

explore

Scrutiny Report – May 2016

As we enter the third year of independence, we have had a lot of good news. This is as a result of a lot of hard work and staff feel very pleased and encouraged that their work has been rewarded. It feels as if we are at a real turning point and the year ahead will see much progress in our aim to be a strong and sustainable organisation. We are writing a five year plan which will be underpinned by an 18 month business plan. The world of social enterprise is a fascinating one and is filled with opportunities for us. We continue to develop new skills and take on new challenges.

Highlights

- We have recently heard from HMRC that we have charitable status. This opens up the world of philanthropy to us.
- Our bid to the Arts Council has been successful. This will give us £97,000 over three years to develop York Explore as a cultural hub in the city centre
- Work underway to develop Explore as a strong and sustainable organisation
- Executive Assistant Dionne Saville has started

Archives Advisory Group

The Gateway to History project is complete and leaves an exciting legacy for York's archives. We are now working on ensuring that the legacy continues. A new advisory group under the Chair of Director John Carlill has been set up to focus on raising funding for the archives. There will be a wide representation on the group from all of York's communities.

Learning and Development Strategy

We are working with CYC's Workforce Development Unit to deliver a two year plan to develop our staff. This is a very valuable partnership for us

and is already producing great results. It is very interesting to be able to measure the difference to staff of working in a mutual.

Philanthropy

Charitable status recognition means that we can progress our plans to raise money through donations. We aim to start with a range of small offers, building to a more focused fundraising strategy over the next 3 years.

Arts Council Project

We have won a bid for £100k to deliver a 3 year programme to:

- Remove barriers and widen participation
- Develop Explore's role as a cultural provider in communities
- Enhance communities' experience of both the arts and libraries
- Support, enhance and enrich libraries' core work
- Unlock creative potential, celebrate the creative diversity of communities
- Develop York Explore as a cultural hub in the heart of the city
- Develop lasting relationships with artists and communities
- Develop new audiences and increase our footfall

We are very excited and keen to get going. First steps are to commission an audience development plan. This is a new thing for libraries and will help us to understand who our potential audiences are, where they are and how to reach them. We will move into commissioning artists to deliver installations and programmes around digital arts. There will be some hacker/maker days encouraging the use of technology such as 3D printers.

Behind all the activity will be a learning and development plan for our staff and volunteers.

Partnerships

We are working a lot with different parts of the council. We sit on the Digital Services Project Board as a key delivery partner. We are ideally and uniquely placed to support people getting online. Increasingly we are seeing a real growth in the need for assisted digital services. This is spending time helping people to complete forms etc online. With the government and council channel shifting to digital by default there is a

real need for this extra help for people who are not online or who need a bit of help. Our staff are trained to help people through the online world and so we can be a real help to the council in persuading people to channel shift.

We also sit on the Building Stronger Communities Board. This complements our work in communities and ensures that we work with the council to provide services for local people.

Public Health

We are in discussion with Public Health and are planning much joint working as the strategy is developed in that area.

Performance

Active borrowers (borrowing at least one book in a financial year) are up at 21% of York's population. So 1 in 5 of York's people have borrowed a book in the last year, which is a significant number and shows the impact we make in just one area. We joined about 14,000 new library members last year and renewed 22,976 paid Yorkcards. 1,086 were renewed free for adults on means tested benefits.

Our visits have fallen by 4.4% over a two year period 13/14 to 15/16 (last year York was shut for refurbishment so that doesn't make a good comparison). Nationally there was a 3.9% fall in library visits in the single year 13/14 to 14/15. National figures for 15/16 are not yet available, but we can assume from the news that a similar decline will have occurred 14/15 to 15/16. Logically, this would mean that the national decline in the two year periods 13/14 to 15/16 would be around 7 – 8%. So our 4.4% decline is better than the national trend. We have instigated a more rigorous system of monitoring and intervention to improve these figures. There is an improvement in the smaller libraries which is encouraging.

We have worked out targets in a different way for the year ahead, reflecting the fact that larger libraries have more opportunities to improve figures as they open longer and have more staff. So, large libraries have a 25% increase through 10% to small ones at 2%.

Asset Projects

Burnholme

We continue to work closely with the council on this exciting project. Our aim is to have a bigger Explore Centre there to replace Tang Hall Library. With Acomb Explore in the west and this in the east, our provision will be much more balanced.

We are meeting with local groups to begin discussions on what the centre will deliver and begin to build new partnerships.

New Earswick

We are working with Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust and the Primary School on the provision of our services in New Earswick. We are working to strengthen the partnership and put on Explore activities in the Folk Hall e.g storytimes, local history, digital inclusion, as well as developing services at the school.

Huntington

We are back in talks with the My Health surgery next door to the library. This project stalled for a while but is now back on track.

Home Library Service

The Home Library Service was re launched last September in partnership with The Royal Voluntary Service (RVS). We pay them to employ a part time person to work in this area, managing and recruiting volunteers and promoting the service. As a statutory service we have to reach everyone in York and so if people are housebound we take books to them at home. We also visit residential homes and nursing homes to reach their residents. Our volunteers are being trained to deliver help to people getting online and supporting their use of online services. The numbers reached are growing and our range of services offered is wider than simply books. We have a major role to play in ensuring that housebound people are not left behind in the digital world.

Children and Young People

The Bloodaxe Challenge culminated in the February half term with children completing the challenge invited to meet author David MacPhail. Children had been challenged to read 4 books between

October and January with a “History” theme. We run this jointly with Jorvik Viking Centre as part of the Viking Festival’s education strand.

As part of LGBT History Month we hosted a talk for teachers, parents, and youth workers on Helping Young people who are LGBT to cope with bullying. We only had a small audience of 12 but those who came found it really helpful. Some library staff were judges on the panel of the recent York LGBT Writing Competition, which was a very successful endeavour. We plan to be involved next year in this really exciting project.

We also hosted the North Yorkshire round of Poetry by Heart, a national competition for young people aged 14 – 16 to recite poetry. It was a wonderful afternoon with some very talented young people. We wish our winner well as they progress to the final.

We will be recruiting young volunteers as part of the Reading Agency’s Reading Hack scheme. As well as offering a general role and Duke of Edinburgh opportunities, we have started to trial The Booksorter club, run by young volunteers. This challenges children to read a book from each genre on the Reading Agency’s Booksorter on the Summer Reading Challenge web site. For each book they read they get a sticker and a certificate for reading all 12.

We launched Shelf Help, a books on prescription scheme to provide reading on mental health issues for young people, aged 13 – 18 on 19th April. We have collections in the 8 libraries nearest to our secondary schools. Information has gone out to pastoral leads in the area and other youth providers. Shelf Help is a national offer provided by The Reading Agency.

We have added new toys to the Toy Library and use continues to grow. We held a launch in February for the new toys that attracted about 40 children, many new users to come and see what the toy library is all about.

We continue to deliver the Bookstart scheme to the children of York on behalf of Book trust. This sees us deliver an envelope containing a free book and reading information to all children at 12 months, 3 years and 5 years.

We are trialling Bear’s Reading Adventure for Bookstart. This involves giving a story/sticker book to under 5s. They then receive a sticker for

their book over a number of visits to the library for such activities as borrowing books and attending story times.

Our Arts Council funded under 5s sessions “Jump Inside a Story” are doing well at York Explore. The sessions are facilitated by Mud Pie Arts and this is the second year of a three year programme. Each session is based on a well known book or story and children take part in activities linked to this. Year 1 was run at Acomb Explore, Year 2 is at York Explore and Year 3 will start in September 2016 and will take place at Tang Hall Explore. The aim is to give fresh ideas for delivering under 5 sessions to staff and leave them able to use those new techniques when the scheme moves on. Acomb currently use these techniques monthly. Each school holiday Mud Pie Arts also run an activity for a slightly older audience. In February we had the story Of The fish in the Forest which 22 children attended and Easter holidays saw 4 sessions of The Great Roald Dahl Hunt, with 5 actors leading the children round the library hunting for characters that had escaped from Roald Dahl’s books.

Contacts with The Festival of Ideas team at The University of York has lead to some extra activities in June including:

- Zombies in York which will see University of York scientists dissect a captured zombie and study the infectious agent causing the outbreak. Children will be asked to help save the day as they examine the zombie’s blood, play with its brains and more, in an interactive, hands-on workshop, aimed at children aged 8-12 (but fun for adults too!)
- On a more serious note we are also hosting Fulford School students to lead an EU referendum, with local MPs as speakers.

We continue to be part of the Children’s University scheme, where children get stickers from the Children’s University for attending our activities, encouraging children to take part in a wide range of cultural activities.

Work on this year’s Summer Reading Challenge – The Big Friendly Read is going well. This ties in to the celebrations of Roald Dahl’s 100th birthday.

- We will be involving 4,250 children in reading 6 books over the summer.
- We are involving schools as usual and launching with York Flash Read on Friday 15th July at 11 am. We would love as many people

as possible to all take part by tweeting themselves reading at 11 am. This can be a preset tweet if necessary. As part of this we are trying a Thunderclap where we get 100 people to agree to tweet. If we succeed Twitter will then send our tweet out widely so that we should get some really good publicity. Please use #yorkflashread when you tweet.

- We are also organising lots of activities tied into Dahl themes of Mischief, Invention and Friendship.
- We will be working with 2 schools in hard to reach areas to see how doing the Reading Challenge affects children's reading over the summer, both in attitudes and reading level.

We are also working with the Theatre Royal, Museum's Trust and York Minster to deliver Arts Award Discover. This is the third year we have done this and our extra aim this year is to get hard to reach children to complete. We will be working with Westfield School in Acomb on this.

Digital Skills and Engagement

Spring Online 2016 - This May, Explore will be hosting three special events to help people get the most out of being online. Our experts will help you discover the world of cloud storage – the safest and most convenient way of saving all those important and treasured documents and photographs. We'll also show you everything you need to know about ordering groceries online and getting your shopping delivered to your door with just a few clicks. As well as these hands-on workshops, we'll also be hosting a Digital Day at York Explore during which our team will demonstrate online resources and digital technology as well as answering any questions you might have about computers and the internet.

Discover Cloud Storage A hands-on introduction to using virtual storage services such as Dropbox, Google Drive and iCloud. Tang Hall Explore, Tues 10 May, 10am – 11am

Discover Online Grocery Shopping A practical introduction to safely and securely ordering your shopping deliveries online.
Acomb Explore

York Explore Digital Day Drop in for free tasters, demonstrations and advice about a range of online resources and digital technologies.

TALKTALK Partnership We are working with TalkTalk in Clifton, Huntington and New Earswick via drop-in sessions and workshops to help people understand the internet and digital technology and assist them with getting connected in their homes.

Social Care Innovation We are supporting families with disabled children as part of the SCI project at CYC. I am meeting with families to help them get to grips with CYC's disability services online, specifically the Short Breaks initiative via York FIS and CYC.

Coding From June 18, we'll be hosting weekly Code Clubs at all Explore Centres for children between 9 – 11 years of age in partnership with Code Club UK. Sessions will be jointly run by Explore staff and volunteers. We will be one of the first library services in the country to offer this initiative.

What is Coding ? In addition to Code Clubs for kids, we're also running monthly introductory workshops to coding for parents and grandparents at York Explore.

Windows 10 Our charged introductory workshops to Windows 10 are fully booked until July and working very well.

Tinder Foundation/UK Online Funding We have secured £5,000 as part of Tinder Foundation's Future Digital Inclusion network for 2016/17 after exceeding targets for the last year.

Ancestry Sessions We are about to launch free Ancestry beginner intros at Dunnington, led by volunteers, and £15 intermediate one-to-one sessions at YO.

Summer Reading Challenge 2016 There will be a prominent digital strand as part of this year's SRC. I will be running Minecraft sessions, competitions and other digital support throughout at a number of libraries. I'll also be attending the special events, ensuring Flash Read is a success amongst the other various things.

Big City Read We will be demonstrating World War 1 digital resources as part of BCR, with emphasis on war poetry and art.

Home Library We now have six HLS volunteers trained and providing IT support in people's homes across the city. They have also been trained to promote and support people with the e-library and library online resources. This was achieved via two one hour-long training sessions with the volunteers. More volunteers have signed up and will be trained shortly. Volunteers have been equipped with Hudls provided by Be Independent. We will be evaluating this project with questionnaires and continued work with the volunteers.

New Services

In December we launched **e-magazines**. The first few months have gone well and we had 500 e-magazine downloads in March. We're finding that this service is something non-users are particularly interested in when staff go out promoting libraries, so it's winning us a new audience.

In December we introduced **internet connectivity to the mobile library**. This means that they can manage their loans and reservations on the live system, like any other library, where previously they were alone in operating an offline service. This is a big improvement in terms of customer service. The vehicle is nearing the end of its life but the mobile internet solution will be transferable to a new vehicle.

In March we upgraded the **wifi** at all branches from 802.11n to 802.11ac which is the very latest standard, using central government funding administered by the Arts Council and in partnership with the council. Following significant teething problems at some branches (particularly Clifton and York), the performance is now fast and stable at all branches.

Looking ahead

The next six months will be an exciting time with the Summer Reading Challenge and the Big City Read happening, as well as business as usual as we open the doors to our services across the city every day. Other key projects are

- Investigating the potential of social investment
- Developing our offer at Burnholme
- Developing our philanthropy strategy
- Improving communications with our Community Members
- Recruiting more Community Members

Fiona Williams
Chief Executive