

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

05 MAY 2021

STATEMENT OF CLLR GREG WHITE

Library and Information Services

Re-opening

I am pleased to say that 41 of our libraries are now open for business as from 12 April; most are still operating on reduced hours and of course with all Covid-secure measures in place (hand sanitising, face coverings and limits on numbers in at any one time plus books are still being quarantined on return). Customer reaction has been overwhelmingly positive with 20,911 'real' book issues, 5,125 customers and 1,353 PC sessions over the first four days. The digital library remained popular with 6,118 e-books borrowed and 10,652 newspapers/magazines read over the same period. This is a credit to the hard work of all the staff and many volunteers delivering our library service.

I know Members were aware that the previous supplier of books closed for business during the first lockdown. I think everyone will be pleased (if not amazed) that the service has successfully received and distributed over 40,000 new books since January. The team at HQ and the van drivers have been very busy – and a nice welcome as customers return.

Staying with the Covid-recovery roadmap the service is currently assessing how face-to-face events and activities can be held safely once these are allowed again. Many customers have enjoyed using the Select and Collect/Book bundle service so we will be continuing to offer this, as will a blended (online/physical) events programme. Plans are underway for the safe delivery of this year's Summer Reading Challenge – with the environmental theme perfectly suited for outdoor events (weather and space permitting).

Annual Report

I am sure Members have seen the Annual Report by now, however I would like to provide some highlight statistics from 2020-21 given the effort everyone involved with our library service has put in to keep delivering to customers. 559,000 books were issued, 311,000 e-books with 8,665 new members and 276,535 visitors – the last two figures particularly impressive when you consider the doors were only 'open for under 5 months. There is some powerful evidence of the role of libraries from the **Customer Survey** undertaken.

In March the service surveyed those using the Select and Collect offer to assess the impact and possible future demand. The results are impressive and demonstrate the value of libraries in these challenging times:

- 93% said the library had helped them cope with lockdown
- 95% said the library had helped improve their sense of wellbeing
- 92% said the library had helped them feel less isolated

Lockdown 2

This last period of lockdown saw 75% of our libraries open with some or all permissible services. Many were particularly appreciative of having access to IT. Online events proved popular being attended by over 3000 people and we continued to engage with our Home Library users delivering 1084 well-being bags. One event of particular note saw NYCC Libraries team up with the local business 'Books Up North' to host one of this year's Women's Prize for Fiction longlisted authors – Claire Fuller.

Another 'first' saw NYCC Libraries pilot a virtual classroom visits and the service is delighted with how the event went. The 30 primary school children were treated to a pre-recorded tour of the library space at Scarborough, a story read to them by one of our outreach librarians and the event ended with a rather lengthy Q&A session! We are now planning a second session (with some technology upgrades) with a view to rolling this out to other libraries in the future. This will hopefully be a welcome addition to libraries events programme especially in our more rural areas.

Library makeovers

I am pleased to tell Members that our community library groups have been busy over the past few months. Colburn, Barlby and Sherburn library groups have funded and managed either full or partial refurbishments. Work at Barlby includes an extension as well as internal improvements. I would like to say thank you to all these groups for their hard work.

ReBoot

Libraries across NY are acting as both collection and distribution points for Project ReBoot – a total of 78 usable devices have been donated with 28 distributed to individuals within communities. (94 donated in total) In addition, libraries have delivered 149 devices to schools.

Reading Friends

Earlier this year the service successfully bid for £10k funding from the Reading Agency. The funding has helped us to establish two pilot 'Reading Friends' groups – Call and Chat: a telephone-based group aimed at isolated older people and their carers, and Page Turners: a virtual group aimed at bringing together teenagers and young volunteers across the county to get involved in their local library and share their love of reading. Both are in early stages of development so if successful (and subject to funding and volunteers to lead) could be rolled out across the county.

Reading Well collections

Arts Council England recently funded the purchase of Reading Well titles in digital format. These are now available on Overdrive and are being prominently promoted on the platform. For a list of titles see <https://northyorks.overdrive.com/collection/1175810>

Coroners

Approval has now been given by the County Council to submit a business case to the Chief Coroner seeking to merge the two North Yorkshire Coroner areas with the York coroner area. The submission is dependent on the City of York also approving the submission.

Upon receipt of proposal from both authorities, the Chief Coroner will carry out a consultation on the proposals and will then decide whether the case for merger is made out. It is therefore likely to be some months yet before the proposals can be finalised.

Registrars

Registrars continue to be under considerable pressure, notwithstanding the decrease in Covid cases. The issue presently is the demand for ceremonies and the consequent need to give formal notice of intention to marry / form a civil partnership. Many ceremonies were postponed from 2020 so demand is very high and this is impacting on the availability of appointments. It is likely to be some months yet before the service will completely return to operating normally.

Records Office

The Record Office welcomed back onsite visitors in April after a prolonged closure enabling researchers once again to experience the excitement of consulting original documents to explore the past.

Whilst the search room was closed, staff were busy behind the scenes. Over 200 boxes of records, ranging from medieval deeds to modern parish council minutes, were appraised and catalogued and more than 25,000 entries added to the online catalogue. Staff also supplied thousands of digital copies of documents to enable researchers and Record Office volunteers to continue working from home.

The Record Office's Lottery funded Resilient Records project is now drawing to a close. This project has given staff the opportunity to explore new and innovative methods of widening participation with the collections, reaching out to groups who have not traditionally connected with archives, including young people, older people, people with dementia, people with low mental health, those at risk of isolation, and BAME groups. The learning from the project will be used to design and lead further interactive, digital sessions with groups from around the County. The first of these - a reminiscence session delivered in partnership with Selby Carers Count - was successfully delivered last month.

May is Local History Month and the Record Office will be working with colleagues in the Library service to promote and celebrate the study of local history. A social media campaign will focus on the theme of the High Street, highlighting historic images, maps and records of local businesses. The recent "Made in North Yorkshire" campaign will be the subject of an online talk, featuring the stories of 10 men and women from history who embody the values of the county and its shared heritage, and who have helped to make North Yorkshire what it is today.

Customer – Digital and Customer Service Centre

The CSC continues to deliver high performance for business as usual services return to pre-Covid levels with all service levels achieved except for a decline in social care performance due to an increase in Social Care demand tracking at 18% higher than the same period last year. The average time a customer is waiting to be answered is currently tracking at 2min 46sec.

As we return to pre-Covid levels in demand for all other services in the Customer Service Centre we have also seen a sharp increase in new accounts created in our customer on-line portal. In March we saw an increase of 3,323 new accounts taking the total number of live customer accounts to 97,196.

Last quarter we launched residential parking permits as an on-line offer and at the end of March 88% of all applications for this service had been completed on-line.

In Q4 the Customer Service Centre also completed 18,093 support calls to Care Homes, these were either daily, weekly or chase calls where online surveys had not been provided for 3 days. We have now moved to all Care Home providers to an on-line survey as the infection rate has fallen. The customer Service Centre is still making weekly care calls to all Care Homes and chasing those Care Homes who have not completed the online survey.

The Customer Service Centre and have made 573 successful contact tracing calls. 95.88% of all contacts sent from the national system have either been attempted 3 time by phone or

have been sent a text if contact could was not successful over the phone. We are now working to review the contact tracing service with the launch of a new national system in June. Contact Tracing is expected to continue until March 2022 at present.

Technology

In March we had an external audit for our ISO 20000 certification which I am pleased to say we passed. It was carried out by the British Standards Institute to ensure that we are meeting the requirements of the international ISO 20000 standards in delivering a service management system that supports the effective delivery of services to the organisation and its customers.

Embedding the ISO 20000 standards continues to support our work on: improving customer satisfaction, productivity and ensuring continuous service improvement.

Digital Workplace

Building on the successes of the Modern Council Programme we are continuing to ensure our technology supports flexible and collaborative working through the introduction of Office 365. Office365 includes a suite of products and this move will provide us with the tools we need to embrace a modern digital workplace and transform the way we work together.

MS Teams is now available on all devices via the Software Centre for laptops and tablets and is on desktops for Citrix users. As of April 2021, there have been 4,320 active users in MS Teams and the number of Teams collaboration spaces have doubled since Q3 to 320 Teams sites created. The most active Team collaboration spaces have been within CYPS and Central Services as well as topics surrounding Covid. Across all active MS Teams sites there are 1400 active channels, where posts are being shared and reacted too.

Yammer

Yammer is an internal business-networking platform, providing a space for work conversations such as sharing and responding to updates, posting ideas and questions that may benefit part, or all, of the organisation as well as being a virtual corridor for conversations to take place, encouraging a sense of community and supporting well-being. On average, there are 1,300 active users logging into Yammer every month with approximately, 5000 messages are read and responded too each month across the different community pages. There are 760 subscribed members to many of the Yammer Community that are now available.

Public WIFI and Internet of Things

A £3m investment has been approved to provide digital technology to support recovery and growth for communities and businesses across North Yorkshire.

North Yorkshire County Council along with NYnet will implement three projects to enhance connectivity, particularly in rural areas, following the award of funding from the York & North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership as part of its allocation from the Government's Getting Building Fund.

These include providing public Wi-Fi in up to 16 market towns to help people to access local and national public services and economic opportunities, introducing "smart places"

technology into rural areas, and providing ultrafast fibre broadband to six business parks, helping to boost productivity.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR GREG WHITE