

To Communities Policy Overview Committee – 2nd June 2008

From: Mike Hill, Portfolio Holder and Amanda Honey, Managing Director,
Communities

Subject: **National Year of Reading 2008**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report aims to:

- Raise awareness of the National Year of Reading (NYR) 2008 and its significance to Communities Directorate.
 - Highlight progress in planning for NYR in Kent.
 - Engage Policy Overview Committee in championing NYR; in particular the importance of literacy skills to Kent's economy and community well-being.
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1. Background

1.1 2008 has been designated National Year of Reading (NYR). Public activity began in April and runs through to December. The National Literacy Trust and The Reading Agency are leading a consortium of national organisations to manage NYR on behalf of the DCSF. See <http://www.yearofreading.org.uk> for further details.

1.2 The Vision for NYR is to create a powerful focus of opportunities and activities, so that children, families and adult learners understand the benefits that reading – for pleasure and for purpose – can bring to change their lives for the better, now and in the future.

1.3 The objectives of NYR are to:

- encourage more people to read
- demonstrate the importance of literacy skills for educational attainment, work and life
- encourage boys to feel more enthusiastic about reading
- encourage and enable young people to understand the importance of reading
- encourage adult literacy.

1.4 Anticipated outcomes of NYR include:

- parents feeling more confident to share books with their children at the earliest age
- children feeling more interested in reading
- increased aspiration among boys
- parents more confident in their own abilities and increased hopefulness about their children's future families and wider community involved with schools
- closer community links through literacy activity.

1.5 NYR will enable the building blocks to be put in place and establish momentum for a systematic change in the reading culture in this country. It will establish sustainable partnerships to promote reading at local, regional and national levels. It will achieve increased support from industry for reading and literacy and embed reading in strategic plans. There is an expectation that there will be an on-going legacy beyond NYR. This could be achieved via the Cultural Olympics.

1.6 NYR may demonstrate a need for a more strategic cross-sectoral approach to literacy. This is something that we will consider when we evaluate NYR.

2. Policy Context

2.1 Literacy skills are fundamental to the achievement of most Towards 2010 targets, Vision for Kent, the Kent Area Agreement, the Children and Young People's Plan, Putting Kent First and the Directorate Vision. They support just about every local and national strategy including health and social care.

2.2 Literacy is vital to community cohesion and empowering citizens. It builds confidence and enables people to take responsibility and make informed choices. It can contribute to a reduction in crime and disorder which is why Kent's Prison Service is engaged. In a computer age the ability to read and write remains fundamental to quality of life and the economy. Computers are far from being a threat to reading; they are a powerful tool to engage new readers across the globe.

3. Process

3.1 Gill Bromley (Communities Libraries and Archives) and Martin Turner (CFE Extended Services) are jointly coordinating plans for NYR .

3.2 Kent Partnership, Supporting Independence, every Directorate in KCC, and partners from the business and voluntary sectors are represented on our Strategic and Working Groups enabling us to reach key stakeholders across Kent. Partners include BBC Learning, Kent Book Company, HM Prison Service and Community Services Volunteers (CSV).

3.3 There are huge challenges and pressures to improve standards of literacy including a focus on audiences which are excluded from society through their lack of literacy skills or interest in books. We have identified the following target audiences for Kent:

- Early years
- Primary age children including looked after children, parents, and boys and fathers in particular
- Teenagers
- Adult learners including employees of Kent's businesses and Kent's prison community

These audiences include people with disabilities including visual impairment and BME communities. While we have identified these targets no one who lives or works in Kent, whatever the age, sex or ability will be excluded from NYR activity.

3.4 We launched NYR with Kent: a Great Place to Read in April. Other highlights of the year include:

- *The Kent Story*; 12 books with the opening sentences of a story written by Paul Carter are circulating schools in each District, enabling the children to continue the tale before passing it on to the next school
- *Women of Kent* which will be published by our Archives service
- An offer to Kent's employers from BBC Learning, Adult Education and Libraries and Archives. We will also target KCC's workforce to raise literacy skills levels
- Involvement in Citizenship Ceremonies including gifting a book on Kent
- A Text Reading Group for teenagers
- *Library in the Park* in Dartford during the summer to engage non-users
- *Read yourself Well* using reading to support mental health.
- Initiatives to target schools including *Playing for Success* (literacy through sport); *Week 53* study support activities; and *Teachers as Readers*.
- *6 Book Challenge* on Sheppey supporting adults to build reading confidence in partnership with SkillsPlus, the Prison Service and Libraries and Archives.
- Plans for a major 'Bring a Friend to the Library' campaign.
- *Save trees, borrow books*; environmental promotion
- A celebration of reading towards the end of NYR including a seminar to share experience and engage partners into 2009 and beyond

3.5 We will also use the year to champion existing reading programmes including Bookstart, Booked Up, Boys into Books and the Summer Reading Challenge which helps to sustain the reading habit through the school holidays. See Appendix one for a summary of these and other initiatives.

3.6 We are also seeking people who love books and reading to volunteer to help us engage with those who lack the confidence or skills to enjoy reading. The public are responding well, demonstrating enthusiasm to get involved.

3.7 NYR represents a huge opportunity for local Members to get involved to help us engage key partners in local communities. There will be local events and activities to which they will be invited. We are also keen to seek their ideas. NYR will feature on Local Board Agendas during the year at the request of Paul Carter.

3.8 Plans for the future beyond 2008 include *One Book, One Kent*. We will encourage as many people as possible to read, explore and celebrate one great book. Promotional events will reflect the themes of the Cultural Olympics.

3.9 National Year of Reading provides the opportunity for Communities to play a leading role in the development of literacy skills in Kent. In Communities we provide lifelong access to books and literacy from the presentation of a Bookstart Bag to every baby by our Registration Service to cross-Directorate work to support individuals and families who are bereaved. Adult Education and the Youth Service, as well as Libraries and Archives, are actively engaged. Sports and Leisure, Arts Development, KDAAT and YOS recognise that they play a significant role. There is scope for the wider involvement of other Units including Community Wardens and the Contact Centre. With young people spending just 15% of their time in formal learning, Communities can really make a difference building on the success of initiatives such as Headspace, a joint Youth Service and Libraries initiative in Folkestone.

4. Resource Implications

4.1 We are currently absorbing costs of NYR within existing budgets. In Communities, Libraries and Archives and Adult Education in particular, literacy is at the core of our business and NYR will help to raise awareness of our roles. Our Coordinators are managing NYR as part of their normal workload. Libraries and Archives Reader Development Team is providing expertise and support. Meanwhile we are seeking funding via Directorates, our partners and sponsors to support significant campaigns, events and activities during the year.

5. Recommendations

This paper seeks:

5.1 Policy Overview support for NYR in particular a recognition of the importance of literacy skills to Kent's economy and community well-being.

5.2 suggestions to inform planning for NYR and its legacy beyond 2008 including the role that Communities Directorate can play now and in the future

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Appendix: Summary of reading programmes