look at solutions to underlying challenges rather than specific problems. Below is one example which focusses on children and adults who are parents. This tool can be used to identify the root challenge, rather than the symptom of a challenge.

	Children		Parents	
Attitudes	Family/local culture doesn't value reading	Low aspiration for children ('I've done OK without much reading')	Lack of awareness of link between reading behaviour and future success	Schools/services seen as a 'no-go' area/threatening environment
Behaviour	Not choosing to read on their own	See reading as something 'taught by schools'	Stop reading with their children at a young age	Don't prioritise book ownership/ borrowing
Skills	Low attainment in reading at national tests	Lack of knowledge about the importance of reading early	Lack of knowledge about non-reading literacy	Low literacy skills

Geographic targeting

In addition to identifying groups of people facing literacy challenges the IMD (link above) was useful in highlighting specific parts of Frome where deprivation is high. The national evidence strongly suggests that these areas will also have people with the lowest levels of literacy. The IMD was updated in 2015 and should be used to prioritise the allocation of any resources which are limited and to identify where early efforts should be focussed.

Feedback from Literacy Action Frome

Members were asked to identify practical changes which could be delivered in Frome in different parts of the town, taking advantage of places where everyone will go at some time (e.g. health providers). Below are the main suggestions, listed by setting with some initial ideas about how these approaches could be achieved.

Setting	Change	Method
Home	More children's books in the home	Campaign/media to encourage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular library visits Sharing of books between pupils (peer advocacy)
Transport	'Sight words' on display	Funded set of 'Read, Write, Inc' 'red' words
Town / shops	More children using the library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library volunteers School visits
School	A seamless transition 'velvet escalator'	Shared accountability / joint assessment days between teaching staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared practice and better inter-school communication

	Better library provision in schools School libraries catering for early years and adults	Volunteer support Changed range of books and opening times
	Regular reading time / daily reading habit	Set reading time in school
Health	Quality books in waiting rooms (GP) Medical practice – community library/book swap	Campaign for donations
Leisure / sport	Reading in sports clubs	Books used for rewards for ‘man of the match’ Recommended books by local sports stars (my favourite books etc) Coaches / referees to advocate reading
Other	Book swap boxes outside schools / waiting areas for parents	Design competition for college/schools – local business fundraising
	Ambassadors in library / Local Literacy Champions	Via Volunteer Frome

Emerging from this section is a mixed picture of suggestions which is trying to tackle multiple strands of need. Some of these strands make implicit links between availability of books and a correlation in increased reading. While true that availability of reading material is required, the majority of challenges identified by the group relate to attitude and engagement with reading, rather than lack of access to materials. It is recommended that any action is justified against the intended outcome, rather than an output e.g.

Better library provision in schools (defined by more books of high quality and longer opening times) may be achieved by having volunteers and donations supporting them.

What, though is the outcome?

Is the aim to have:

1. better libraries
2. more children using libraries
3. children reading/reading more
4. children who already use libraries using them more
5. children who don't currently use libraries to start to use them

Any of the above outcomes may be a valid aim but may not all be achieved in the same way. Literacy Action Frome should plan activities based on outcomes and work backwards.¹

The role of technology was also highlighted by several delegates, including high rates of smart phone ownership, use of apps and other digital which could form part of promoting reading but also represents some challenges in relation to adult engagement with literacy.

Next steps

Proposed organisational structure

Literacy Action Frome is a steering group which should meet on a regular basis and will deliver Frome Reads. Frome Reads is the public facing identity for a range of work which will be place-based (i.e. Frome) and work to raise literacy levels in Frome through a consistent, multi-partner approach over 5-10 years. Literacy Action Frome recognises that low literacy is a socio-cultural problem where low attainment is strongly linked to deprivation and low aspiration. Low literacy results in people who often struggle at schools, in finding work and die younger of preventable diseases. Because the root causes of low literacy are wide ranging, various and entrenched in societal and cultural factors – the solutions need to be equally flexible and involve a broad range of partners.

Literacy Action Frome will identify priority areas, high need groups within the Frome community and contact organisations and individuals who already work with the priority groups. They will coordinate donated resources and professional support from members of Literacy Action Frome to enable organisations to deliver more effective and integrated literacy support.

Literacy Action Frome may also take on a fundraising role through community giving, council funding and applications to Trust and Foundations. Literacy Action Frome will investigate the legal and financial framework necessary, or seek a local partner able to 'host' the work of Literacy Action Frome.

Actions

¹ Media coverage/funder support may also be a valid outcome.

Following wide ranging discussions on the literacy challenge and ideas from National Literacy Trust Hubs presented by Jason Vit, a number of general conclusions were reached:

1. Literacy Action Frome will reflect on the current membership and consider inviting representatives from Public Health among others. Kate Hellard will serve as the Secretariat for the group.
2. Literacy Action Frome will design a public facing campaign with an online and media presence aimed at the public and to be called Frome Reads. The campaign will serve as an umbrella identity for a range of activities which will be carried out by partner organisations as well as the members of Literacy Action Frome. (Suggested activities are below).
3. In the medium term; to create supporting groups which represent specific partner types. These support groups will help coordinate activity among similar organisations under the Frome Reads banner and contribute to the overall aims of Literacy Action Frome.
 - a. Schools (through meetings of Heads of Literacy Leads)
 - b. Adult education and support services
 - c. Businesses/employers
 - d. Health service

Frome Literacy Action Matrix for Year One

Schools	Other partners	Media
Continuing to promote reading for fun in addition to the curriculum (eg World Book Day, Libraries Week).	Working with large employers to support literacy improvement through the Good Business Framework.	Develop a media campaign to celebrate reading for fun in Frome.
Promote Reading Ahead (formerly Six Book Challenge) to parents at the same time as the Summer Reading Challenge.	Increased awareness of Books on Prescription and other national initiatives among health providers, education staff and the general public.	
Parent literacy champions (school gates) parent/TA regularly available for parents.	Explore possible reading projects with Health Connections and other partners, eg Active and In Touch.	Identify and promote neighbourhood literacy champions.
Contribute reading recommendations for inclusion in local press.	Literacy cost study with front line agencies including CAB.	Top tips for parents on local radio / in media including book recommendations (regular spot agreed in Frome Times)
Explore reading as part of transition with participation and success celebrated when pupils transition.	Youth Conference Make it Happen 'Book Swap' – link to middle school to college transition and visiting authors.	Partnership with community radio – Frome voices reading (agreed with Frome FM).
Work on an agreed definition of 'School Readiness' and readiness for all stages of transition.	Reading materials in community settings, including popular sports clubs and Fair Frome, linked to and signposting Frome Library.	Promote local 'Frome Reads' authors and reading lists in local bookshops and Frome Library.
First schools' Parents and Siblings reading group.	Motivation for children – e.g. books or tokens as rewards for kids clubs, sport etc	Frome Phonics film.

Partnerships with sports clubs with a literacy focus.	Working with large employers to support literacy improvement through the Good Business Framework.	Explore the possibility of 'child's eye level' sight word/rhyme transfers on bus stops.
To explore the value of schools buying membership of the National Literacy Trust network and participation in the Annual Literacy Survey.	Strengthen links with and promotion of Hunting Raven (including visiting authors, ABC Fantastic Fiction week) and Frome Library.	'Reading corners' for children and storytelling at popular town events.
Other specific action plans, both between schools and in individual schools in place.	Ensuring entry level opportunities for acquiring literacy skills and adequate signposting to these.	Window decals for town centre businesses supporting Frome Reads (barbers/cafes/pubs etc).