

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

17 NOVEMBER 2021

STATEMENT OF CLLR GREG WHITE

Library and Information Services

I am pleased to say that all our libraries now open at just over 90% of pre-pandemic hours. Use continues to increase above the national average both of the actual service and our digital offer.

We have started to reintroduce face-to-face activities whilst maintaining Covid-secure mitigations in place and continuing to run events online (and even both together with some live streaming!!)

Before I let you know what has been happening on our libraries a couple of updates from my previous statement:

Reboot – libraries have now distributed 140 devices, most recently to support Afghan families in temporary accommodation including one to support DWP with applications - but also a laptop to an Adult Learning English language student trying to do practice tests on her phone!

COBRA - As part of our offer to support people to explore business sectors, find business support and trade legally, we introduced COBRA (The Complete Business Reference Advisor) in February 2021. Since that date we have had 404 log-ins to the resource.

National Awards

I am extremely proud to inform members that two of North Yorkshire's youngest librarians have been crowned winners in this year's Libraries Connected awards which celebrate the achievements of people working in libraries. Basia Godel, 25, won the Information and Digital category and Shaun Doyle, 23, the Children and Young People category.

Basia is a Library Assistant who is deeply committed to supporting equality and diversity. She celebrated Black History Month by commemorating notable Black figures from North Yorkshire's history. It was one of the many ways in which libraries support County Council objectives on community cohesion and racial justice.

Shaun joined the library service as a young volunteer before securing a job as a Library Assistant. He is passionate about the opportunities libraries offer, particularly those for young people and he has researched, devised and suggested numerous ideas to better engage young people in libraries. During the first lockdown Shaun led on the creation of the Young Adult Library Team (YALT), with youth engagement as its focus. The team consists of young library staff who don't have a managerial role. It has made recommendations contributing to stock policy, promotion strategies and new services aimed at supporting mental health.

Libraries Month

North Yorkshire libraries decided that the national Libraries Week was not long enough to celebrate all that we do so held a month of events and activities that included Get Online Week, National Poetry Day, and Black History Month amongst other national promotions. The 'Squeeze in a read' campaign focused on the promotion of reading for pleasure, suggesting practical and enjoyable ways to include reading in their daily routine. Other events included author talks, children's activities and a theatre performance.

Hawes library hosted a theatre performance from the Inn Crowd; visitors to Northallerton library enjoyed a drop-in consultation with the Book Doctor; the reading dogs were at Selby library; Tea and Tales events restarted at many libraries including Eastfield, Catterick, Richmond and Ripon; and many libraries held Alice in Wonderland inspired activity featuring puzzles, games and crafts.

Libraries go Phygital

Libraries Month also saw the first blended library event – with attendance limited to enable social distancing to maximise the audience the event was live-streamed. The event was organised in partnership with Filey Literature Festival and saw Sharon Wright talking about her new book *Mothering the Brontes* to a small audience at Filey Library streamed online to reach a larger audience reaching as far afield as Bridlington and London! There were a few technical issues (both organisers at attendees) but was successful and will hopefully be the first of many such events combining physical and digital. Not only did it result in increased use of the library but also improved attendees digital skills.

Foodbank Project

After successful pilot projects in in Harrogate and Craven areas the service was successful in a bid to receive free books from the Reading Agency to distribute via foodbanks in the rest of the county. By working in close partnership with local food banks and local Community Support Organisations the library service aim to support those in most need in terms of income, literacy and employability as well as reaching residents in very rural areas where loneliness and isolation are more prevalent and transport, digital skills and connectivity may be more limited.

Refugee Support

The service has been working closely with the Refugee Council and others across North Yorkshire, delivering books and activity packs plus the aforementioned IT devices. In addition, the team at Scarborough Library are working with JobCentre Plus to provide work experience support.

Scams training

The service is working with NY Police to provide Scams awareness training for staff and volunteers across the county to enable improved support to our customers

YouTube Library Channel

Our libraries are leading the way again with the launch of their YouTube Channel so you can catch up with your favourite storytimes, craft activities. More seriously, the channel also includes guides to using the Library App and other resources, plus video tours of our larger libraries. Content is being added regularly so add to your favourites to keep up. Simply go to [North Yorkshire Libraries - YouTube](#). The channel also has a 'protected' area for staff/volunteer training webinars.

Mock G7

As part of the Summer of Action our youth cabinet and Ripon Library young reading friends planned and co-hosted a Mock G7 event. The group looked at the creation and make up of the G7 as well as how it influences local and international policies. The young people agreed their themes for debate and who would take the lead on different presentations during the evening with library and youth services staff supporting the delivery of the online event.

Summer Reading Challenge

And finally, I know that members will have seen the report circulated by the library service on this years challenge – Wild World Heroes. I am sure you will join me in saying a big thank you and well done to all our libraries for delivering this annual event in the most challenging of circumstances.

Registrars and Coroners

The expected date for submission of the business case to amalgamate the three Coroners area in North Yorkshire and the City of York is now November. The formal report to request consent from the City of York is expected to be considered by the City of York Council on 18th November 2021.

I am pleased to inform members that the Northallerton registration office and the Coroner's office have now moved into their new accommodation into the old Magistrates courthouse building at 3 Racecourse Lane. For all visitors, there is a much-improved waiting area and more toilet provision. For registrars, there is now a third interview room available, and this will improve the availability of appointments.

For the Coroner, the use of a dedicated courtroom will enable the speedier holding of inquests, without the need to negotiate dates with external venues, with the fees paid to hire the venue.

Since both services share accommodation, there will be an enhanced level of co-operation between the two services.

The registration service continues to be under considerable pressure. The ceremony market has resumed but this has meant above average demand as couples make up for the "lost" opportunities to have their ceremony. This in turn places extra demands on the offices as each couple has to give their formal notice and some couples now have to redo their notices as the original ones have expired.

The easement from the Department of Work and Pensions whereby couples could receive child benefit without registering baby ends on 31st October 2021. This will mean extra demand from new parents in the short term. In addition, the number of death registrations continues to be at or above the 5-year average, as we enter the period of the year when the numbers rise for seasonal factors. This is a national challenge.

Records Office

The Record Office has launched a new digital heritage trail for Northallerton. Created by our Graduate Trainee Archivist, the one-mile trail features 13 stops around the market town. From Northallerton railway station to All Saints' parish church, the trail puts users in the location of historic photographs to discover 'what was here' in times gone by and to shine a light on Northallerton's history. The trail was developed in partnership with East Riding Archives and is available through their What Was Here app, which was launched in 2019. It enables users to explore the past through heritage trails brought to life via historic photographs and maps.

Last month, the trail provided inspiration for the annual heritage week at Applegarth School, Northallerton. 160 pupils visited the Record Office to learn about the work of the office and about some of the town's buildings in times past. The children researched the history of landmark buildings from original historic documents and used that information to create their own heritage trails to follow with their families during half term.

The first of several art exhibitions that form part of the Unfolding Origins project has been held at Pickering Library. Unfolding Origins is an artist in residence project developed by the Record Office in partnership with Chrysalis Arts. The project supports the creation of new artworks inspired by North Yorkshire's archival collections and develops exciting ways for the public to engage with this resource. This first exhibition was created by artist Carolyn Thompson, who was inspired by the World War 1 appeal papers held at the Record Office. A display of the original tribunal papers complemented the artistic works, along with an artist talk and a drawing workshop. The project is also working with artists, local schools and young people's groups in Selby and Richmondshire and further exhibitions are planned for the coming months.

The Record Office is used to dealing with old and potentially valuable items but when a German World War II incendiary device arrived recently it did cause some consternation. But no one was injured and the bomb squad safely detonated the device on open ground nearby. One of the many attractions of the archive service is that you never know what is going to turn up next.

Climate Change

The Council's carbon reduction plan 2021 – 2024 was agreed by the Executive in July and has been published on the Council's website. Our plan initially concentrates on the emissions which we have direct control over and direct ways of measuring emissions from. These are heating and lighting of our property, street lighting, water use, fleet vehicles and staff business travel. In April 2022 we will refresh the plan and integrate it with the Council Plan.

The Council's carbon footprint for 2020-21 has been calculated and there has been a reduction of 1591 tonnes CO2e from 2019-20 figures which is 13.9%. Some of this reduction can be attributed to changes in working behaviours during the Covid pandemic. New ways of working aim to retain some of these, particularly in relation to virtual working with the consequent savings in carbon emissions from business travel.

Recent progress and achievements have included:

- SmartCampus proposals for County Hall to integrate energy generation and storage and low/zero carbon heat options are being worked into the County Hall master plan.
- Window replacement works funded by the Public Sector Heat Decarbonisation Scheme. A further application has been made for funding to install air source heat pumps in three corporate properties.
- The County Council's Energy Team were successful in winning the 'Best Climate Action Initiative' award at the National Association for Public Service Excellence in September for their work with schools
- A study has been completed to identify the number of publicly available electric vehicle charge points which will be required in the county by 2030. The next step is to identify specific locations and look for innovative ways to overcome some of the barriers.
- A West, York and North Yorkshire Sustainable Procurement Toolkit has been completed to help commissioners and procurement officers utilise low carbon and circular economy procurement techniques.
- North Yorkshire Highways have produced a carbon management plan setting out an approach to manage and minimise whole life carbon, to align with the County Council's aspiration net zero date of 2030.

Digital Workplace

Building on the successes of the Modern Council Programme, we are continuing to ensure our technology supports agile and collaborative working through the introduction of **Microsoft 365**. Formerly known as Office 365, it provides a suite of office productivity tools to enable the Council to embrace modern digital working and transform the way we deliver our services.

Support and upskilling of colleagues across the organisation continues to develop; MS Teams webinars have had over 1000 views. The 'MS Teams Tips and Tricks' Yammer community page is seeing on average 3 colleague ideas posted per day as well as the latest knowledge updates. There are over 100 knowledge base articles and Frequently Asked Questions for MS Teams available on the IT Get Help self-service portal; a wealth of articles continue to be produced to promote specific features available and details of any new updates from Microsoft.

Customer

The North Yorkshire customer portal has now 118,116 active accounts with Dropped Kerbs being the latest service to offer a digital channel through the portal.

October also saw the launch of Credit Control in the Customer Service Centre to enable the team to support customers to access alternative payment options and signpost to the correct area of the Council for invoice queries. Speeding up the response for customers.

Social care demand continues to rise; the Customer Service Centre has introduced a new option on the adult social care telephone channel to help prioritise members of the public calling for support and better manage the rising demand.

Covid number in North Yorkshire continue to rise and the Test and Trace figure in the customer service centre have been fluctuating in line with the rise and fall in positive cases. In the last 3 months the Customer Service Team have attempted to contact over 6500 customers with an overall success rate of 51%.

The Customer Service Centre continues to support customers who are self-isolating and require support. In the last 3 months the CSC has received 492 calls and provided support to 366.

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). This monitoring has proved most successful with the Information Security Team successfully identifying and blocking threat activity from various international locations. To date they have taken evasive action on twenty persistent threats.

Data Products

We've built a tool to allow emergency responders to share intelligence in real-time back to a control room and make more effective decisions. This will improve NYLRF ability to respond and critically share intelligence to supporting agencies and is based on the rapid solution design work called "flooding intelligence" in 2020.

LEP Building Better Infrastructure project

NYCC working with NYnet continues to build out the free wi-fi programme to 16 market town across North Yorkshire. Through the second quarter, the team working with BES Highways have delivered services to Malton and Skipton.

The Internet of the Things network has moved into the pilot stage, trials focussed on Bins, Air Quality, and Home Care are in the process of being deployed across the Harrogate, Selby, and Richmond area.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR GREG WHITE