

Explore Performance Report: May – September 2014

On 1 May, the Council's libraries and archives were transferred to Explore York Libraries and Archives Mutual Ltd. Schedule 2 of the Contract for Services sets out what is to be delivered (See Annex 1).

The first six months have been very busy, creating a new organisation, delivering the library service as well as managing the major HLF Archive project - Gateway to History. We are finding our feet and looking to the future. It has been a challenging road and our skills have developed and improved in different areas. Explore staff have embraced the challenges and remain committed to this model of provision, they are an amazing group of people and they deserve every credit for the commitment and support they offer.

Delivering on our vision to enable people to live fuller, more connected and engaged lives, is very exciting. The vision and values inform our decisions and strategy:

- We will be Enterprising – innovating and striving for excellence
- We will be Community focused – working in partnership to deliver high quality services
- We will be Fair – free and open to all, impartial in all that we do
- We will be individually and collectively Accountable for the stewardship of our collections and on the delivery of our commitments
- We will learn – building reflective practice into everything we do to continuously develop and improve

From the first we have aimed to be transparent and are putting all key documents and statistics on our website. We will be developing this over the next six months. We sent an Explore leaflet to all houses with photos of all staff with email addresses. We want people to easily be able to find the right person to talk to.

Highlights

- Completion of the capital element of the Gateway to History project
- Summer Reading Challenge. This year was The Mythical Maze and 3377 children took part. That is 1 in 5 of all children in York in that age group.

- Big City Read, returning after a year off. Tom Harper's *The Orpheus Descent* proved a very popular choice. Tom lives in York and it was good to support a local author. We had a Flashread, our first Skype author event with Madeline Miller from Boston USA and an extreme reading challenge photographic competition
- A series of Mint Yard Lectures have been touring the libraries during York's closure
- Community Archive work. Sarah Tester joined us as community archivist working within the Gateway to History project. She has met with 43 community groups and delivered a number of projects, for example with York's Normandy veterans
- 3,702 people helped to get online
- 50 residents of Askham Grange Prison attended an evening with Tom Harper at the prison, giving them a chance to talk directly with an author
- Developing a project to support adult digital learning with Be Independent, the other CYC "spin out".
- We have agreed a partnership with the RVS to improve our home library service and our delivery to older people more generally
- We are working with CYC to establish community hubs around libraries and to develop a model for explore wellbeing
- Rowntree Park Reading Café has been very successful through the summer. Our new manager has made a great difference to all aspects and we are very excited about how we replicate that success in York Explore Reading Café

"Rowntree Park Reading Cafe keeps going from strength to strength! Each day we are seeing lots of new faces and of course our regular ones. During the summer holidays the extended opening hours went down a treat, with people loving the longer cafe and library service. The Reading Café is a vibrant hub for local families, ensuring the young people of York understand the values of a library service. New and exciting events are being held at the cafe to attract local people, and also visitors to the area. I expect the cafe to get even busier, as its reputation for excellence spreads throughout the City of York."

Jason Bailey Explore Café Manager

National Excellence

In August I was invited to Number Ten Downing Street to a reception hosted by Francis Maude. This was a celebration of the first hundred mutuals. As the 100th public service mutual, Explore and CYC have been nationally recognised as innovators in the reform of public service delivery. We have

spoken to many other authorities about what we have done and are helping some to go down the same path. This sharing of our learning is a part of the Cabinet Office support programme.

We continue to work with the Cabinet Office to promote what we are doing and we are being recognised as good practice. The Chief Executive has delivered a number of presentations and discussions at the Cabinet Office's Commissioning Academy.

Partnership with CYC

We are continuing a strong partnership with CYC, from developing community hubs to working with Customer Services on how to provide access in communities and how to get people online. We have also facilitated access to several consultations for CYC including: the Local Plan consultations; Lendal Bridge Consultation; NYCC Minerals and Waste Plan, and the Local Flood Risk Strategy.

The partnership with CYC is important to us and we value the support offered in this our first year.

Performance

The contract is measured by a series of performance indicators (see Annex 3). The targets have been set for year three and year five to facilitate a longer term plan than one year.

York Explore closure has had a significant impact on numbers, as would be expected. We added opening hours to other libraries, but that would never completely cover the loss. Attempting to factor out York's closure, it appears that issues are down by about 4% on last year. This is expected as that has been the trend for a few years. We have formed a reading development group that is charged with looking hard at the statistics across all book types and categories. Following on from this work, the group will make recommendations to improve the issue figures. We are able to do this because recent IT upgrades are allowing us to interrogate our data in more depth than before.

Bucking the downward trend however, are ebooks and audio downloads. Following a promotion, issues here have risen from 800 a month to around 1300 a month – a 62% increase. Problems remain in the number of titles we are able to offer readers (due to publisher concerns over loss of income), but excellent selection and monitoring have made a huge difference.

Visits have also been affected by the closure and so although they look down, individual libraries are reporting increased numbers. Once Explore York reopens, it will be possible to get a clearer picture overall.

Similarly with Yorkcard sales, Explore York sells most of these. Once we reopen, we expect a rush on them as people prepare for Resident's Festival.

Governance

Working within a different governance structure has been exciting and challenging. Staff have much more input to decision making and planning strategy. We have all developed additional skills and we are enjoying the opportunity to make a difference.

Board

This is set up and running with just the CYC nomination to be identified. We have a good mix of skills and knowledge on the Board. Our Chair is James Henderson. All Board Members have been going through an induction process to get them up to speed with the complete range of services that we offer. The Staff Director, Vicky Pierce, (who was voted for all staff) is providing the frontline view and will be chairing our Reading Advisory Panel.

“These first few months as Explore have been an exciting and challenging time for us all - with a steep learning curve! However, the enthusiasm, flexibility and motivation of all our staff is constant and reflects our commitment to our core purpose. Everybody cares hugely about what they do and why they do it. Having the opportunity to be the staff director while also working on the frontline, I think, reflects just how much we have transformed as an organisation. I think it is crucial that we have that connection between the board and the frontline and that ground level engagement with the decision making process going forward. I think we have come a long way in six months and I feel positive about the progress we will make in the next six.”
Vicky Pierce

Advisory Panels

There will be a number of Advisory Panels set up to look at specific issues or projects. These will be chaired by a Board Member with a selection of partners, Community Members and expertise from our specialists. The Archives one has had its first meeting (see below for more details). The Children and Young People's one is in the first stages of set up. There is a staff Advisory Panel as well that is looking at how we recognise and celebrate excellence in our staff.

Friends Groups

We have been working with local residents in Dunnington to pilot a Friends Group, focussed on fundraising. Once the pilot is complete, we will look to set them up for every library.

Community Members recruitment

We are now able to begin recruiting for Community Members. Everyone over the age of 16 is eligible to join. Membership comes with voting rights and the right to stand for election to the Board. Community Members will make up two thirds of the ownership of the organisation (with staff the other one third). We are very keen to ensure that children and young people are also included in the governance and the Advisory Panel will be tasked with making recommendations as to the best way of doing this.

The Cultural Life of the City

Explore took on Dave Fleming as Inclusive Arts and Media Coordinator. Libraries and archives are a key contributor to the cultural life of the city and we want to discover how we can make that better known through improved partnership working and more grant funding

The development process includes:

- Identifying local to international funding, investment and income generation opportunities (e.g. Tang Hall Big Local, EU Creative Europe funding)
- Consulting and speaking to current and potential partner organisations from local cross sector grass roots community groups, artists, residents, arts/cultural organisations
- Building upon and enhancing successful projects, programmes, initiatives and collaborations e.g. CYC Inclusive Arts programme, EY's digital inclusion offer to large scale media arts, Big City Read, author events, York's vibrant literary and arts scene
- Ensuring Explore is at the core of the city's cultural offer and it's initiatives such as UNESCO Media Arts, York TV, York@Large, Red Letter Nights
- Being at the forefront of creative innovation for the benefit of the cultural life of communities and promoting active citizenship through creative participation e.g. developing community cinema network, community radio, makerspaces, hackspaces, coding
- How arts, media & cultural contribute to and enhance the delivery of Explore's core services, aims & objectives and the library universal offers e.g. the role of community/participatory arts within Health & Well Being

To support the programme Explore are planning a £100k+ Arts Council England (ACE) bid to its Libraries Fund by March 2015. We are also looking to work closely with ACE on a local to national level to ensure libraries are at the core of ACE's 10 year vision for arts & culture.

Toy Library

We have taken on the delivery and management of the toy library. It will be live from February 2015. Our Children's Librarian has worked with The Avenues Children's Centre to review what there was and remove them to storage in Explore York. The toys are being catalogued and will appear on the library catalogue. So people will be able to request and borrow them.

What the new Toy Library Service will look like and how it will work:

- Parents will go on line at home (or in a community venue that has access to the internet) and be able to view details of the toys and see which ones they want to borrow.
- They will then choose a toy and the library from which they want to collect it
- The toys will be issued from the Central Storage point and delivered to the nearest library (using the existing driver & transport system that the service has in place)
- Parents will then go into their nearest library to collect the Toy and the Library service will log the borrowing and returning, via their existing systems.

This will enable city wide, equal access for parents across York. We are really pleased to be managing this service as otherwise it would have been stopped. Children will be able to take home books and toys from their local library.

Community Hubs

Explore is fully engaged in enabling community hubs to develop across the city. We are working closely with the council to identify opportunities and take the lead in supporting other venues through our buildings.

To further this work, Explore has been clarifying its different levels of service. We are being asked more and more for services in different places. The success of the Reading Café has fuelled requests for similar services locally. For instance, the consultation from the JRF Loneliness Project in Carr clearly asked for a library in the area. The local community are developing a hub at Lidgett Grove and asked Explore if we could provide that service there. We have considered how we would do this with no additional resources. This fed into other thinking about how we can deliver the elements of our services in different ways. In response to this we are developing the concept of Explore Neighbourhood. Neighbourhoods will all be different depending on the building and project. Ideally they will be on the ground floor and completely accessible. They would be run by volunteers supported by library staff and

act as satellites to Explore Centres. This relationship will be developed as we plan the services. The Lidgett Grove neighbourhood would be run from Acomb Explore and staff from there will support the delivery with specialists coming in for specific activities. We envisage these spaces being planned with local communities but they would have a base of the functions above and the following:

- Popular fiction and non fiction books
- Children's and young adults books
- Mixture of traditional shelving and modern bookshop style display
- Comfortable seats
- Public access to the internet via WiFi and pcs and tablets. The number of these will vary depending on need and space – power sockets for people to recharge their devices and data and power sockets for pcs.
- Self issue terminal with drop box and trolley - this needs 1 data socket and 1 power socket
- Local history specialists and outreach will work with communities to interpret the history of the area and York and introduce people to family history
- Specialist drop ins will provide a range of library services e.g digital inclusion, reference, learning and skills, employability, digital media

They are very much not a library as such, rather a space that offers a range of library services at different times with different specialists supported by volunteers. Self issue terminals enable us to offer this flexibility. The first step is to ensure the superfast broadband access. This is helping communities to become more digitally literate and we work with CYC ICT department to deliver this. Neighbourhoods will always be in addition to our existing library network. We want to monitor how this different way of delivering services works as a way of responding to community need.

So, our network consists of:

Flagship Explore Centre - City Library Learning Centre as a flagship offering a wide range of services.

Explore Centres - Four smaller Library Learning Centres situated across the City

Explore Reading Cafes – these can be separate or part of a centre or gateway

Explore Gateways - Library provision staffed with trained staff at community level will be offered in a variety of venues in partnership with local people.

Explore Neighbourhood – new provision in response to community demand centred around book lending with specialist surgeries

York Explore has been closed since 1 June and this has had a big impact on everything. We are looking forward to its reopening on 5 January 2015. Explore has continued to deliver an excellent service from all service points. However, York Explore's closure has had a big impact. It has been closed for an additional four months above what was anticipated when the business plan for Explore was written. It has been a strange beginning as a new organisation with our main building closed. We now have access to the upstairs and so can begin to bring the Archives back from their storage.

Other libraries' opening hours have been extended during the closure. The Reading Cafe at Sycamore House has become very popular with people as a city centre library. It was largely unknown before, but now has a big following. The story times there are very popular. Library staff have been on hand to help people.

Asset development

We are placing communities at the heart of a number of projects looking at our buildings:

- In New Earswick we are working with Joseph Rowntree to look at moving the public library into the Folk Hall. This opportunity arose from the redevelopment of Red Lodge and the Folk Hall. JRHT are building a community for all ages and it is right that a public library is at the heart of that. The current public library is one of our poorest performers. We would also be able to offer a local history service, celebrating the rich history of the village. If successful this would happen in 2015/16.
- We are planning a thoroughly modern and different service in the community stadium to reach non traditional library users. This offers us a real opportunity to take our services out into a different community. We will be working with local sports organisations to help them preserve their archives.
- Explore is also involved in the project looking at the possibilities for the future of the Burnholme School site.

Health and social care

Our work in this area mirrors the Universal Health Offer developed by the Society of Chief Librarians. This ties the work to an agreed national standard.

Explore is working in partnership with City of York Council to design Explore Wellbeing, a discrete collection of health information, wellbeing opportunities and a wellbeing sign posting service staffed and supported by information

and health professionals that seeks to connect communities and individuals to relevant information and activities at crucial life stages within a confidential and non-clinical space. This will be piloted at York Explore initially.

Outcomes

- A continually improving information and signposting service that encompasses information, health, and wellbeing professionals
- Improved health and wellbeing in York's communities
- Customers are able to access specialist advice and support through the library
- More digitally literate population and greater independence for customers accessing information on health and wellbeing
- York's communities are able to make informed health and wellbeing decisions, accessing information to facilitate this locally
- Customers are informed about opportunities and new initiatives in relation to health and wellbeing
- Reduce and divert call handling by CYC

Books on Prescription

The Books on Prescription scheme is a social prescribing model for mental health and wellbeing, whereby healthcare professionals refer patients to self-help literature as part of their cognitive behavioural therapy treatment. The Books on Prescription scheme is currently run from 8 of our libraries. Indicative expansion:

The second iteration of Books on Prescription will be a new collection focussing on early stage dementia. One complete set of this collection has been purchased for York Explore.

Digital Inclusion

Our overall aim is to reach the "hidden" digitally excluded people of York. We work in partnership with CYC ICT team to provide the infrastructure and the York Community Learning Partnership to put on events such as Get Online Week. We are involved in the Universal Credit team, preparing people for the change. We also work with CYC Customer Services to help residents get online and use the council's website.

All libraries are UK Online Centres, Explore provides free access to computers, Wifi, the internet and digital support. We get people online for free and support their online journey. Our tablets and e-readers taster sessions provide a method of trying a wide selection of technology before buying devices. In a society where the "hard sell" is unavoidable when

purchasing digital equipment, including the purchase of internet security, we feel that it is our job to support computer beginners not only in the basics of using the technology but also in staying safe and secure right from purchase onwards.

As well as offering regular digital taster sessions we are, just now, piloting a tablet loan scheme in which learners who have enrolled on the Explore Digital Care course may take home a Tesco Hudl for one week to practice their new skills and demonstrate what they have learned to those for whom they care.

We are working with JRF and York Carers Centre on a project that is hosting weekly clinics at the Folk Hall in New Earswick. Our digital experts will be on hand to talk to the elderly and carers about their digital needs and demonstrate technology. It is our intention over the coming months to create a reliable 'Explore Experts' service in our centres, not unlike the model used by Apple in their stores, to help people with all digital queries and resolve issues with technology and online resources. We have already constructed a team of Digital Champions across our service who are beginning to deliver this support.

The team are running a wide range of events focusing on different elements of being online. For instance, banking, library catalogue, shopping, local history. We are being asked for more one to one tablet sessions to help people make the most of their device. We can go to wherever people need us to be and are a key providers of helping people to get online in York.

Archives and Local History

Explore is committed to the delivery of the £1.8m York: Gateway to History project, funded with a £1.6m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and £200,000 support from City of York Council. This project brings together York's internationally important City Archives and Local History Library for the first time in a state-of-the-art facility at York Explore in the heart of the city. During the last 6 months, Explore's City Archivist Victoria Hoyle and Project Manager David Burton have overseen the completion of the capital element of the project, including:

- The **construction of a conservation Archive store at York Explore**, extending the Grade II listed building and completing architect Walter Brierley's original vision (see attached visualisation and photographs). The new store will house 2/3 of the city's archives in secure climate-controlled conditions which meet the latest European standards for preservation. This will enable us to achieve Archives Accreditation, will ensure the long-term conservation of collections and maintain our status as a National Archives Approved repository for deposit of Public Records.

- The refurbishment of the first floor of York Explore to create **a suite of public spaces for hands-on access to archives and local history**. The new Archives Reading Room, Local History Library and Family History room will enable people of all ages, abilities and interests to engage with their pasts in all sorts of ways. The spaces are equipped with the latest digital technologies to remove barriers to exploring the collections. They are all flexible and can be configured for private work, group study, formal and informal learning, volunteering and public events.

The new Archives and Local History Library will open along with the rest of York Explore on 5th January 2015. Scrutiny members will be invited to preview the facilities and explore the archives in December.

Explore has also been working to ensure that the new Archives service is as inclusive and engaging as possible. We have established **an Archives Advisory Group of representatives from local groups and equalities organisations** who are working with our Public Services Manager Laura Yeoman to ensure we remain customer focused and accessible to all. The group met for the first time on 13th October, and will meet bi-monthly throughout 2014/15. Our front-line staff have participated in weekly specialist training sessions since June and visited flagship services such as Hull History Centre.

Explore is investing in the promotion of the Archives with communities and with local partners to increase their reach and profile. We have:

- **Created the first online catalogue to the Archive**, which will be launched on 5th January. Our Archive Assistants Francesca Taylor and Georgie Myler have catalogued 70 community collections in just 3 months, including the records of the York branch of the British Legion, the First World War VAD hospital, the York Mystery Plays and papers of the Royal Observer Corps. Our Archivist for Civic and Public Records Justine Winstanley-Brown has also extended the catalogue of the civic archive by 525 entries. When launched in January this online catalogue will mean that people from around the world will be able to discover original documents at the click of a button.
- **Extended the online catalogue of the Local History library** to include over 5000 titles. This is an increase of 400% on 2013/14, and the number continues to grow as a team of volunteers converts our outdated card catalogue index.
- **Worked with community groups to develop their own Archives and archive projects**. Since May 2014 our HLF funded Community and Outreach Archivist Sarah Tester has met with representatives of 30 organisations throughout the city, from Parish Councils to local

charities, to talk about how Explore can support them. She has helped Wigginton Parish Council to create its own Archive store; partnered with Poppleton History Society to provide access to their collections at Poppleton Library and worked with the Normandy Veterans' Association on a project to collect oral histories and preserve personal papers. In 2015 Sarah will be taking the Archives out on a 'roadshow' around the city, appearing at local fairs, festivals and events, as well as running archiving workshops throughout the year.

Explore has continued to service the information needs of City of York Council, and to support democratic accountability through Freedom of Information. Since May 2014 our Archivist for Civic and Public Records Justine Winstanley-Brown has responded to 32 enquiries from Council officers from Legal, Property and Democratic Services. She has also supported officers to respond to three Freedom of Information requests. In addition she has facilitated two research visits from the Police serious crime unit and two from the Coroner's Officer.

Investing in Volunteers

Explore's work is supported by a team of 143 volunteers delivering 5845 hours since April. We have a range of volunteer roles from shelving to storytimes to helping people get online. We will be recruiting more volunteers to support the archive and local history service at York Explore in the new year.

We've been working hard over the past 6 months, updating our processes, creating new roles and working with our volunteers and staff to improve how we work with volunteers throughout Explore. We are now confident that we are in a position to arrange for our assessment in order to obtain the Investors in Volunteers accreditation.

Investing in Customers

We have been working to prepare for the Customer Service Excellence standard. This has involved completely reviewing and improving our already good customer service procedures and policies. We have created Customer First, which is our own standard, covering how libraries should look, staff behaviours and engaging with customers.

Fiona Williams
Chief Executive

Abbreviations

HLF – Heritage Lottery Fund

CYC – City of York Council

NYCC – North Yorkshire County Council

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

ACE – Arts Council England

JRF – Joseph Rowntree Foundation

ICT - Information and communications technology

JRHT - Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust