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To: Cabinet – 30 March 2009
Subject: National Year of Reading (NYR): a Legacy beyond 2008
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report aims to raise awareness of:

- the achievements of National Year of Reading (NYR) in Kent
 - plans to develop a Strategy for Reading and Literacy for Kent recognising that reading is fundamental to Kent's economy and community health and wellbeing
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1. Background

In March 2008 we launched National Year of Reading (NYR) in Kent under the banner *Kent: a Great Place to Read*.

There is already national recognition of Kent's work and the Leader was invited to speak at the national conference in September. National evaluation states that *'it is recognised that the delivery of NYR in Kent provides a positive example to other Library Services and Local Authorities. The research team were impressed by the level and diversity of groups and individuals actively engaged in the NYR, in particular the engagement of senior members of the council'*. Some evidence of success is highlighted in this report.

2. Kent: a Great Place to Read: new and innovative approaches

We have tested and developed:

- new approaches to literacy
for example Library in the Park, Doorstep Libraries, The Kent Story
- new partnerships for literacy
working with partners such as the NHS, the BBC, the Probation Service
- new audiences for literacy
by working with reading groups for people with special needs, and developing services for adults with learning disabilities
- a renewed focus for existing programmes for literacy
programmes such as "Reach out and Read", "6 Book Challenge", "Time2Give"

These programmes are described in more detail in **Appendix 1**, along with a sample of some of the other work that has been undertaken during National Year of Reading

3. A legacy beyond NYR

3.1 Reading for Life: a national legacy beyond NYR

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has always expected that NYR would be the catalyst for a longer-term legacy to develop a reading nation. This on-going commitment

and campaign will be called *Reading for Life*. This work will be led by the Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency.

3.1.2 Some drivers highlighted in *Literacy Changes Lives* (www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/Literacy_changes_lives.pdf) include:

- 95% of jobs require literacy skills
- 70% of pupils permanently excluded from school have difficulties in basic literacy skills
- 25% of young offenders have reading skills below those of the average seven year old
- 60% of the prison population has difficulties in basic literacy skills
- one in six of adults cannot read at the level expected on an eleven year old

3.1.3 Research into attitudes towards reading commissioned by DCSF has highlighted that only 24% of C2DE parents see the link between reading and success in life. See [www.yearofreading.org.uk/wikireadia/index.php?title=Attitudes to Reading in England](http://www.yearofreading.org.uk/wikireadia/index.php?title=Attitudes_to_Reading_in_England)

3.2 Drivers for a legacy beyond NYR in Kent

There are many reasons why we should continue this work, not least the economic and social benefits of having a literate population. This is especially important in the current economic climate, and compliments the long-term need to up-skill the workforce of Kent.

In addition to the immediate economic benefits, literacy and reading are essential for us if we are to fulfil the aspirations outlined in the Kent Regeneration Framework, the Children and Young People's Plan, the Public Health Strategy, Later Life Strategy and other key priorities.

Literacy and reading contribute to:

- Building individual confidence and community cohesion
- Child development
- Education and community learning including adult literacy

These drivers are explored in more detail in **Appendix 2**

3.3 Seizing partnership opportunities

NYR has been a powerful catalyst for raising awareness of the importance of literacy and reading and is enabling us to begin to build partnerships and test new approaches. We are already pursuing new opportunities which these partnerships, strengthened through NYR, are opening up. For example:

- We are partners for the national *Family Reading Matters* initiative which recognises that reading starts at an earliest age in the home. Children who are read stories by their parents and carers are more likely to become readers.
- We are working to develop literacy skills to support people who are homeless or in danger of losing their homes due to the recession.
- We are supporting the Public Health-led *House* initiative which provides an access point for teenagers to activities, information and services that relate to their wellbeing.
- We are developing a Text Reading Group for teenagers
- We are supporting new reading groups and reading activities for people with mental health conditions and other special needs.
- We are continuing to grow the number and range of volunteering opportunities we offer through Libraries and Archives *Time2Give*. National evaluation of NYR cited Kent's *Time2Give* as 'a very forward thinking approach to delivering reading initiatives'.

4. A Kent Strategy for Reading and Literacy

4.1 There is evidence that work with new partners and with new audiences has delivered significant benefits and should be extended beyond NYR. There is now the need for a more strategic, focussed and sustained approach to be developed involving KCC and its partners.

4.2 We want to harness our success to engage more strategic partners across the county, to raise standards of literacy and promote the benefits of reading, for pleasure and for purpose. A Kent Strategy for Reading and Literacy will help us achieve this. It will extend and mainstream the most effective approaches highlighted in Appendix 1 and continue to test and promote new approaches.

4.3 A major conference was held recently which attracted delegates from across all sectors. The event marked the end of NYR and the beginning of the push to ensure a powerful legacy through a Kent strategy for reading and literacy. Footage of the event can be seen on Kent TV.

4.4 The purpose of the strategy will be to put long-term plans and partnerships in place to support the development of literacy skills and to promote the benefits of reading across the county, ensuring equality of opportunity everywhere. Our intent is to progress towards a long-term aspiration of 100% literacy in Kent. Kent's Library Service will lead work to develop the strategy. It will be developed with key partners and celebrated during Kent's first Literacy and Reading Week in 2010.

4.5 We believe this approach will gain strong support and interest from elected members. Many KCC Members have supported NYR at local level from attending events to providing grants. We believe that our Members are our ambassadors in their communities for literacy and reading and we will value their continued support, local knowledge and the challenge they can provide to ensure our strategy is rigorous and focussed on action in communities.

5. Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- support the development of a Strategy for Reading and Literacy for Kent; as detailed in this report; and,
- seek the support of all KCC elected Members to act as ambassadors for literacy and reading in their communities.

Gill Bromley
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Appendix 1

Kent: a Great Place to Read: some of the range of the new and innovative approaches implemented in Kent during National Year of Reading

New approaches to literacy

- **Outdoor venues to promote reading and literacy:** our Library in the Park in Dartford, a partnership with Dartford Borough Council, sought to attract more people to use a rather intimidating and seriously underused Victorian library. It attracted over 1000 visitors and ran regular activities to encourage families to take the first steps on the path to literacy.

'My children and I have found it a fantastic introduction to using the library' (a parent visiting Dartford Library in the Park).

- **A Doorstep Library in Sheerness** where volunteers from Seashells Children's Centre read stories to children in streets and in their homes. The project aims to reach families in our most deprived communities who do not use public services. There is growing interest in developing Doorstep Libraries beyond this pilot in Folkestone and Thanet.
- **The Kent Story:** 12 books with the opening paragraphs of a story, written by Paul Carter, have circulated around schools enabling the children to continue the tale before passing it on to the next school.
- Renowned children's writer Nigel Hinton wrote a new short story **Beaver Towers Mission to Kent** which was read simultaneously in our primary schools in October. Feedback has been positive including *'we asked the parents to take part, regardless of their ability to read/read aloud..... the whole session was a complete success, and the children were full of ideas and suggestions as to further adventures and possibilities for Flipip and Baby B!'*
- **Guys grab a Grown up** was a Family Learning Treasure Hunt in all four "Playing for Success" centres where children searched for sections of a story.

New partners for literacy

- **The NHS** have supported Read Yourself Well and Recovery through Reading - library-led projects with mental health patients at 2 Kent hospitals.
- **The British Dyslexia Association's** Best Practice Guide for Libraries will help us support adults and children with dyslexia, their carers and their families.
- **The BBC** worked with Adult Education and Libraries and Archives, developing a joint offer to support Kent's businesses to develop employee literacy skills. Our offer was distributed by the Kent and Medway Local Skills for Productivity Alliance. BBC Radio Kent ran a monthly Book Club supported by Libraries and Archives.
- **The Probation Service** is piloting a programme of visits to Gravesend and Sheerness Libraries with trained mentors to support and promote library use.

New audiences for literacy

- **Adults with learning disabilities:** Sevenoaks Library won an award for its work to support the District Partnership. Benefits include special Makaton signage in libraries, the use of libraries as meeting spaces, weekly Biblio Hour, and books specially selected by and for this audience. We are also using Bag Books, multi-sensory story-packs which offer accessible stories for adults and children with learning disabilities.

- **Reading Groups for people with special needs** include new groups for visually impaired people, a telephone reading group for Home Library Service users, and MIND Reading Groups for mental health patients in Maidstone, Gravesend and Tunbridge Wells.

'Wish you could be a fly on the wall at our group.when I asked them if they would like to carry on for another year, the positive impact of the group was overwhelming. The carers' responsibilities vary from one who looks after a severely autistic son in his 20's to our oldest....., now in his late 80's, who looks after his 50-something daughter with learning disabilities..... Several have husbands with dementiaunanimously, they said how much they value the group and the opportunity it provides to escape their caring responsibilities, just for an hour or two' (Maidstone Carers' Group).

A renewed focus for existing programmes for literacy

- Support for the **GO Award** (Get On in Local Government), a national initiative led by our Adult Education service, through which KCC will lead by example to raise standards of literacy and numeracy of our workforce.
- Adult Education is also leading on the national **Skills Pledge** initiative, which will support Kent's businesses by providing the opportunity for staff to work towards or obtain their first full Level 2 qualification.
- **Family Language Literacy and Numeracy** programmes enable adults to achieve Skills for Life qualifications and support the achievement of their children.
- **Reach out and Read:** a partnership between the Looked After Children Advisers Team, the Fostering and Volunteering Team and Volunteer Reading Help used the ROAR scheme to monitor training for 48 carers and provided volunteers to work with 42 looked after children outside school hours for one week.
- The **Teachers as Readers** national pilot encouraged teachers to act as role models for reading eg Games Teachers, Science teachers etc (not just the English Dept who are always seen reading).
- **Week 53** provided a list of reading activities for participating schools who each received £250 to support their work
- **Bookstart**, Book Ahead, Boys into Books and other DCSF funded initiatives are achieving significant results in Kent by promoting literacy and library use to children from birth. The Bookstart baby pack is gifted to all babies at registration.
- **Test the Organisation sessions:** Adult Education tutors have worked with employers to improve workforce literacy skills including Eurostar, B.T., Kent police, Boots Distribution Centre, school catering staff, P&O ferries, a papermill and a Jobcentre.
- **6 Book Challenge** helped adults on Sheppey to build reading confidence in partnership with SkillsPlus, the Prison Service and Libraries and Archives.
- **Time2Give:** Libraries and Archives' award-winning volunteering programme managed by CSV has attracted new volunteers to support NYR activities.

'it's given me a real opportunity to use the skills that I developed during my degree in a real world context - writing a play from some source material with a specific audience in mind.the link with the adult literacy learners is also quite appropriate as I'm just about to start a PGCE in English' (a volunteer at the Canterbury Cathedral Archives).

- **Kent Sport, Leisure and Olympics** were the major partner for the Summer Reading Challenge *Team Read*. 7537 children completed the challenge to read 6 books during the school holiday; an increase of 6% over 2007-08. The scheme helps to sustain the reading habit throughout the holiday period.
- **Kent's prisons** have taken an active part in NYR. Activities have included Story Book Dads/ Mums which has enabled prisoners to develop their reading skills to enable them to record a story to be sent home to their child.

'It has encouraged me to read books again... I think I may be hooked!' (a prisoner at HMP Sutton Park).

Appendix 2

Drivers for a legacy beyond NYR in Kent

The Economy

The most basic and essential driver is the current economic downturn. Literacy is even more vital today to enable people to compete, to be confident and, not least, to cope. It can help them to gain employment or to stay in a job; to play an active part in their communities at a time when community cohesion will be challenged; and to get through the anxiety and depression that come with the fallout from a recession. This will be fundamental to helping Kent not only to get through the downturn but to enable individuals, organisations and communities to seize opportunities, and look ahead to a bright future. Literacy and reading are central to achieving the Kent Regeneration Framework, *Unlocking Kent's Potential* as well as *Backing Kent's Business*.

Building Individual Confidence and Community Cohesion

Literacy and reading are essential to every aspect of life and to achieving our *Vision for Kent*. Reading and literacy enable and support:

- **Bonding:** sharing a book is one of the most intimate and rewarding activities for a parent and child. It contributes to good parenting and it fosters a love of books from the earliest age.
- **Social skills:** attending a Baby Rhyme Time or any reading activity with other families encourages listening and communication skills.
- **Readiness for school:** a child who loves books will have developed some key skills including manual dexterity, an understanding of story, and confidence to take part and share with others.
- **Skills for work:** literacy builds confidence and enables people to apply for jobs and work effectively.
- **Involvement:** a comprehensive reading strategy will enable more opportunities for people to get involved through volunteering to help us reach our target audiences.
- **Health and wellbeing:** reading can provide an escape from loneliness, isolation and depression. It will make a vital contribution to an ageing population.

Child Development

Reading and literacy are vital to our Parenting Strategy.

64.6% of five year olds in Kent achieved 6 points or more in Personal, Social and Emotional development, compared with 71% nationally. For Communication Language and Literacy, 40.5% of Kent five year olds achieved 6 points or more compared with 47% nationally.

Education and Community Learning

Literacy and reading are essential to achieving the aims of our Children and Young People's Plan, *Positive about our Future*

Key stage 1 and 2:

There has been significant improvement in narrowing the gap between Kent scores and the national average but there is clearly more we could do in particular in geographical areas where performance is lowest.

Key Stage 3:

In 2006-07:

- 8538 boys (34%) did not achieve the expected level in English
- 851 boys (66%) on Free School Meals did not achieve the expected level in English

These pupils' life chances are seriously affected by low literacy levels, so long term support for literacy development is essential. Boys will be a priority in our Strategy.

Adult Literacy

Reading and literacy can make a significant contribution to *Supporting People* and *Active Lives* enabling people to make positive choices to be healthy and to play a full and active part in their communities.

276,000 adults in Kent have Entry Level 3 or below literacy skills, and the Kent and Medway workforce has the lowest qualification level of any area within the South East Region (source: LSC Kent and Medway Annual Plan 2007-08). Entry level 3 is the baseline level of competence for functional skills; an adult possessing literacy skills at this level is just able to engage with a primary age child at Key Stage 2. The overall percentage of adults in Kent and Medway who have skill levels below level 1 in literacy and numeracy across Kent is 47%, rising to over 50% in Gravesham, Swale and Thanet.