

Meeting: Cabinet

Date: 17 February 2026

Wards affected: All

Report Title: National Year of Reading 2026 | Go All In

When does the decision need to be implemented? Early 2026

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Cllr Jackie Thomas, Cabinet Member for Tourism, Culture and Events and Corporate Services. Jackie.Thomas@torbay.gov.uk.

Director/Divisional Director Contact Details: Matthew Fairclough-Kay, Director of Corporate Services, (01803) 207449, matthew.fairclough-kay@torbay.gov.uk

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The National Year of Reading 2026 has been commissioned by the government and designed as a private/public funded collective action campaign. It is part funded by the Department for Education, with additional funding and support from multi-sector partners including Arts Council England, Julia Rausing Trust, all major and independent book publishers and the Booksellers' Association, Amazon and Spotify, the National Year of Reading 2026 aims to change the nation's reading culture both during the Year and beyond.
- 1.2. As free to access community hubs, libraries are central in the National Year of Reading campaign to engage people of all ages with reading. The Reading Agency has been appointed to work with sector partners to deliver and support public library engagement. The Summer Reading Challenge, which encourages children aged 4 to 11 to keep reading during the summer holidays, and World Book Night, the annual celebration of reading for adults on 23 April, will form key moments for libraries in the National Year of Reading. Throughout the year, The Reading Agency will provide public libraries with resources, toolkits, and print and digital materials to activate the National Year of Reading.
- 1.3. As the statutory duty holder for the libraries service in Torbay, Torbay Council is supporting the National Year of Reading and Cabinet are being asked to endorse the initiative, highlighting the opportunities to the public.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1. The National Year of Reading 2026 has a simple but ambitious vision: to (re)connect people of all ages with reading as a meaningful, modern, and social activity. Reading is not only a skill for school or work but a practice that brings relevance and joy to everyday life, connecting people with stories and ideas that reflect their cultures, interests, and needs.
- 2.2. The ambition is that the National Year of Reading 2026 will make lasting change to the reading habits of the nation to reverse the decline in reading for pleasure and unlock one of

the most powerful tools for equity and opportunity: a love of reading that lasts a lifetime. The National Year of Reading is grounded in both existing evidence and new research. This is a critical component of the campaign, to ensure it is impactful and meaningful, both during the year and beyond.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

That Cabinet:

- 3.1. Recognises the benefits of reading for educational attainment, wellbeing and social inclusion and declares its formal support for the National Year of Reading
- 3.2. Welcomes the campaign objectives and commits to working with our partners including local libraries, schools, community groups, literacy organisations, and businesses to promote reading across our communities.
- 3.3. Requests that the Director of Corporate Services completes the online pledge stating actions the council will take.

4. Background Documents

About | National Year of Reading 2026 | Go All In

Supporting Information

5. Introduction

- 5.1. The UK is experiencing a profound, generational decline in reading enjoyment. Evidence from the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey (2025) reveals that only one in three children and young people aged 8 to 18 reported enjoying reading in their free time, while just one in five read something daily. International comparisons further highlight this challenge: according to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2021), only 29% of pupils aged 9 to 10 in England said they "very much like reading," significantly below the international average of 46%.

This pattern of disengagement extends beyond childhood. Recent research from The Reading Agency (2024) underscores a lack of reading among adults, many of whom cite barriers such as time pressures, low confidence, and limited access to relevant reading materials. The impact of this decline is far-reaching, affecting cognitive development, language and critical thinking skills, and contributing to growing social and economic inequalities.

- 5.2. Libraries Unlimited deliver the libraries service and are fully engaged with the National Year of Reading Go All In campaign and its vision to (re)connect people of all ages with reading as a meaningful, modern, and social activity.
- 5.3. Activities planned at all our libraries, with more to be scheduled as events are confirmed. To supplement these activities, directors are working to ensure that the opportunities to

maximise resident benefits are taken, with particular focus on Children's, Adults', Public Health and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion outcomes with the Corporate Plan.

6. Options under consideration

- 6.1. There is only one option under consideration here, whether the Cabinet support the National Year of Reading or not. The reasons for such support are detailed herein.

7. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 7.1. There are no adverse financial implications in making this decision, all activity is in budget.
- 7.2. There are numerous soft financial benefits gained from facilitating a literate population who are engaged in reading, to which this initiative will contribute. As noted above, the impact of the decline in reading is far-reaching, affecting cognitive development, language and critical thinking skills, and contributing to growing social and economic inequalities. It can be seen, that acting to combat this decline will have benefits in these areas, and associated financial benefits in support services as well as in our economy.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1. Nil

9. Engagement and Consultation

- 9.1. There is both national and local engagement activity aligned to the Go All In campaign. The engagement is being run on a national basis through the National Year of Reading and locally through Libraries Unlimited.

10. Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

- 10.1. Through an increase in reading there may be positive outcomes in this area. There are no negative implication in making this decision.

11. Associated Risks

- 11.1. Nil

12. Equality Impact Assessment

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act and groups with increased vulnerability	Data and insight	Equality considerations (including any adverse impacts)	Mitigation activities	Responsible department and timeframe for implementing mitigation activities
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18% of Torbay residents are aged under 18 years old. 55% of Torbay residents are aged between 18 to 64 years old. 27% of Torbay residents are aged 65 and older. 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable
Carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the time of the 2021 census there were 14,900 unpaid carers in Torbay. 5,185 of these carers provided 50 hours or more of care. 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable

Care experienced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As of January 2026, there were 277 former care experienced young people aged 18-24 in Torbay. 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the 2021 Census, 23.9% of Torbay residents answered that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot by a physical or mental health condition or illness. 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable
Gender reassignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the 2021 Census, 0.4% of Torbay's community answered that their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth. 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable
Marriage and civil partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of those Torbay residents aged 16 and over at the time of 2021 Census, 44.2% of people were married or in a registered civil partnership. 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable

Pregnancy and maternity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Between 2013 and 2024, the rate of live births (as a proportion of females aged 15 to 44) has been slightly but significantly higher in Torbay (average of 56.0 per 1,000) than the Southwest (53.4) and broadly in line with England (56.3). For the period 2022 to 2024, rates in Torbay (44.6) have been significantly below England (50.0). 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable
Race	<p>In the 2021 Census, 96.1% of Torbay residents described their ethnicity as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.6% as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh 0.3% as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African 1.5% as being of Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups 96.1% as White 0.4% described their ethnicity another way. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are more likely to live in areas of Torbay classified as being 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable

	amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.			
Religion and belief	<p>The 2021 Census showed that the residents in Torbay identify their religion and/or belief as the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48.5% are Christian • 0.4% are Buddhist • 0.2% are Hindu • 0.6% are Muslim • Less than 0.1% are Sikh • 0.1% are Jewish • 0.7% have another religion • 43.2% have no religion • 6.3% did not answer 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable
Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 51.3% of Torbay's population are female. • 48.7% of Torbay's population are male. <p>Girls continue to read daily at higher rates than boys, with the gender gap widening to 6.2 percentage points – the largest seen since 2023.</p>	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable
Sexual orientation	<p>In the 2021 Census, residents described their sexuality as follows;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 89% as Straight or Heterosexual • 1.7% as Gay or Lesbian • 1.1% as Bisexual • 0.1% as Pansexual 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.1% described their sexuality another way • 7.4% of people didn't answer the question 			
Armed Forces Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. • In Torbay, 5.9% of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces. 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable
Additional considerations				
Socio-economic impacts (Including impacts on child poverty and deprivation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Torbay is ranked as the 39th most deprived upper tier local authority in England in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2025. • Fewer children and young people who receive free school meals (FSMs) said they enjoyed reading compared with their peers who do not receive free school meals (39.5% vs. 43.8%). 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable
Public Health impacts (Including impacts on the general health of the population of Torbay)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the five-year period 2020 to 2024, data shows there is a 6-year life expectancy gap between males who live in Torbay's least and most deprived 	<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable

	areas and, a 3-year gap for females.	As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.		
Human Rights impacts		No adverse impacts on human rights are anticipated.	Not applicable	Not applicable
Child Friendly		<p>This is a time bound aspect of our existing libraries service. All impacts are related to the existing service benefits and will be positive.</p> <p>As the settings and service are both existing no differential impacts are foreseen.</p>	Not applicable	Not applicable

13. Cumulative Council Impact

13.1. Soft benefits through associated positive impacts of the National Year of Reading.

14. Cumulative Community Impacts

14.1. Soft benefits through associated positive impacts of the National Year of Reading.