

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21st JULY 2021

STATEMENT OF CLLR GREG WHITE

Library and Information Services

Re-opening

I am pleased to say that all our libraries are open with over 25% at pre-pandemic hours. Covid-secure measures remain in place with the exception that we are no longer required to quarantine items on return. Customer reaction continues to be positive and use of our digital library remains steady. Again, this is a credit to the hard work of all the staff and many volunteers delivering our library service.

At the time of writing evaluation on how full face-to-face events and activities can be held safely is being considered on a case-by-case basis. Later in this report I will highlight some of the activities being undertaken, but I think I am safe in predicting that the future is *phygital* – a blend of physical and digital.

Hidden Disabilities

I am extremely pleased to say that the hidden disabilities sunflower lanyard scheme has been extended across all libraries in North Yorkshire. The aim is to enhance the library experience for customers with hidden disabilities, such as autism, dementia, visual or hearing impairment and anxiety.

Customers can pick up a free sunflower lanyard in the library. The lanyard acts as a discreet sign that they may need extra time or support when using the library. Staff and volunteers have had awareness training and are happy to assist.

The sunflower design is recognised by numerous organisations, including many shops, airports and supermarkets. Using the same design means customers can use their lanyard with organisations across the UK in the knowledge that the community will recognise its meaning.

Summer Reading Challenge

Members will recall the success NY Libraries have enjoyed with the annual Summer Reading Challenge. This year Wild World Heroes aims to educate youngsters on what we can do to make a difference to the environment and stand up for the planet. To take part children need to sign up at their nearest library to get a map of a place called Wilderville, read their chosen books to receive stickers and make Wilderville a better, greener place to be. There are more free incentives to collect along the way with a certificate and medal completing the challenge.

Children can choose from a range of books at the library or download them as an eBook from the catalogue. Although there are new books about wildlife and looking after the planet, they can choose any six books to take part in the challenge.

A programme of online events for families will also support the challenge, including a cartoon workshop, a story hunt, finding out why rubbish isn't rubbish and how to be a North Yorkshire Rotter. More details of the events and great reading recommendations will be posted on the @nycclibraries Facebook page and local library pages.

The service is also hoping to visit some of the Holiday and Food Summer programmes to promote the challenge and encourage library membership.

ReBoot

Libraries across NY continue to act as both collection and distribution points for Project ReBoot – a further 45 devices have been distributed to individuals within communities. Plans are underway to deliver support sessions for those unsure about clearing data from donated devices as well as those receiving – once restrictions allow.

Reading Friends

As I reported last time, earlier this year the service successfully bid for £10k funding from the Reading Agency 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. I am pleased to say that funding has been obtained to continue Call and Chat for a further 12 months. Page Turners are having a break during the summer but will start again in the autumn.

Other activities/events

It has certainly been a busy time for libraries.....

Under 5s week and Buzzy Bees Honey Hunt reading challenge

Early June saw North Yorkshire libraries keeping the little ones entertained with events including the launch of Buzzy Bee's Honey Hunt, a free scheme that rewards young children who borrow books from the library with cards, stickers and a certificate. As well as joining the Honey Hunt, all children under five who visited the library to borrow either four books or a staff selected book bundle received a free goody bag including crafts and musical instruments. Over 200 joined in the first week with to date 437 members.

Under 5s week included a series of free online events including bedtime stories with storytellers in PJs and dressing gowns, Folktales and songs from Hoglets Theatre Company and lullabies and songs with Thula Mama

Local and Community History Month

As always local history proves a popular topic and a great conversation starter even when online. North Yorkshire libraries encouraged residents to discover and enjoy their community heritage as part of Local and Community History Month in May. Inspired by this year's theme The High Street, historic resources such as maps and newspapers from were shared on social media. A full report will be circulated to all members but the to reach 138,052 people and have 28229 engagements from just over 20 posts is very impressive -and who knew that Morrisons supermarket opening in the International Centre in 1982 was a great conversation starter with 39 shares, 97 comments, over 25,000 people reached and over 5000 engagements.

Safely socially distanced

The service is continuing to hold events online – many plans for 'in-person' put on hold when restrictions were extended to 19 July including most planned for the summer holidays. Not everyone has suitable outside or sufficient indoor space to comply with current restrictions so just a couple of other libraries who have been trialling bookable events:

- Harrogate had Elizabeth and Leonard playing to a 'sell-out' crowd (of under 5s) and a Harrogate Theatre performance of 'Finding Folk' with Phoebe Ophelia. (Elizabeth and Leonard are still providing online musical rhymetimes for our libraries so you don't need to live in Harrogate to hear them.)
- Filey Library has been hosting outdoor storytimes with volunteer Robert moving from his shed to a gazebo in the library garden.

- Scarborough have been holding live storytimes in the library and bravely live-streaming on social media; plus hostings Andys Mans Club (suicide prevention group)
- Ingleton hosted an outside Storytime and Sports event with 27 children attending. One mum said that her son, born in January 2020, had missed out on all the toddler and playgroups, and this was the first time he was able to get out and play with other children.

Apologies to anyone missed!

Rewind songwriting

North Yorkshire Libraries are excited to be sharing a brilliant new music playlist. Between March and May, six young songwriters (aged 12 – 19) from across North Yorkshire met online for weekly songwriting clinics with Leeds musician Rich Huxley to share the music they like, learn and practice their songwriting skills. Songwriting is recognised as a brilliant way for young people to express themselves and to share their ideas. The finished recordings which are available to hear via the library youtube channel.

KIT Theatre

Most people believe that wardrobes are very ordinary objects. Most people are wrong...Wardrobes can be things of magic and adventure, as the children of Scarborough have been discovering this summer thanks to an Arts Council Grant. Years 3 and 4 pupils at Gladstone Road Primary, St George's RC Primary and St Peter's RC Primary have been on an exciting adventure where they have helped and met local heroes from Scarborough's past. This project was in partnership with Scarborough Museums Trust and further sessions held at Eastfield Library.

The 'Thousand butterfly' project – Easingwold.

In late 2019, Easingwold Community Library successfully applied to North Yorkshire's Stronger Community fund for money to run a volunteer led project called 'Inspire the Child' Originally planned as encouraging children from the small rural schools around Easingwold into the library following the Covid outbreak it was amended to create an art installation outside the Easingwold Community Library. The '1000 butterflies' was born!

Seen as an opportunity to draw people together during lock down and social isolation the community were asked to decorate plywood butterflies with the option of writing a message of love and hope on the other side. In parallel with the '1000 butterflies'; another project was started by the library 'knit and natter' group who, of course, couldn't meet. Hundreds of colourful butterflies were knitted or crocheted by a host of local people and these too have fluttered back to the library. And placed outside the library around and under the magnificent Willow tree. They look truly wonderful with many special heartfelt messages recorded on them! The youngest participant was aged only 2 and the oldest was aged a grand 92! It is clear that the butterflies had helped to combat 'loneliness' during the lockdown.

Registrars

Registrars continue to cope with exceptional demand, mainly created by the easing of restrictions on ceremonies. Bookings are high for the rest of the year as couples re-plan their ceremony dates. It is anticipated that this demand will remain above average for several months yet.

Registrars have also had to cope with a fundamental change in how marriages and civil partnerships are recorded (from May 4th), a change to how notices of marriage and civil partnership for EU citizens are taken (from 1st July as a consequence of Brexit) and starting the same day, a temporary liberalisation of the law to allow ceremonies to be held outside at licenced venues. These changes have added considerably to the workload.

All this, together with other challenges, has placed great demands on the staff of the service, who are to be congratulated and thanked for the tireless work to meet the needs of their customers

Coroners are continuing to reduce the backlog of cases, with the Chief Coroner monitoring the position closely. Three more Assistant Coroners have been appointed to assist in this work.

After further discussions with the Ministry of Justice, it has been decided to delay slightly the submission of the business case to request the merger of the three existing coroners areas. It is anticipated this will now be submitted in August 2021.

Records Office

May was Local History Month and whilst it was not possible to hold the annual Archives at Dusk open evening, a social media campaign was launched in partnership with the Library service with the theme of the High Street. Historic photographs, maps and related documents were shared via twitter and Instagram, resulting in the generation of 25,725 impressions from the Record Office twitter account and a reach of 4250 on Instagram. Also for Local History Month, an online talk was given by our graduate trainee about our recent 'Made in North Yorkshire' campaign celebrating the lives of great North Yorkshire sons and daughters. With a wider potential audience than would have been possible with a traditional talk, this event reached over 250 people.

The Record Office has been continuing to work with new audiences and has collaborated with the Ignite Bright Sparks group at North Yorkshire Youth to deliver training in heritage skills to young people. Many of the group attended the Activity Day run by the Record Office at Carlton Lodge Activity Centre in March 2020, and were involved with the historic research which was undertaken into the former brickworks on site, as part of the Resilient Records project. They were keen to find out more about the archival and conversation processes that go on behind the scenes at the Record Office and to explore the skills required for heritage-based careers. Initially, a digital session was held to introduce the young people to the archive and its resources, and to explore the work and techniques used by our conservator to repair fragile and unique historic documents. This was followed by a hands-on session at Carlton Lodge during which the young people had the opportunity to gain skills by undertaking some basic conservation work for themselves, making repairs to historic paper with wheat starch glue

Customer

Digital Workplace

We continue to ensure our technology enables our workforce to be both productive and support flexible/collaborative working utilising Office365 across a range of devices. The Office365 suite of products provide us with the tools we need to embrace a modern digital workplace and continue to transform the way we work together. Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) is now our main collaboration space that enables colleagues to stay organised, work together and have conversations in a centralised place.

The decommissioning of Skype for Business has commenced. This means Skype will no longer be accessible for internal users through the Skype client. Over the last few months, we have seen a decline in end users choosing Skype as their default communication tool and beginning to utilise the features MS Teams.

Using a feature called Teams Live, T&C have continued to support the Council and Councillors to broadcast and record their meetings to the public via the web, as well as host

live webinars to staff; feedback has been very positive and over 600 colleagues watching the webinars in their own time.

Customer

106,771 customers in North Yorkshire now have access to a customer account.

In June we launched 3 new services on-line and in the CSC. Customer can now report lost and stolen Blue Badges and Age and Disabled Bus Passes and request a replacement. 80% of customer have used this service to replace a Blue Badge and 60% for Age and Disabled Bus Passes.

Customer has also been working with North Yorkshire Disability Forum to improve accessibility to North Yorkshire Services. Improvement have been made to the website and the CSC has now become the accessibility hub for North Yorkshire. The CSC was also joined on-line by members of the North Yorkshire Disabled Forum to deliver training and support to the CSC team

In June the CSC has seen an increase in the volumes of contact tracing requests coming from the centre government team. This increase aligns with the increasing infection rates and continues to grow week on week. In June we received 420 requests compared to 89 in May.

The CSC continues to support customers who are self-isolating and require support. In the last 3 months the CSC has received 375 calls from customers needing support

Cyber Security

We continue to proactively monitor for cyber threats through the use of security software and acting on intelligence received from trusted partner organisations e.g. National Cyber Security Centre (NCSN), Yorkshire & Humber Warning, Advice & Reporting Point (YHWARP) and Regional Organised Crime Unit (YHROCU).

Phishing emails continue to be a threat and whilst the perimeter defences stop the majority it is possible for the odd one to get through. In the main these appear to be from trusted accounts which are compromised and highlighted by the receiver. Once notified we carry out proactive remediation to remove as many of the emails as possible whilst also blocking the links they contain to reduce the impact they may have on the network.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR GREG WHITE