

REPORT TO: Employment, Learning and Skills, and
Community Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 21st September 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community
and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Community and Sport

SUBJECT: Library Service

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Library Service.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

In the COVID-19 society, public libraries continue to be well used but must be responsive and adaptable to reconnect communities to vital resources that support wellbeing, learning, information & reading.

Heightened during this time is the need for people to be part of something, feel valued, involved, and not have to pay money. The trusted reputation of library services, working with key partners and making novel alliances, provides a valued platform for engaging and supporting communities in this new normal. Effectively communicating new initiatives to dispersed communities and teams across the Borough will play a pivotal role in successful delivery.

3.1 2019-20 summary

2019-20 was a successful year for the library service with a number of high profile innovative projects including the Get it Loud in Libraries gig in February, now nominated for a National award, and Halton's inaugural Readathon which saw 197,000 reading minutes logged by people during the week. The service also achieved positive baseline data, increasing overall visitor numbers to libraries and the number of active library members.

3.2 Lockdown activity

In line with government advice, all library buildings closed to the public and library teams on 23rd March. Library teams worked quickly to shift activity to digital platforms. Budgets were reallocated to increase

resources and support new demand. An intensive social media campaign was developed to engage audiences and highlight resources to new and existing customers.

Use of the digital newspapers and magazines platform increased by over 100%, and ebook and eaudio loans increased by 70%. There has been a 350% increase in new members during lockdown.

3.3 Recovery to Date

Following the easing of lockdown restrictions the service has renewed focus on three key values:

Connection

Halton Libraries connect communities to valued resources, offering stability and familiarity in uncertain times. Library teams, key partners & artists underpin the successful delivery of our innovative programme of work.

Creative learning

Halton Libraries offer opportunities for creative learning through imaginative application of digital platforms.

Spaces

Halton Libraries offer access to unique virtual and physical space for communities and staff

Highlights of a sample of current projects are below.

3.3.1 Connection

Home Library Service:

During lockdown library staff continued to deliver books to over 100 vulnerable and isolated residents, as well as increasing provision to include new customers shielding. The library outreach team contacted all our Home Library Service customers by phone a number of times to provide updates on the service and offer support. The Home Library Service continues to be a valuable and increasingly popular service.

Choose & Collect:

In June we introduced a contact-less pick up service for customers. The majority of library staff were now redeployed but a core team rolled out this new initiative to support the value of reading for mental health and wellbeing that has understandably been heightened during this time. Customers can request books via telephone, email or social platforms, library staff choose an appropriate selection of titles and these bundles are then collected from outside the building.

3.3.2 Creative learning

The national Summer Reading Challenge and Halton's successful programme of summer activities all moved online this year. Highlights included Mama g digital story sessions for under 4's and our partner led computer game coding workshops which had 7000 participants.

3.3.3 Spaces

Reopening library buildings started with Halton Lea Library on the 7th July. All libraries are now open with safety measures in place. There are restrictions on customer numbers, but PC access is available and staff are safely supporting customers as they adapt to the current temporary offer in the buildings.

3.4 Next phase

Engaging creatively with communities during this phase when we do not have the option to use the library buildings as the conduit is a new challenge. A current piece of work focused on overcoming this challenge is The Joy Project:

3.4.1 The Joy Project

The Joy Project is a planned season of visual arts activity in public spaces taking place across the Borough this autumn. In a COVID society, we often travel between destinations without taking a moment to look around, this project imagines what might happen if we paused just for a second and saw something that sparked joy. Small installations will be created by artists in a number of locations currently being explored.

When it is safe to do so we will be reopening library spaces as places to spend time, and for events and group activities to take place.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Library service activity supports the delivery of the Library Service Strategy.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications contained in this report. The activities undertaken have been delivered within existing business provision.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Library service strategy supports children and young people through a variety of reading activities, a class visit programme, story sessions, learning activities and a volunteer programme.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Library service strategy supports employment, learning and skills through the provision of public access computers and free Wi-Fi in all libraries, support for people getting online, support for job seekers, and access to resources for those learning new skills.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Library service strategy supports health through the provision of venues from which to deliver health and wellbeing events, Books on Prescription & Mood Boosting collections in all libraries, reminiscence work in the community using Memory Boxes, partnerships with local groups, development of the Community Library Service, and all library staff are trained as Dementia Friends.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Not Applicable

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Not Applicable

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

There are no risks associated with the report.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The report gives examples of best practice in ensuring that our Library Services are accessible to all.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act.