

GUILDFORD BOOK FESTIVAL

5 MARCH 2021 (VERSION 5)

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Introduction – Guildford Book Festival

Established in 1989, the annual Guildford Book Festival hosts authors from across the literary spectrum in a series of events in the town each October. In 2019, 52 events were held with 5,000 tickets being sold. The Festival also organises a schools programme (17 schools and 1,800 students were engaged in 2019).

In a normal year, the operating costs would be in the region of £90,000. Salaries and overheads account for about 50% of the cost, with other notable expenditure on marketing (£14,000), venue hire (£10,000) and author fees (£9,000 which were introduced from 2017). Ticket sales for events provide the main source of income (£48,000 in 2019), but the Festival also receives an annual grant from the Council of £23,000. The main other source of income is sponsorship (£11,000 in 2019).

Even before the current pandemic, Guildford Book Festival recognised the financial pressures facing local government and the need to become fully self-reliant. For a number of years, it has been seeking a main sponsor(s) to reduce reliance on the Council, but this has not materialised.

This mandate sets out the options for future funding of the Festival in the context of our even more challenging financial position, corporate priorities and the outcomes of the consultation with residents on future spending priorities.

GUILDFORD BOOK FESTIVAL - STRATEGY

1. Why should a programme/project be started now?

A decision is required on future funding of the Guildford Book Festival as part of our savings strategy.

2. What is the good idea or problem to be solved?

In the context of the challenging financial position facing the Council, its corporate priorities and the outcomes of the consultation with residents on future spending priorities, to determine whether financial support for Guildford Book Festival should continue and, if so, the appropriate level of funding.

3. What is the purpose of the project and what outputs and outcomes will it deliver?

Depending on the preferred option, the decision will deliver financial savings to the Council of up to £23,000 per annum.

4. What priority, corporate objective or strategy is fulfilled by this project?

A reduction or cessation of funding would contribute to savings required as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

The Guildford Book Festival does not contribute strongly to the Council's corporate priorities and funding in this area has been identified by residents in the budget consultation as a low priority in terms of future spending.

The Festival will though make a minor contribution to supporting the local economy by attracting visitors and spend to the borough.

GUILDFORD BOOK FESTIVAL - OPTIONS

5. What are the strategic options available to GBC to deliver a solution?

a) Do Nothing

Continue with the existing annual grant at the current level of £23,000.

b) Do Something

In line with the objective of the Guildford Book Festival to become financially self-sustaining and subject to annual review, introduce a gradual phased reduction of funding along the following lines:

£18,000 (2021)	£13,000 (2022)	£8,000 (2023)	£5,000 (2024)
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c) Do More

Reduce funding to £11,500 in 2021/22 and discontinue all funding in subsequent years.

c) Do Most

Discontinue all funding with immediate effect. In the absence of significant additional external sponsorship, this option would place the survival of the Festival at risk within 12 months.

At its meeting on 23 February 2021, CMT recommended Option C (Do More) to provide some financial support for the 2021 Festival, whilst enabling the organisers to develop a more financially self-sustaining model and seek alternative sources of funding.

At its meeting on 2 March 2021, the Executive Liaison Group recommended a future funding path of £12,000 (2021), £6,000 (2022) and £2,000 (2023).

GUILDFORD BOOK FESTIVAL - CONSIDERATIONS

6. Who are the lead Director and Service Manager who will lead and direct the project and use/maintain the projects products once they are handed over?

Dawn Hudd, Strategic Services Director

Steve Benbough, Strategy and Communications Manager

7. What are the impacts on other Operational Service Leaders or projects?

Changes to funding that resulted in the winding-up of Guildford Book Festival would have an impact on our own box office income (commission received from ticket sales for events) of about £6,000 per annum. Subject to ticket pricing policy, any reduction in the scale of the Festival may have a smaller negative impact on box office income.

8. What general approach will the project take to deliver?

Any decision will be implemented and managed by the Strategy and Communications Manager.

9. When and why must the project start and finish?

A decision is required in early 2021 to enable Guildford Book Festival to plan ahead on the basis of any changes to future funding.

GUILDFORD BOOK FESTIVAL- RESOURCES

10. Which stakeholders are or will need to be involved in the project?

Corporate Management Team
Lead Councillor/Executive
Guildford Book Festival

11. What specialist resources (internal and external) are needed to consider this mandate and develop a strategic outline business case?

A strategic outline business case will not be required and any decisions will be taken forward as part of the Council's savings strategy.

Legal support will be needed to prepare a funding agreement to reflect any agreed changes.

12. What Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM) are the likely Whole Life Costs (WLC) of the project and live service?

Current funding (and the full scope of potential savings) is £23,000 per annum.

GUILDFORD BOOK FESTIVAL – RISKS, ASSUMPTIONS & ISSUES

13. What are the strategic Risks, Assumptions, Issues, Dependencies, Constraints & Opportunities?

Risks

Criticism from supporters of the Guildford Book Festival and potentially the local media about any cessation or reduction of funding.

Any fast and substantial reduction of funding may place the viability of the Guildford Book Festival at risk.

Failure to reduce funding in an area of low corporate priority and with lower support from residents (as expressed through the budget consultation) will undermine other challenging decisions in higher priority areas.

An extended period of disruption caused by Covid may lead to a deterioration in the Festival's financial position.

Assumptions

That the Council wishes to review priorities for funding in light of current financial constraints.

That there is a wish by all parties for a successful book festival to continue in Guildford.

Trustees are aware (due to previous discussions) that reduced future funding is likely.

Issues

A decision is needed on the level of future financial support for Guildford Book Festival as part of the Council's savings strategy.

GUILDFORD BOOK FESTIVAL – DEPENDENCIES, CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Dependencies

The continuation of Guildford Book Festival relies on it being able to increase income from other sources (e.g. sponsorship and ticket sales) and/or reduce costs to deliver a programme of events within the funding available.

Constraints

Decisions required in early 2021.

Long-term financial pressures.

Opportunities

To deliver financial savings required as part of the Council's savings plan and within the 2021/22 budget.

Reduced future dependency by the Festival on Council funding.

Incentivise the Festival to build new relationships with other potential partners.

Internal GBC Stakeholders (Contributors to this Issue/Mandate)

Involved or sighted so far

Steve Benbough, Strategy and Communications Manager (author)
Sam Adam, PMO Officer
Faye Gould, Procurement Manager
Dawn Hudd, Strategic Services Director
Jo James, Senior Policy Officer (Strategy)
Claire Morris, Director of Resources
Louise Odell, Interim Project Officer
Diane Owens, Lead Specialist Legal
Vicky Worsfold, Lead Specialist Finance
Corporate Management Team
Councillor Joss Bigmore, Leader of the Council
Councillor James Steel, Lead Councillor

To be consulted at the next step

Executive Liaison Group