

## Notes from Community Meetings, November 2021

### Information update from Bruce Leeke, Chief Executive

#### Finance

- Suffolk Libraries has come out of the early part of the pandemic in reasonable financial shape
- Due to being eligible for Government Covid-19 grants we came out of the 2020/21 financial year with a surplus of over £600k
- This surplus will be used to cover loss of income from established 'paid for' services, like room hire and printing and copying
- These services are slowly recovering but it will take time for them to return to pre-pandemic levels
- As a result, Suffolk Libraries is forecasting a £100k deficit in 2021/22 – this deficit has been reduced significantly as the organisation is eligible for £300k worth of Covid-19 grants this year
- In the coming financial year 2022/23 we face a number of additional financial challenges outside of lost income
- Inflation is increasing and the governments' 6.3% increase in the living wage means that we need to find at least £250k extra
- As our contract with Suffolk County Council is not index linked, we will need to find this money ourselves
- In combination with the slow recovery of lost income it is likely that we will set a deficit budget of around £400k
- We can manage this for one year as a result of the surplus in 2020/21 but further work is needed to ensure we are generating more of our own income

#### Suffolk County Council Contract

- Our 10-year contract with SCC is up in July 2022
- We have been offered a variation of contract until July 2024 as a result of a pause on public sector procurement in Suffolk due to Covid-19
- This means that it is likely there will be a consultation followed by a procurement process for the next 10-year contract in 2022 and 2023
- Any new, long-term contract is likely to start in August 2024
- It would be hugely helpful if Friends Groups could engage their local county councillor and ensure that he/she is aware of all of the amazing stuff going on at their local library

#### Covid-19 Response and Recovery

- The organisation adapted well to Covid launching a number of impactful services like the Lifeline telephone service for elderly and vulnerable people which made 11,000 calls
- This was supported by other initiatives like our Laptop Loans service and the launch of a specialist perinatal service
- We have recently been running 'The Big Catch Up' campaign which is designed to encourage people to return to libraries
- The Arts Programming Team and BLOC project continue to go from strength to strength with the Stowmarket Garden project making a stunning space at the heart of Stowmarket Library

#### Volunteering update from Diane Moore, Volunteer Engagement Manager

Our volunteer awards were first held in 2019 and were designed to recognise and reward the hard work and commitment of our volunteers and community group members who devote their time and energy to supporting their local library, our staff, and the local communities.

We are hoping, in 2022 that this event will be taking place and have booked the venue for Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> June at 7pm. I am hoping that as we have been able to change the date to the summer months it will go ahead without any issues. It will be held at the same venue as last time, now called Venue 16, on Tuddenham Road in Ipswich with ample parking.

Invites will go out to everyone via their local libraries at the end of March beginning of April. Although the majority of the nominations are made from Library staff, we do also open these out to all our volunteers and community group members, so if you know of someone who you feel should receive an award then please look out for the categories and how to make a nomination which will be sent out via an email.

We regularly receive applications from people wishing to volunteer with us and are now able to reach a wider audience on a new online platform. This is through Volunteer Suffolk who have partnered with a company called BeCollective who host the new platform. Any specific roles we have in libraries can be advertised on this site. There is a link from the Suffolk Libraries site to this.

### **Community group reminders from Daniel Harvey, Head of Community and Performance**

- We have a members' website – [slmembers.co.uk](http://slmembers.co.uk) – which contains loads of useful information for library community groups. You will hopefully find the answers to lots of questions here!
- Please tell us who your trustees are – we've issued several reminders about this, but there are still about 20 groups who haven't submitted their details. This is important because it ensures that we've got the right people's details on record and are communicating with the right people. You can find the online form to submit your details on the members website.
  - For those who have already submitted their details, we've also set up an amendment form which you can use to tell us if there any changes in your trustee details – again, that's on the members website.
- Just a reminder to groups to ensure that you regularly review your constitution to make sure it's up to date and that all trustees are familiar with it. If your group has overlooked your constitution and needs help to readopt a constitution, please let us know and we can help you with that process.
- Also, another reminder that, if your group is struggling for volunteers, we have promotional postcards which we can provide you with to help attract new people to the group. If that's of interest to you, please let your library manager know so they can make the necessary arrangements with Diane and me.
- Finally, if any groups need help and support with anything, please do let Diane or I know. We're always happy to help and we can always set up a Teams meeting to talk through things if that would help or we can come and see you – just let us know.

**Bank charges.** Some groups reported that their banks have started applying bank charges to their account. There was a discussion around different banking options and there appears to be some inconsistency in the way that banks are dealing with community groups. Thanks to Liz Gleave who shared this link <https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/bank-accounts-for-community-and-voluntary-organisations/> with useful information on different banking options for charities.

### **Performance update with Daniel Harvey**

We collate and report performance data across our libraries to SCC on a quarterly basis. This isn't something that I've tended to cover at these meetings in the past, but I thought it might be of interest to

you, particularly given the impact that the pandemic has had on our performance, so I thought I'd give you a bit of an overview of some key areas

I've just put together the report on quarter two, so I'll give you some highlights from that report. Of course, all areas of performance that relate to physical library spaces were severely impacted by the covid pandemic and the lockdowns. The last quarter was the first time since the start of the pandemic that we started to see significant increases in these areas of performance

Some highlights from the report.

- So, in quarter two, there were 502,333 physical items issued from libraries – more than double that of quarter one, when there were 246,980 in quarter one). The summer reading challenge will have helped with that. That's obviously massively encouraging, but to add a bit of context, in the corresponding quarter of 2019 / 2020 – prior to the pandemic - there were 704,340 physical issues. So, the figures are really encouraging, but there's still a long way to go to get back to re-pandemic levels.
- As at the end of quarter two, there had been 46.8% more physical borrowers (38,923) than in the whole of 2019 / 2020 (26,519). Again, to give you some context, there had been 60,141 physical borrowers at the end of quarter two of 2019 / 2020
- All of our libraries have free public WiFi and in the past, this has been a popular service with people using their own devices in the library for study and work. There are five libraries not included in these figures for different reasons, but of the libraries that we are able to report on, there was a total of just 1,875 unique logins recorded – some libraries were in single figures – less than 10 people connected to the WiFi in three months! We are therefore looking at ways to increase use of our public WiFi and have started by issuing a new 'free WiFi poster to libraries to put up around their library/
- There were 18,174 public computer bookings in quarter two (compared to 8,881 in quarter one)
- We have recently added a one question multiple choice survey to our public computers when people log on, asking people what they are going to use the computer for – customers can choose as many options as are applicable, or they can skip the question if they want. Based on extrapolated results, 4,577 public computer uses related to job searching / applications / CVs, 4,427 related to homework / study and 1,709 related to universal credit applications.
- Events and activities were more fully reintroduced across the county in quarter two; 1,350 sessions attracted a total of 17,751 attendees. (In quarter one there were 358 sessions which attracted 1,350 attendees). In 2019 / 2020 Q2 there were 3,663 events and activities which attracted 55,726 attendees.
- The number of Home Library Service customers was up 87.12% in quarter two compared to quarter one (247, compared to 132). In 2019 / 2020 there was an average of 514 HLS customers per quarter.
- Volunteering in quarter two was way up, boosted by the summer reading challenge. There were 791 active volunteers in quarter two, up from 359 in quarter one. Quarter two of 2019 / 2020, 1486 volunteers contributed a total of 2007 hours of volunteering.
- There were 6,879 registrations for the Summer Reading Challenge and 3,565 finishers, which was very positive considering the challenges of the period 16 months and restrictions only lifting on 19<sup>th</sup> July.

That's just a summary of a few key areas of performance from quarter two. One other thing that we include in the quarterly report is stories or case studies that highlight how libraries have helped to make people's lives better – these are often the most powerful part of the report! I just thought I'd share one example from the quarter two report:

**Bungay Library** received a letter from a customer expressing gratitude for the lifeline calls they received last year and highlighting the positive impact that the calls had on her:

*“The first Lockdown on 23 March 2020 halted my usually fairly peaceful, if busy, life on my 79<sup>th</sup> birthday. The PM ordered everyone to 'stay at home', supermarket shelves were decimated, hospitals were put on alert, a feeling of dread was paramount (but so also was the 'Blitz Spirit') and no-one, least of all apparently the Government, knew what to do or when to do it.*

*But Bungay Library did. Almost immediately the services usually provided by its lovely, always helpful and always cheerful staff, were transferred online, and I think that by the end of April 2020, when the PM somewhat optimistically announced that we were 'past the peak of the pandemic', Amanda King and Maxine Williams had set up a weekly rota of 'Lifeline Calls' to those of us deemed to be 'vulnerable', which meant that on a designated day every week each one of us got a phone call from either Amanda or Maxine. This continued throughout the subsequent national and local Lockdowns and the four-tier system; the social distancing; the lifting of restrictions and then the re-imposing of them; the imposition of quarantine; the wearing of masks; and the steep learning curve of getting to grips with Zoom, really until the vaccination roll-out began.*

*It's hard now to remember the roller-coaster of the Covid timeline, but it's not difficult to remember how wonderful Amanda and Maxine's Lifeline Calls were. They were the highlight of my and many others' week, especially for those of us who live on our own – it was just so reassuring and validating to know that we weren't forgotten; to have a 'normal' conversation about anything and everything that wasn't Covid-related; to smile, and to weep a little sometimes; and to know that there was someone 'out there' who knew you and cared enough about you to make a weekly phone call.*

*I'm immensely grateful to Amanda and Maxine for all the help and support and encouragement they gave. It was very special.”*