

Scrutiny Report – Explore York Libraries and Archives

May 2018

Explore's vision is:

“To enable everyone to lead fuller, more connected and engaged lives”

Our key objectives in delivering that vision are:

- To be a strong and sustainable organisation
- To share the joy of reading with everyone
- To be the focal point of communities, building resilience and engagement
- To contribute to everyone's health and wellbeing
- To be places of learning, creativity and discovery

We are now beginning the fifth and final year of this contract. We are both looking back and planning for the future, using everything we have learned. There are some key things happening in the next few months, a new Explore Centre opening and a new Gateway. Both of these have entailed many years of work to move forward and they represent significant change for Explore as an organisation. We have grown over the last 5 years and we are now much more of a cultural business. Moving in this direction is key to sustainability and we are building a strong business plan looking ahead over the next 20 years.

We have been recruiting for new Community Members and now have over 500. Being a Community Member gives local people a real stake in Explore, with a chance to sit on the Board and help out in other areas.

Performance

The CIPFA library statistics for 16/17 have now been released. These give us an opportunity to benchmark against other library services. It is 18 months behind, which isn't ideal, but it is the only way we have of benchmarking easily

Our book issues (per 1,000 population) are still above average. Within that our issues are upper quartile for specific types – adult non-fiction, ebooks and eaudiobooks. The number of ebooks issuing has been rising for some time now and shows that this is still a popular choice. We are well into the upper quartile for book acquisitions now. Our acquisitions of all items have been roughly 30,000 items for years, so

expressed per 1,000 population it's fallen just a bit here as the population has risen, but meanwhile everyone else has been buying fewer and fewer items. The unitary average has gone from 140 to 97 (average book acquisitions per 1,000 population across all unitaries) in the past four years, which is quite an alarming drop. So it can be seen that across the country, other services are reducing their book buying significantly as a way to reduce budgets. We have managed to keep book buying steady without increasing the amount we spend against a rising population. We are looking at ways to keep doing this and increase the number of books per 1,000 population. This will be a challenge, but books remain at the heart of any library service.

Other key statistics

- Our visits are in the upper quartile. We work hard to increase visits and it remains our most important statistic
- We have a large number of volunteers (volunteer hours per 1000 population = upper quartile and we're the single highest unitary by a small margin). Our volunteers provide invaluable support to our paid staff and allow us to achieve so much more. We do still hold fast to having paid staff in every library and so are different to many other services now who have moved to volunteer run libraries. We believe our mixed approach provides a higher quality of service for local people
- High number of requests (expressed both by population, and as % of all issues, we're well into upper quartile and one of the highest)

York Explore

The staff at York Explore have worked very hard over 17/18 to improve their usage and they have been very successful. Improving figures like this means hard work all day, every day across the year and can only be achieved by working as a team. Barbara Swinn, York's manager has worked so hard alongside her staff to make York Explore an exciting, welcoming place to be. She is building new partnerships in the city centre and inviting people into the spaces e.g York Fashion Week, International Day of Disability. Now York Explore has been shortlisted for a Visit York Award as a family friendly place. We are looking forward to the Awards Evening in June – so fingers crossed!!

At the end of 16/17 against target they were down 23.7% against visits and 10.4% against issues. In 17/18, they have increased visits against target by 17% and 12% for issues. To put this in context, book issues

nationally are declining and so to increase means a lot of work. This can be seen in their book displays, recommendations, events, staff time. They make effective use of social media and other comms. This summer will see activities happening on the library lawn to encourage people to use that space more as well as many exciting events inside.

Archives Accreditation

We have been working hard for the last year to gain Accreditation Status for our archive service. This is administered by The UK Archive Service Accreditation Partnership and is the recognised national quality standard for archive services. The standard defines good practice and agreed standards for archive services across the UK, thereby encouraging and supporting the development of the archive service. It allows archive services to participate in a scheme supporting the ongoing development of their service against a nationally agreed standard. Archive Service Accreditation also allows The National Archive to provide assurance that standards are being maintained by archive services that have been approved as places of deposit.

This is the latest step in the overall plan to improve and to provide a secure future for York's archives and allows us to benchmark ourselves against the best services in the country.

The award is held for 3 years and then we must reapply against the standards. Staff worked very hard to put together the application and our success is a reflection on their commitment to excellence and so we are very proud of our achievement.

Archives Highlights

- Celebration event for Past Caring? Project. This celebrated the work of staff and volunteers on cataloguing and conserving the records. The Lord Mayor shared the story of her grandfather who was in the York Workhouse. This also was the subject of an article in The Press
- The work continues on cataloguing the main collections, both civic and community. There is much work to do here, but our staff are making significant inroads to the task. This is essential to improved access. We are working to clear the basement at York to free up space and to continue this work
- We are working with second year students at York St John University. They are cataloguing records as part of their course. This is proving a very successful project for both them and us and

some students carry on volunteering for us in archives and libraries

- We coordinated events for Vote 100 to celebrate 100 years of improved suffrage
- Work on the Hugh Murray and Knowles collections continues. We will be naming the Family History room upstairs after Hugh Murray in recognition of his huge contribution to the city later this year
- We have completed 3 more education packs in partnership with York Civic Trust for schools. The Workhouse, Suffragettes and World War 1
- We have been successful at stage one of a bid for funding to catalogue the Council's architects and engineers records – On the Drawing Board. Stage 2 has been submitted
- We have submitted a bid to the Arts Council – Archives Alive to use archive material to inspire storytelling for children

Staff Wellbeing

We completed our second staff wellbeing survey in December and the results are very positive. Generally staff are happier now, more satisfied with their job and believe that the work that they do is important. In fact the survey shows us -that 'job satisfaction' had gone up nearly double on the 'very satisfied' section.

We have a Staff Advisory Group (StAG) which is made up of staff who volunteer to be on the group. The group leads on the wellbeing survey work and they develop action plans following each survey to address any issues that arise. We have seen real progress and change as a result and this is one way that our governance model allows staff greater and more meaningful input to strategic and operational management. The group report into our Board and that direct access to Board Members keeps staff wellbeing high on our list of priorities.

Reading - Adult Participation

- We have held a number of top level author events such as Philippa Gregory, Ann Cleeves and Louise Penny
- We worked with local author Pamela Hartshorne who travelled round 3 of our Gateway Libraries. The smaller libraries don't often get authors and so this was well received and we plan to do more
- Hosted 7 events for the York Literature Festival. Our partnership with YLF is growing stronger and we will be working much more together in the future.

The Summer Reading Challenge

This year will be Mischief Makers – 100 years of the Beano and we expect record numbers taking part – maybe even some adults reliving their childhood! We are trying a new source of funding for the delivery of this. Crowdfunding through the York Hive. We have guaranteed the Challenge, so if we don't raise enough it will still go ahead. This is part of our work to establish alternative sources of funding for different parts of our delivery. It has been picked up by the Bookseller as an innovative approach. We are now very much a cultural business and will be exploring lots of different approaches to protecting our core services.

Bloodaxe Challenge is our annual partnership with the York Archaeological Trust. It challenges children to read 4 books around a history theme and coincides with the Viking Festival. Over 400 children took part this year. The Challenge has become one of our key events in the year to promote children's literacy by engaging them in fun activities and events.

Children and Libraries January – March 2018

- School visits, 87 schools visited their local library with 2088 children. Class visits are an opportunity to introduce children to libraries and reading, showing them how to find information etc. For some children this will be their first experience of libraries and we aim to encourage them to come back with their parents to join
- 20 playgroup visits with 201 children
- 233 under 5 storytimes with 1946 children and 1485 adults. Storytimes happened every week in all libraries and are joyous occasions with children joining in with their favourite stories and songs. They can get quite noisy which we love, as it shows that the children feel welcome and at home in libraries and with books. It is also an opportunity to engage with the parents and carers to encourage them to read to their children at home and bring them to other events and take part in the reading challenges we offer
- 75 over 5 events such as craft sessions, chatterbooks and holiday activities – 610 children and 325 adults attending
- 1960 Treasure Packs handed out. These are for all 3 year olds and are part of the Bookstart programme funded by the Treasury

Explore a Story

We are working with students from the Education Dept at the University of York to put together packs of a book with props to deliver storytimes for children. This provides ready made story activities for staff and volunteers to deliver and saves time for frontline staff. It has run for 2 terms so far and the students enjoy the work. We hope to repeat it next year.

Big City Read – Matt Haig’s The Radleys

Matt is a former resident of York and still has close ties with the city and *The Radleys* is set in York’s very own Bishopthorpe. We are enormously excited that he has accepted our invitation to be our Big City Read author and are planning some fantastic events to celebrate the themes of the book and celebrate the power of reading.

We are working hard on a fantastic programme of events including performances of a play that we have specially commissioned for the Big City Read this year. Riding Lights Theatre Company will be performing *Surprise Ending*, written by Bridget Foreman in all of our libraries, mobile libraries and reading cafes and some other specially selected venues in and around the city. This strand of the programme is being funded by a grant from Arts Council England.

The Big City Read 2018 brochure and event booking will be available from 1 August and we will be launching it on Thursday 20 September and distributing 5000 free copies of *The Radleys* from 21 September. Our programme of events across the city will run from 20 September to 16 November.

Acomb – 10 years!

This May, Acomb Explore celebrates its 10th birthday. Acomb was our first Explore Centre and enabled us to show people how the Explore vision worked in reality. It has been unbelievably successful – due in some part to the wonderful staff. Julie Travers who was the first manager there, took our vision and made it a reality. She built a team who opened their arms to the local community, welcoming everyone and working hard to celebrate the joy of reading and encouraging people into learning. Since it opened, it has become the hub of its community. That is a well worn expression, but in this case is completely justified. Its success has meant that we are now considering how to extend and

improve the building to provide more spaces for learning, community activities etc.

Explore was founded on the principle of flexible spaces that can easily be transformed from one use to another, thus maximising the range of events and activities that can take place. Since the doors opened we have welcomed over 1,200,000 people to borrow books, learn pilates, get online, use the WiFi, take level 2 literacy and numeracy exams, play boccia, attend storytime, listen to children's opera, have lunch, sit in the garden, knit,

The success of Acomb lead to York Library's transformation and now onto the latest and biggest Explore Centre at Burnholme (which opens in June). The support we get from the local community has been amazing and we would like to thank everyone for coming along and taking part. We have ambitious plans to improve and further extend the centre to develop our offer into the future.

Explore @ Burnholme

The new Explore Centre @ Burnholme is our biggest ever project and in many ways is the culmination of all the wonderfulness of our vision. Tang Hall Library has served the local community well over the last 55 years and the next chapter in its history, in a new location, is very exciting.

Ten years ago we were opening the very first Explore Centre at Acomb and that has given us the blueprint for York Explore and now Burnholme. It feels very good to have that investment in the east of York that balances out Acomb in the west.

Below is our original vision for an Explore Centre taken from 21st Century Learning; 21st Century Libraries – all the elements will be there at Burnholme. This vision was developed in partnership with Adult Education and has given York's libraries a solid base on which to build. We are developing and adapting it, in consultation with local people, but it remains at the heart of Explore.

Here is a journey through the spaces of an Explore Library Learning Centre. All space is flexible for maximum use

- **Transition space** - as people enter the building, they will find themselves in a welcoming space that is part café, part meeting space, part information point. Here they can decide which services they want to access or simply enjoy a coffee with friends or look at

the latest exhibition. There will also be self issue and return terminals here

- **Quick Choice** – a range of popular fiction and non fiction plus the “just returned” books for people who only have a few minutes. This will be a bright, exciting area that encourages people to stop and look
- **Lending Library** – presentation of fiction will follow the lines of modern bookshop display. The books will be supported by innovative reader development activities with the aim of promoting the joy of reading. Presentation of non fiction will be shelved more traditionally and will support both informal, self directed and formal learning. There will be spaces to sit with sofas, chairs and tables to encourage people to stay
- **Reference and Information Library** – there will be printed and electronic material to support enquiries and study. This will be the quiet part of the building with study space
- **Archive and Local History** – making accessible the wealth of materials the library holds on the history of York and its people. And encouraging communities to add to the collections with their memories and photos.
- **The Children’s Library** will be a colourful space that belongs to the children. Here they can make a noise and enjoy reading and playing. There will be books attractively displayed – fiction to promote the joy of reading and non fiction to support the national curriculum. The space will be flexible to allow for activities such as storytimes, class visits, painting, crafts etc.
- **Young People’s Library** - There will be space for young people that they have helped to design. The aim of which is to encourage young people to stay and feel that they are welcome
- **IT** - In addition to free WiFi throughout the building , there will be public access ICT positioned in different parts of the building to indicate different uses – in the café for quick email sending or internet surfing; in the reference library for study and longer searches; in the lending library to access the catalogue; in the learning rooms to support more formal learning. The aim will be to always be at the cutting edge of technology
- **Community Activities** - There will be a variety of activities happening in the building at any one time from reading groups to homework clubs. Many of these activities will be arranged and led by volunteers from the community – using the building as a space for people to come together

- **Exhibition/Performance Space** – regular programme of exhibitions showcasing local artists, schools work etc. Performances of dance, theatre etc
- **Information and Advice Point** – this will be a flexible space with a desk and a space for confidential interviews. The space will be used by a range of organisations on a rota system e.g CAB, Benefits Agency, Police. IT will link each organisation back to their base
- **Learning Spaces** – these will be a combination of separate rooms and spaces in the public areas that can be used flexibly for a wide range of formal or informal learning as needed. The rooms will be set up as state of the art learning environments with all modern facilities to make the most of blended learning approaches

Sadly, the opening of Burnholme has been put back one month so we now plan to open to the public on 23 June. But our new manager, Andrew Oldham is using the extra time to build partnerships in the local community and training staff. He meets regularly with the Council. Project manager and the current tenants. We want the tenants to have a good experience through the changes and are looking forward to working with them. They are York Community Church, Tang Hall SMART, Burnholme Nursery and York Learning. We are especially pleased to welcome York Learning as they have contributed so much to the development of the Explore vision over the last ten years. United Response, while not a permanent tenant, are a significant hirer of the main hall and community rooms, with multiple room occupancy from Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm for their commissioned service.

We are receiving many requests for room hire and are optimistic that we will be able to meet our targets as well as provide a real mixture of events and activities for local people and for the people of York as a whole. Some examples of this are:

- York Learning – jobs fair
- York Learning – community engagement activities
- NHS organisation – therapy spaces
- Organisation teaching English as a second language
- Keep fit organisations
- North Yorkshire Police training/meetings
- York Mosque

There will be a learning kitchen in the centre and we have been talking with Brunswick Nursery about how we can work together as they will be

managing the grounds around the Centre. Continued promotion of the community rooms will take place, aiming for a diverse range of activities reflecting the local community and their interests and needs – this will include an ongoing aim for the main hall to become a large event venue

We already have a number of events planned, such as Big City Read, the Summer Reading Challenge and, already, several author events in the diary, in partnership with Waterstones York. The hall's capacity means that we can attract major authors and events and will be our largest facility.

We have recruited Facilities Support Assistants and Reading Cafe staff. We are especially pleased with the number of local people who have applied, many of the new staff live within walking distance and so can act as local "ambassadors!". Part of the strength of libraries is through the employment of local people who know their local areas and so are part of the community.

The Explore Reading Cafe continues will operate with minimal environmental impact such as reducing single use plastic and we'll be investigating the composting of food waste, with the wider building ensuring good use of recycling

Open days at Explore Tang Hall Library (the latest being on Friday 11 May) together with social media activity and maintaining strong links with local Tang Hall partners is continuing to create excitement, ongoing interest and enthusiasm. A 'Neighbours Day' is being planned so that those most affected by disruption will get to see the building before it opens to the wider public – they will also receive a cafe discount offer for a period of time as a 'thank you' and leaflets will be locally distributed with this invitation

We are looking at possible discounts for building teams who will be continuing their development of the immediate surrounding area and will benefit from easy access to refreshments

Plans for the opening day (23 June) are being finalised – this will be celebrated but importantly this day is also a chance to ensure the building operates effectively – therefore, there will be a more formal opening too, ideally in July, followed by a community celebration, ideally in September, in partnership with Tang Hall SMART.

We continue to plan for the community rooms to be named, based on the heritage of the former Burnholme Community College and Tang Hall community. A wider communications plan is being developed, with the Explore Centre Manager working with marketing and communications partners at City of York Council and the wider media so that we continue to tell the Burnholme story in the days before we open, but also the impact of the building on the local community, in the weeks and months following.

New Earswick Gateway Library

Plans are now well under way to move the Gateway Library from the primary school to the Folk Hall. Our partnership with JRHT is enabling us to reach further into the local community. Being in the Folk Hall gives us so many possibilities – extended opening hours, a reading cafe, use of the rooms and hall for events and activities. The Folk Hall is very much the centre of New Earswick and we will be much more accessible. We would like to thank the school for our partnership over the last ten years and we want to continue working with them to encourage children to enjoy reading and support their homework.

The new Gateway Library will open to the public on 29th May so we are very busy making sure everything is in place. Mary Marlowe the manager there is working very closely with the manager of the Folk Hall. Although not an Explore Centre, New Earswick gives us the opportunity to use the elements of our vision in different ways. So, we will not be running the cafe, but we will place books in it to encourage reading, we will have a dedicated space for the majority of the books, but we want to use the whole building in different ways e.g a reading group can use a corner, an author event can take place in the hall. This will give local people access to big name authors in a way that we could never achieve previously.

This “co location” provides us with a much more sustainable way to ensure the future of local library services. We will be carefully watching how it works so we can replicate elements in other parts of York. Our overriding ambition is to protect library services in local communities and these different projects are showing us different ways of doing that. The answer will be different for each community, but the result will be the same in keeping our services local.

Looking Ahead

The rest of the year will be busy developing a 20 year plan for York's libraries and archives. The work looking back over the last 5 years is allowing us to reflect on successes and failures and consider what the next 20 years will look like. We are using the results from the public consultation that the council recently undertook to shape future services. The digital technology alone will offer us very exciting opportunities to continue sharing the joy of reading and encouraging people to learn, create and discover. New opportunities at Burnholme and New Earswick will show us more ways forward and we can begin to plan for the next Explore Centre.