

Scrutiny Report – Explore York Libraries and Archives

October 2017

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

This is our fourth financial year operating independently and we continue to grow and develop. We are looking very much at the future at this critical stage in the contract, planning how York's libraries and archives continue to deliver excellence for good value. To put that into context, our overall cost per visit in 16/17 was £1.97, making us one of the very cheapest services comparatively (CIPFA figures). In 15/16 only two services were cheaper. We are only able to deliver the range of services we do because of our wonderful staff and the support that we get from our communities.

Strong and Sustainable Organisation

Performance

We have done a large piece of work that covers all of our performance to gain a picture of how Explore measures up against national trends etc. This was shown to Scrutiny in September and will be available to the public as part of the forthcoming CYC public consultation on libraries.

We have also produced a booklet using infographics to provide a picture of performance in 16/17 (annex 1)

Digital by Default

Following our digital by default policy, we have moved to email only overdue notices. This reduces the amount we were spending on postage and paper etc. We have stepped up promoting ways to renew books at the same time to reduce the number of overdue notices. We also send overdue notices (messages by text a few days before the book's due date) to remind people to renew or return their books.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

We are preparing for the new GDPR coming into force. We take this very seriously and are training our Chief Operating Officer in depth on the new legislation.

Finance

Over the last six months, we have installed EPOS tills (electronic point of sale). These link to a website giving us up to the minute information about transactions in our reading cafes and libraries. They also allow us to monitor stock levels so we can minimise waste.

We have also set up a funding pipeline spreadsheet to monitor all external funding. It allows us to see at a glance how much we have and what we are applying for.

We are further developing our growth plan – looking at different finance options and business development opportunities.

Governance

Our new Executive Assistant is improving and strengthening our governance. She is working on our website and communication with our Community Members as well as supporting the Board and Management Team. We are working towards Customer Service Excellence accreditation and Investing in Volunteers accreditation. These standards will allow us to best demonstrate how we put people at the heart of everything we do.

We are just about to submit our Archives Accreditation for assessment, which will show the value we place on managing the City of York Archive.

Workforce Development

We have now completed one full staff survey on wellbeing, followed up by two “pulse” surveys (asking a small number of questions). It was run by CYC’s Workforce Development Unit to ensure confidentiality and anonymity as we wanted staff to answer truthfully. Nigel Burchell and his team have made a significant difference to this work, advising us and helping us to interpret the results.

Highlights

- 70% are satisfied with their job
- 79% feel happy when they are at work
- 68% enjoy the work they do
- 71% are proud to work for Explore
- 94% feel their job is worthwhile

There were also issues with stress and frustration which we wanted to unpick, so our Staff Advisory Group (StAG), undertook further consultation with staff through holding drop in workshops to delve into how we can improve. What would make a difference to them. An action plan was developed so staff can clearly see that action is following. It was very important to us that there is a visible path from survey to action. StAG is made up of staff on a voluntary basis as well as our Staff Director who provides a direct link into the Board.

Relevance of libraries in the 21st century

When the Town Clerk opened the new York Library in 1927, he said that it was for “the rooting out of all ignorance”. 90 years on, we might phrase that a little differently, but the role of libraries is essentially the same it has ever been. The technology changes but the purpose remains.

The internet has been hailed as the answer to all things, everyone now has access to all knowledge and information and libraries can slowly fade away.

The last few years have shown how wrong this assumption was. Information can be and is misrepresented, inaccurate and selective. “Fake news” is now Collins’ word of the year. The big tech companies are under intense scrutiny and people are being given the right to be

forgotten. There are many opportunistic websites out there seeking to maximise traffic or spread falsehood by passing off fictitious stories as new reports. There is so much information out there it is becoming very difficult to know whether what you are looking at can be relied upon. The internet gives you 100,000 answers, a librarian will help you to find you the right one.

More and more information on the internet is disappearing behind a paywall. Libraries work together to negotiate national licences for this, so everyone gets equal access. We constantly review websites to recommend ones that provide reliable information – nowhere is this more important than in health.

Libraries stand for impartial, equal access for everyone, not just those who can pay. Our pcs are used everyday by people who don't have them at home, they allow people to apply for jobs, benefits, passports, learn, contact families and friends etc.

Our statistics show that we are used by all ages for many different reasons, books remain at the heart of what we do, but they are now in a range of formats to suit individual need – ebook, audio download, large print etc. Being the focus of communities is also in the DNA of libraries – safe, impartial spaces where everyone is welcome, where they can take part in our services or just spend time. There are so few of these places now, libraries are the only ones that welcome everyone equally.

But increasingly, as well as providing access to knowledge, libraries are becoming involved in supporting the creation and sharing of knowledge and ideas. Our Arts Council project, Explore Labs, is allowing us to experiment with new technology and deliver new services e.g 3D printing – allowing everyone access to this new product, maker spaces – where people can gather to create, design, invent and learn.

Cataloguing

It has been a very successful year in the Archive, progressing the backlog of cataloguing, making more collections accessible.

- 10,000 journal index entries to the catalogue opening up our journal collection for researchers e.g Dalesman, Yorkshire Life, Yorkshire Ridings Magazine
- 654 onsite archive encounters in Quarter 2, including 132 archive research visits and 188 offsite encounters. This is a 38% increase

in overall onsite encounters in the same period last year and a 15% increase in archive researchers over the same period

- Staff have retrieved 446 more documents in 17/18 to date than they did in the whole of 16/17
- 28 boxes of local history pamphlets have been catalogued by volunteers, increasing access to this collection

Volunteers in the archives

In the last quarter we have had volunteers from a variety of places and for a number of reasons

- 26 archives support volunteers and 4 family history buddies supporting the front line ALH service
- 8 working on the Hugh Murray collection
- 1 digitisation volunteer working on a personal archive collection
- 2 working on our historic Coroner's files
- 2 from Askham Grange – 1 working on the Civil Defence files and 1 working on Architects and Engineers drawings
- 1 working on the records of Nunthorpe Grammar School
- 2 from Blueberry Academy on their placement programme
- 2 remote volunteers researching the history of women's suffrage in York
- 1 researching the men listed in the Chocolate Letters collection
- 4 working on a pilot project for our Architects and Engineers drawings
- 23 supporting the Past Caring? Project

One important project is the **Architects and Engineers Plans collection**. This serves as an example of the sort of work our archivists are doing to improve access to the City Archive. The records in this collection are many and varied and still of use to engineering and building projects as well as of intrinsic value due to the historic nature of the buildings and the story they tell about York.

This is a very large collection and is currently not catalogued and so access to the plans for council workers is limited. These records are still much needed in projects across the city and to have them catalogued and accessible would save the council both money and time. We are working with the council department on a pilot to assess the likely cost of

cataloguing the whole collection with a view to applying for funding to achieve this. Volunteers are key to helping us untangle this important resource.

The volunteers worked for 10 weeks on the cataloguing of the flat and rolled plans, splitting their time evenly between plan types. Flat plans are housed in the plan chests on site at York Explore and the rolled plans are housed in crates and were recalled from Deepstore for the purposes of the pilot. The purpose of the pilot was to collect information related to the listing, staffing and handling of the plans that will inform how we prioritise and approach the greater project.

Catriona has had a total of 5 volunteers, three volunteers are pursuing careers as archivists, one is doing a PhD in York and this work is informing her research. One volunteer is on a placement from HMP Askham Grange. For the final 5 weeks of the project she also had a volunteer from the Blueberry Academy (who provide specialist support and job coaching for young adults with a range of special educational needs). He has been carrying on with the listing of the flat plans while the others moved onto the rolled plans. Two work experience students also worked on the flat plans for a day and Catriona will continue to work through the remaining drawers with placement students and volunteers until they are all listed.

Some members of the Architects and Engineers project advisory group have had a chance to see the work in progress, including Nick Beilby, and Gary Frost and Andy Willison from City of York Council. Catriona has conducted a preliminary analysis of the findings and has been able to extract some key data related to the number of flat and rolled plans an individual can process per hour, number of plans typically in roll, number of rolls in crates, material type, handling, equipment required etc. There is more analysis of this data to do so that we can identify an appropriate funding stream for this project. It is clear that it will be a very time consuming project, particularly when it comes to the rolled plans.

We will need a dedicated space, a dedicated project archivist and a dedicated team of volunteers. Having worked on this project with a wide range of volunteers of different age groups and backgrounds it is clear that, once the method is established, the task of cataloguing the material should be quite straight forward, as the process is quite prescriptive and c.95% of the plans clearly feature all the information needed for cataloguing purposes. The next step is to identify an appropriate funding body.

Findings: Examples of plans in the collection of flat plans:

- 137 plans relating to the Guildhall 1870s – 1970s
- 18 plans relating to the School of Art
- 63 Plans relating to York Theatre Royal 1821 – 1922
- 70 plans for Municipal Offices 1888 - 1908
- 31 plans for the Mansion House 1870s/1880s
- 8 plans for Lendal Bridge 1874 - 1974
- Site plans for new streets
- Proposed improvements in Goodramgate and Gillygate – 1960s and 1970s
- Individual houses and shops
- York City Gaol 1864

Findings: Examples of plans in the collection of rolled plans:

- York City Fever Hospital 1928
- Water Lane Housing Estate 1936
- City of York - 9" Sewer from 2nd Manhole in Acomb Branch Sewer, to Hobmoor Place. 1933
- Proposed improvement to island Tower Street
- Ring Road 1929
- York City Asylum 1901
- York City Electricity Works - Foundations to New Boilers etc.
- City of York Proposed Improvement – Fishergate, Bishopgate St
- Proposed sewers at Malton Road and Whitby Avenue
- Floor Plan of the Small Pox Bungalow, Huntington

90th Birthday celebrations

York Explore celebrated its 90th birthday on 23rd September with a day of activity. There were a number of artists in residence to work with the public as well as digital makers – there was a range of exciting things to try out such as a potato synthesizer and a 3D printer One of our archivists brought her harp in and as well as playing it, let children have a go. We are planning to hold some music evenings in York Explore Marriott Room in the new year.

We launched our appeal of “90 for 90”. York is an exciting, digitally-creative and imaginative city. By giving everyone access to opportunities

that spark imaginations, somewhere to dream, to discover and to experiment, we can create our own home-grown hotbed of talent.

Your donation could spark a child living in poverty to go to university. It could help a disabled person discover a hidden talent for art. Or it could help an older person to unlock a new world of digital opportunities. With your help we can shape a unique and vibrant future for York.

So we are encouraging everyone to give us 90 minutes volunteering or 90p (or more) donation. We are contacting businesses asking them to donate £90 to the appeal. All businesses that contribute will have their names on a piece of art in York Explore as well as on the website to show their support. We are getting a very favourable response to this and would urge everyone to donate their time or their money – or both! This will run over the next 3 months. <https://www.exploreyork.org.uk/90-for-90-pledge/>

Share the joy of reading

The 2017 Big City Read book is *To Catch a Rabbit* by Helen Cadbury. Sadly, Helen passed away earlier this year, but it was her wish that we carry on and so we are dedicating the programme to her incredibly rich contribution to York and to literature. Her third book will be published in November. We would like to extend our thanks and sympathy to her family who have been so generous with their time.

The programme of events is as wonderful as ever, our Reading Development Librarian Wendy Kent has worked so hard to create a mix of events for all ages. It will close on 10th November. 5,000 books were given out and they went so quickly, it has been a very popular book. We gave out books at Tesco, Railway Station, West Offices, City Screen, Job Centre Plus and Theatre Royal as well as all our libraries. We estimate that the Big City Read reaches about 20,000 people across the city every year. It has proven to be such a good way to get people enjoying reading and discovering new authors.

For the first time we were able to include ebooks and audio downloads of the book – improving accessibility for everyone

Reading Ahead is a programme that encourages people who struggle with reading to discover the joy that comes with it. We worked with Tesco Union representatives and York Learning tutors

Our **Summer Reading Challenge** – Animal Agents was very popular, with 3,731 children taking part over the summer vacation. Acomb Primary School won the School Cup for the second year in a row – they had X % completion. It is so good to see the commitment from the teachers to bring children and reading together. Enjoying reading is proven to help with school attainment. Here are a couple of quotes from parents

“Both my children have thoroughly enjoyed this challenge. It has encouraged us to use the library and really motivated my younger daughter (who is yet to really understand getting lost in a book and reading for pleasure) to enjoy reading over the summer holidays. Top marks to the wonderful staff who have listened to them both. They are always so patient and enquiring. Many thanks!”

“Brilliant, never done it before and it meant my child went up a reading level when returning to school in September. Usually a nightmare to get him to read to me but he went along with it for the prizes. Thank you!”

We just love hearing children talking about what they have read and helping them to choose what to read next. The summer is always a joyous time. We held a celebration Sunday with author and illustrator Kate Pankhurst with lots of cake and prizes.

Next year will be 100 years of the Beano, and they are joining with libraries to celebrate – so get your black and red striped jumpers out!!
Book gifting

Jump into a Story was a 3 year project with Mud Pie Arts and Arts Council funded to improve staff’s storytelling skills. It took place at Acomb, Tang Hall and York Explore. Staff have really enjoyed taking part and the quality of our storytimes has improved, sharing language and words on the page.

Over the 3 years we have worked with 20 different artists delivering 187 sessions with just under 2,000 children taking part.

We are now working with Mud Pie Arts to develop a project around storytelling and our archive – telling stories from York that can be very local for children to understand more about where they live. It is a great pleasure and privilege working with Mud Pie Arts and we hope the partnership continues into the future.

Focal point of communities

Haxby Mobile

The new mobile is delivering the service from 4 key sites in Haxby and Wigginton. Usage is about 75% of when it was in the building, so staff are working hard to minimise the impact of not having a static base. We continue to work with the Memorial Hall and council on a longer term solution.

New Earswick Gateway

Work is continuing on the redevelopment of the Folk Hall in New Earswick and we are working with Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust to jointly create an exciting vision for the library moving to the Folk Hall. We are weaving our provision into the whole building in a new way to deliver library and archive services. We are expecting to move the library from the school in Spring 2018.

Burnholme Explore Centre

Work is also progressing well at Burnholme and the move of Tang Hall Library will happen in Spring 2018. We are working with a number of partners to deliver a vibrant building that is accessible to all with lots of events and activities happening as well as a 21st century library and archive service.

We are working in partnership with Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust and the Rowntree Society to submit a bid for funding to celebrate the innovative social housing projects that New Earswick and Tang Hall were. 2019 will be the centenary of work on Tang Hall beginning with a vision of new homes for returning soldiers.

Contribute to everyone's health and wellbeing

Social Prescribing - In July we launched the fourth **Books on Prescription** scheme for long term health conditions. The other schemes are for mental health, young people's mental health and dementia. The books are available to borrow from libraries or through prescriptions by healthcare professionals. We work with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to ensure that the books reach everyone who may benefit.

Partnership at 30 Clarence Street

30 Clarence Street is a multi-partner shared venue providing a range of support for vulnerable people. This ranges from support for Young People aged 16 – 25 through a drop-in information and signposting service, counselling and support. Adult mental health recovery service, providing support, advice and guidance. A new service for those in mental health crisis will be introduced before the end of the year – this is focused on providing an evening and weekend drop-in support service, with the intention of reducing the impact on A & E. We provide a range of books in the reading cafe to support health and wellbeing, including the Books on Prescription schemes.

We attend a monthly operational meeting with partner leads which is useful to keep up to date with new initiatives and for sharing the Explore offer.

Past Caring?

We have now just passed the halfway mark of our two-year project. Currently, Julie-Ann is working on the arrangement and cataloguing of Work Packages 2 and 3 (the healthcare records).

In the last three months Julie-Ann has completed the comprehensive scoping and survey of material in Work Packages 2 and 3, which includes the records of the Improvement Commissioners (see image right), the Medical Officer of Health and the Department of Health, and the Department of Environmental Health (1850s-1970s). This survey revealed that 352 boxes of records, 148 volumes, 95 separate loose plans, and 9 boxes of glass plate negatives and photographs are in scope for the healthcare collections. Included in this, are eight boxes of water damaged material that will need specialist attention from our conservator.

The amount of material identified is approximately 20 per cent more than indicated in the original consultant's report – which relied on a sample of records only. In addition there is a greater diversity of record formats than initially indicated. In order to deal with these issues and maintain our project schedule, we have recruited and trained 11 volunteers who will be helping the Project Archivist list and repackage the records.

To date, the Project Archivist has catalogued the records of the Improvement Commissioners, the mental health records, and is currently

working on the main series of records from the Department of Health. This cataloguing work is revealing the enormous research potential of these collections, which deal with issues such as maternal and child health, health education, slum clearances and overcrowding, prevention of infectious diseases, and environmental health. Over the coming months the team will be working with higher education institutions, community groups, and members of the project advisory board to promote these collections to both local and international audiences.

On 2nd October the Past Caring Team also welcomed an additional member, our Erasmus trainee from the University of Valladolid in Spain. Carlos will be with us for three months and will be assisting with the cataloguing and conservation strands of the project. He plans to pursue a career in archives, so this is a fantastic opportunity for him to experience all aspects of archive work.

Places of learning, creativity and discovery

Engaging with children and young people in the archives

We are delivering innovative archive practice with our work in this area. It is wonderful to see young children on the floor in the archive reading room, learning about the history of York and engaging with original documents.

2017 Summer Reading Challenge animation workshop

Following on from the success of last year's Hunt collection-inspired animation workshop, this year we decided to celebrate the September anniversary of the library's opening 90 years ago. We were initially concerned that the collection would not have the immediate visual impact as the Hunt collection with its famous faces, but the children loved comparing the photographs of the building and the staff to those of the present day and were amused by the rules of the library, some of which were very much of the time. The parents of the children also had the opportunity to see some of the treasures from the archive when they came dropped into the workshop half way through and the archive features strongly in both of the final animations.

History Agents

As part of the Big City Read, we invited children aged 4 to 12 to become archives detectives for the day. They had the rare opportunity to follow hidden clues and go behind the scenes in the archive store to find a treasure from each century represented in our collections. From Henry

It's 1155 charter 18th Century Astronomical journals through to today's newspaper, the children learned about the history of their own city, the importance of archives and their role in the creation and care of archives of the future. By the end of the session they had also created a timeline of treasures from 1155 to the present day in the archives reading room.

Digital Inclusion

Muse Hack is a digital making & music technology project for young people aged 10-14 working in collaboration with professional artists and digital makers. There have been 10 workshops so far. The outcomes from this are:

- Participants show an increase in digital making skills including coding, 3D printing, using interactive circuit boards, aduinos, breadboards, LED lights
- Parent's feedback is extremely positive, especially regarding artists/digital makers' facilitation and the opportunity for young people to work with professionals. They would like more opportunities
- Increase in artists' digital making skills and knowledge. We have a considerable amount of creative digital making ideas we are exploring
- Provided artist development opportunities within library environment which is leading towards other workshops and projects with other organisations
- Increase in awareness of digital making at York Explore through the project workshops, publicity and promotion and pop up makerspace for Summer Reading challenge
- Increase in artists' involvement and engagement at York Explore and awareness, understanding and knowledge of the potential for creative output for artists
- Positive change in perceptions, attitude and awareness of libraries
- Increase in staff learning and development in digital making and working collaboratively with artists and digital makers
- We will be setting up a Muse Hack digital making club for young people

Lending technology

As well as providing training and support, we are experimenting with lending different sorts of technology to see how, by making it easy to get hold of, that might work to encourage people to be more adventurous.

Micro:Bit lending

A Micro:Bit is a tiny, programmable computer. We have secured 50 of them and will be lending them to people. This will allow us to provide the technology required to explore coding and hack projects within people's own homes. We will provide support via Explore Labs sessions, Hack Camps etc. We feel that whilst it's important to include coding as part of our internal offer, it's also vital that people can access the technology in their own time and environments. People who become familiar with this technology will provide essential resources and support in future projects, including the work we intend to do with VR and AR. It's all about progression and harnessing talent.

Tablet lending

We are conducting a pilot in partnership Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT) and the events coordinator at Red Lodge (an elderly people's care home) in New Earswick to lend tablets to residents to help them get used to mobile technology, online resources, touchscreens and e-reading. As well as lending out twenty tablets, we'll be hosting regular support sessions to help the residents understand the technology further.

Printing in Libraries

We have been working on replacing the public printers at all libraries, as our previous estate was getting very old and causing complaints. We have completed the roll-out of replacement printers at the Gateways. For the Explore Centres, we're investing in a much more sophisticated solution with additional functionality: self-payment, printing from wifi and home computers, and managed scanning and photocopying. This means no more wasted printing not being picked up and all printing being paid for. It will reduce waste and increase income.

We have trialled this at Acomb Explore and take up has increased, especially from WiFi. With so many people bringing their own devices now, it has become essential to provide a way for them to print. Increasingly, we are finding that people don't have their own printers at home and yet there are still many tickets, forms etc that need to be printed.

Looking ahead

We are working on our business growth plan and looking ahead to the next ten years. The public consultation will give us a real insight into how York's population use and value their libraries.

We are also continuing to work with Optimo (the four library mutuals) to explore ways of working together beyond delivering Masterclasses for the DDCMS. We see much potential in partnership.

Annex 1 16/17 booklet

Annex 2 List of archives accessioned