

## NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

18 November 2020

### STATEMENT OF COUNTY COUNCILLOR GREG WHITE

#### Library and Information Service

##### **Libraries are open for business**

I am pleased to announce that ALL of North Yorkshire's libraries are now open for business, albeit with a more limited service offer than we would like or rather they would have been in not for this second lockdown. Many are still operating a revised timetable and Covid-secure protocols for visits are in operation - hand sanitising, face coverings, limits on numbers and Track and Trace. However, visitors are returning and since July over **159,000** visitors have borrowed **308,084** books and our computers have been booked nearly **30,000** times. This is above the national average and big thanks must go to our community libraries and staff for their hard work in making this possible.

Our virtual library is still proving popular with over **103,000** ebooks/eaudio borrowed and **146,000** newspapers and magazines being read since we re-opened in July. The service is continuing to offer online events and activities with Facebook posts having reached over **700,000** people.

I am also pleased to say that the situation around book supply has been resolved. Unfortunately our main supplier for the regional contract went into receivership during lockdown so the service has been working hard to maintain the supply of new titles using local suppliers. However this has led to fewer copies being purchased. A new (regional) contract is now in place so normal service should resume soon.

##### **Malton Library**

I am pleased to say Malton Library re-opened on 28 October following an internal refurbishment. Visitors will find the library bright, modern and with flexible facilities, such as moveable shelving that in the future will enable the library to host a wider range of events and activities (when Covid allows!). Along with the rest of the library, the children's area has benefited from a full makeover, providing an enticing space for children to explore. In addition, a dedicated IT space has been created, along with a further space for customers who prefer to bring their own devices.

##### **Library App**

North Yorkshire's library service has launched an app to help customers to access library resources anytime, anywhere. The app, which is being launched during Libraries Week (5 to 10 October), brings together all the County Council's online library services, as well as offering library members new facilities. Using the app, members can view their account, search the library catalogue and reserve and renew books, as well as downloading e-books and e-audio books and accessing free online reference resources.

##### **Grow and Learn**

The service is working in partnership with Children's and Young People on this campaign, promoting use of libraries, the joy of sharing stories and providing activity sheets for families. In the pilot area Registrars are now enrolling library membership to not only new births but also their siblings with families receiving Grow and Learn pack at birth registration.

##### **Black History Month**

Sharing stories and local history are the focus of North Yorkshire Libraries' Black History Month celebrations during October. Customers joined the online reading group Book Chat on Facebook to discuss titles from the library's digital Read Learn Act – Black Lives Matter

collection. Throughout the month Facebook pages were full of archive material from the County Record Office that tell the stories of North Yorkshire's people and places reaching 16,627 people.

The library service also showcased a number of local history speakers talking about the hidden Black history of Yorkshire with one event being 'attended' by over 100 people. One participant said afterwards *"thank you so much for this! Yes, we're alright in North Yorkshire but we could be so much better. I hate sport, always have. Nor can I sing to save my life and those presumptions always left me feeling thwarted. These tools offer a real opportunity to open discussion. I am a proud Black woman from Ripon!"*

### **Libraries Week**

Budding readers across North Yorkshire were invited to take part in a variety of events and activities as part of Libraries Week (October 5 to 10). The service is hosted storytimes and rhymetimes for young readers and in partnership with The Reading Agency, a selection of popular authors will be hosting virtual readings with the chance to ask questions reaching 69,786 people and active engagement with 4,227. After one storytime from Northallerton Library one viewer stated *"Well done guys, this is fabulous. This is brilliant. I miss seeing you all on a weekly basis."*

### **Looking forward...**

I would also like to announce that Ho, Ho, Ho! Christmas isn't cancelled in libraries ... in fact it's more exciting than ever! From Saturday 14 November all children aged 4-11 years are invited to take part in the Christmas Reading Challenge. The scheme was initiated by young Harrogate library volunteer Olivia Chapman last year, and proved so popular it's being shared around the county to all libraries who chose to take part. Olivia helped design this year's 'elf' themed resources and chose the incentives and is keen to encourage more families to take part this year. The challenge ends at lunchtime on Christmas Eve, or nearest library opening day. The scheme runs while stocks last and families are asked to check their local library is taking part.

### **Home Library Service**

Avid readers across North Yorkshire have praised the home library service for its continued support as lockdown restrictions are relaxed. Its hardworking volunteers deliver books free of charge to people who are unable to visit their local library due to disability, illness, or because they are caring for someone. Although most of the county's libraries have safely reopened, many people are still choosing to limit their contact so the service running a campaign to raise awareness – even if people choose to use for a limited time.

Home library service volunteers select books and audio books for delivery. All books are left on a pre-arranged date in a secure place and collected and quarantined afterwards. As one user says *"I've had the service since I was 80 and to me it is a godsend. I'm an avid reader and can get lost in a good book, it's what keeps me going. I recommend it to everyone I meet and tell them it's a brilliant service."*

### **Family Matters**

Parents and carers bringing up children during the pandemic can now access self-help books on raising children from North Yorkshire's library service. The Family Matters collection comprises books on subjects ranging from potty training and toddler tantrums to communicating with troubled teens. They cover pregnancy, weaning, starting school, teenage anxieties and tips for healthy living. There are books to help with various situations and some for parents and carers to use with children on topics such as bullying and bereavement.

### **Coroners**

On 30<sup>th</sup> September the Senior Coroner for North Yorkshire, Mr Robert Turnbull retired. Following an open recruitment exercise in collaboration with the City of York and overseen

by the Office of the Chief Coroner, Mr Jon Heath ( who was the Senior Coroner for the City of York) has been appointed as Senior Coroner for both North Yorkshire and the City of York. The Chief Coroner has agreed that this appointment is in contemplation of a merger between the Coroners areas of North Yorkshire and York

It is anticipated that a business case will be submitted to the chief Coroner in January 2021 proposing this merger, a merger that is in line with the published national policy of the Chief Coroner.

## **Registrars**

All statutory services have now resumed. Whilst the registration of deaths continues to be a priority, the backlog of birth registrations has also been almost eliminated after the resumption of birth registrations on the 3rd June.

There is a small cohort of parents who have yet to register their babies within the normal statutory time of 42 days. However, this is a tiny minority, currently less than 50 parents out of the 2600 births already registered since 3<sup>rd</sup> June. For those parents, I would remind them that every precaution is taken to safeguard you and your baby and would ask you to make your appointment as soon as possible.

The service has produced a video to reassure parents and this may be found on the website here:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/registering-birth-your-baby>

The holding of marriage and civil partnerships had resumed from July but the market was severely disrupted. Originally, up to 30 people were allowed in the ceremony room, but numbers often were reduced at the offices to ensure social distancing could be maintained. Receptions were allowed if it was a "sit down" reception. The permitted numbers were later reduced to 15 in the ceremony party and 15 at the reception. This has meant many couples are postponing their ceremony to 2021 and beyond.

As the majority of our ceremonies are held in one of the many excellent venues we have in the county, this already posed challenges to those venues most dependent on the wedding business.

From 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020, ceremonies will once again not be allowed to be held except in exceptional circumstances. This is presumed to mean where one of the parties has a terminal illness and is unlikely to survive until ceremonies are resumed. Such ceremonies can be extremely challenging to hold, especially where one party is in intensive care with Covid. Every precaution that can be taken will be taken where staff may find themselves in this position and will only be held after an individual risk assessment.

## **Archives**

The Record Office searchroom is not yet open to personal researchers but the office is continuing to engage digitally with new audiences through its Lottery funded Resilient Records project. In partnership with the Refugee Council, six themed sessions have been held with resettled families, using archive sources to generate opportunities for the groups to engage and connect with the rich history and heritage of the county and to explore British culture and traditions more widely. Digital engagement sessions have also been held with people living with dementia and with carers in the Scarborough and Ryedale districts. In partnership with Orb Arts, Knaresborough and Pioneer Projects, Bentham, the Record Office is delivering a ten week, archives inspired, heritage focused textile project. The project aims to support people with low mental health and low levels of well-being. It will foster a greater sense of connection with local heritage and community by introducing

participants to the county's archive collections, and encouraging participants to draw inspiration from them to create a collaborative textile piece. The project has been running for five weeks and recently featured on the Make a Difference slot on Radio York's mid-morning programme.

### **Microsoft Office 365**

Whilst the major of the Council's staff have continued to work remotely using Microsoft Skype as their main communication and collaboration tool, the Technology and Change team have been preparing the groundwork for the Council's move to Microsoft Office 365. Some senior officers and members have already experienced Microsoft Teams and their feedback has been used to fine-tune the deployment to the wider Council. Teams, along with the other Office 365 Productivity tools will further enable staff and members to collaborate and share information securely with citizens, multi-agency teams and other partners.

In addition to improving communication, information sharing and collaboration, Office 365 offers a range of tools that will enable our staff to consider new and innovative ways of meeting our service needs. As Office 365 resides in the 'Cloud' our information resources can be accessed from a wide variety of locations and on lots of different devices including tablets and smartphones, assisting our frontline staff to engage locally and deliver their services our citizens, customers and businesses on their doorstep.

### **Cyber Security.**

The Technology and Change service continues to monitor the ongoing cyber security threats and the increase in and continued use of homeworking has inevitably increased the potential attack surface of the Councils network. We continue to see cyber threats attempting to infiltrate our network every day, at times during the last 6 months this has been as high as 47% of all incoming traffic was blocked due to the threat it posed.

However, we are also reliant on our staff to handle potential threats correctly, as they are the last line of defence against these attacks. We have invested in new training material and regular updates and reminders that will be rolled-out shortly to all staff to increase their knowledge and awareness of potential threats both at work and when at home.

Last November we successfully passed our re-certification for ISO 27001 which is our Information Security Management System which is the policies and procedures that we work from to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of data on the corporate network. This is a national recognised standard and we continue to be one of a small number of councils who hold it, we will be shortly going through our annual audit to evidence that the system is working optimally.

The importance of having these measures in place has been highlighted this year as two local authorities have been hit by cyber-attacks with significant impact on their ability to deliver services. Redcar and Cleveland council who were attacked earlier in the year lost data and systems and took a number of weeks before services came back online; currently they estimate the costs of recovery to be in excess of £10 million. More recently the London Borough of Hackney were also attacked and are still recovering a number of their legacy systems a number of weeks later.

We have good links with the Yorkshire and Humber Warning, Advise and Reporting Point (WARP) and the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) as well as other forums to keep

abreast of potential new threats, we also utilise a number of the products provided by the NCSC to further improve our ability to deal with the continue threat of a cyber-attack.

### **Customer Update**

Demand in the Customer Service Centre is higher than pre-covid levels.

We have seen an increase in demand for the Blue Badge and concessionary bus pass service from August with over 5000 calls. This is demand to apply and renew Badges and Passes, a service that declined significantly through lock down.

Demand for social care services (both Adults and Childrens) has increased by approx. 15% on the same time last year.

With all the changes to the Ceremonies service demand for this service through the Customer Service Centre has been high throughout August, September and October. Over the 3-month period we have received 6500 enquiries from customers.

The Customer Service Centre has been supporting professionals in education settings and parents as part of outbreak management. Since launching this service in August, the Customer Service Centre has received 1500 calls to this service.

Throughout October, the Customer Service Centre has been building an outbound calling team to support Care Homes and Contact Tracing. These services have gone live at the beginning of November.

The customer service centre has been operating 7 days a week from the beginning of lockdown to provide support to customer. This will continue for the foreseeable future.

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