

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 18 SEPTEMBER 2020

Statement from: Councillor C N Worth, Executive Councillor for Culture and Emergency Services

CULTURE

Heritage Sites Reopening Performance

Lincoln Castle continues to see a strong increase in visitor numbers week on week. The site has welcomed over 80,000 visitors since opening the castle grounds in May and has also received over 10,000 paying visitors since the Medieval Wall Walk, Victorian Prison and Magna Carta reopened. Over the past few weeks, the average admissions have reached 50% of where we would usually be at this time of year. This is a good achievement when compared to the current performance of some National Museums. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for example, released figures last week evidencing how some National Museums were only reaching 8.8% of what they normally would expect for this time of year.

The Collection Museum has welcomed just under 2,000 visitors since it reopened on the 13 July, with a weekly average of between 300/400 visitors.

The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight visitor centre opened in July with reduced opening hours, limiting both the number of tours, and reducing the number of spaces available on them. Since reopening, the visitor centre has welcomed nearly 500 visitors through its advance booking system, and tours are fully booked until September. Given its reduced capacity, the average visitor figures are 10% of where we would expect them to be at this time of year.

Lincolnshire Archives also reopened in July, operating on reduced opening hours, limiting the number of visitors and operating an advanced booking system. It has welcomed over 80 visitors, and again advance bookings are near full for the next few weeks. Given its reduced capacity and limitations on visiting, their average visitor figures are roughly 15% of where they would usually be at this time of year.

Digital Activity

The Culture Service has continued to develop ways of keeping in touch with audiences during site closures, and since the reopening of initial heritage sites. This continues to provide a blended onsite and digital offer keeping culture at the forefront of people's minds. This included Lincoln Castle, The Collection and Usher Gallery, and the Digital Archaeology Festival. The festival comprised of weeklong activities hosted on Facebook and YouTube. In total there were 15 online films, which received 3,875 Facebook views and 1,126 YouTube views. The festival also caused a massive increase in the traffic through The Collection's website and its Festival webpage.

Lincolnshire Archives also took part in the national #LoveCulture week encouraging people to feel reassured and inspired to explore local attractions this summer. Visitors were encouraged to celebrate by adding old photos of great days out at our heritage sites on social media channels, tagging our heritage sites and the Enjoy Summer Safely and Throwback Thursday campaigns.

Exhibitions

The Wildlife Photography Competition which closed in July received a fantastic response, with many quality images entered. These will shortly be judged before being exhibited as our first reopening temporary exhibition at The Collection from mid-September.

Our Arts Council England NPO funded bursary project to develop "Make Kits" working with a local artist have been distributed via EDAN Lincs and to the Lincoln Food bank to help keep people creative through the summer and engage with families and younger audiences that cannot always get into our sites.

Details continue to be finalised with the Imperial War Museum's collection to showcase two touring artworks in an exhibition this December at The Usher Gallery, alongside works from our own collection, as part of 2020's commemorations of the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain.

We continued to work with partners to devise plans for recovery focusing on moving major programming content and large scale events/exhibitions to early 2021 onwards. This will include the postponed hosting of the annual 'Wildlife Photographer of The Year' exhibition for summer 2021, and a spring 2021 date for the hosting of the spectacular Gaia installation featuring detailed NASA imagery of the Earth's surface at a 6m scale.

Libraries

Core Libraries

- New online joiners: 156 in May, 135 in June and 187 in July
 - Increase in e-books: up 345% in May, 363% in June and 345% in July
 - Increase in e-audios: up 81% in May, 72% in June and 64% in July
 - Increase in e-newspapers and magazines: up 214% in May, 261% in June and 240% in July
 - Increase music streams and downloads: up 160% in May, 128% in June and 145% in July
- (% increases based on comparison of the same month in 2019 and 2020)*

From 13 July, 14 of the 15 core sites reopened for collection of pre-reserved items, PC use and deposits of existing loans. The final core site re-opened on 3 August. July alone saw 20,909 new issues, 21,329 visits and 394 hours of PC use. It is worth noting that this is only part of the month that the sites were open and they are operating on reduced hours. This is a very positive start to the libraries recovery.

The IT refresh with Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) is progressing. The new Library Management System has been installed and is now in use by customers and across all core sites. Roll out to Community Hubs will commence as these sites reopen to the public; which is anticipated to start throughout September.

All except one Community Hub have new public PCs, volunteer PCs and printers; this delay is unfortunately due to a fire at the site. All core libraries have new public PCs and printers and now travel restrictions have been removed, work is underway for GLL to replace the staff PCs at all core sites.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Fire and Rescue

The first few months of the new financial year have seen Fire and Rescue's activities significantly impacted by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. With robust contingency plans already in place, decisions to review, stop or amend daily activities were taken, with a process for continual review implemented. Local and national guidance has allowed suitable control measures to be developed and implemented to ensure that our response capabilities have continued to support our communities.

A reduction in operational calls was noticed in April and May, with our Co-Responding activities temporarily suspended due to identified issues with personal protective equipment requirements. Following a quick resolution, working alongside LIVES and EMAS, we were able to commence these activities again across the county. Incident types were also monitored closely, allowing prevention strategies to be developed to manage identified risks.

The replacement programme of our new appliances whilst impacted initially has been brought back on track as a result of the hard work of the Organisational Development and Ops Support teams. We currently have 17 new Scania appliances in use across the county, and continue to receive really positive feedback from all crews.

Following the period of consultation, final amendments have been made to our Integrated Risk Management Plan document. The document will be presented to Scrutiny in September, with final sign off by the Executive Committee in October.

The Service continues to review the way in which we deliver our core functions, recognising that we need to use new and innovative ways to provide an effective service delivery.

Fire Station Chief Officer Group (COG) Inspections

Chief Officer Group (COG) inspections are a vital part of the CFO's engagement with fire stations. They are also run alongside our station audit process for all stations. It is pleasing to see that more and more local councillors are coming to their stations and this helps our remote fire crews to feel more part of Lincolnshire County Council.

COVID has severely impacted the COG Inspections and Audits. As we recover we are looking to use new video technology to provide remote engagement opportunities but are also exploring starting informal COG visits once again whilst ensuring the safety of our staff and visitors. County Councillors will be most welcome to come along when these are established.

Fire Protection

During lockdown our fire protection teams have been completing virtual audits to ensure the highest risk properties in the county are monitored, in line with the Fire Safety Order. This has worked really well and is something that we will continue to develop.

We have now completed the relevant submissions to secure central government funding. The first grant of £60,000 is for the Building Risk Review Programme and the second grant of £91,436 is for the Protection Uplift Programme. This is a one-year funding arrangement intended to make a significant impact in driving improvement in the protection function within fire and rescue services. The grant conditions cover:

- The Building Risk Review Programme which will deliver a review of all high-rise residential buildings over 18 metres by the end of December 2021.
- The Protection Uplift Programme which supports initial improvements in local protection capability, for example training and development of our teams.

Fire Prevention

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Prevention team have continued to support the vulnerable across the county, with our advocates giving telephone advice and providing Safe and Well visit to the very vulnerable, ensuring people continue to be safe and well within their homes. We are now reviewing this approach with the aim of reaching more people in support of our Integrated Risk Management Plan.

We have also recently advertised to increase the Fire Safety Advocate Team and received over 30 applications, which is pleasing to see how many people want to join our team and help our communities.

Emergency Planning

The first quarter of this financial year has seen the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity team play a significant role in the multi-agency response to the coronavirus pandemic. This response has necessitated the co-ordination of both LCC services and LRF resources and has required a new approach to be implemented to ensure that the county could assist and support our communities during a prolonged national emergency.

There have been many new challenges to face during this time which have included the formulation of new plans which take into account remote working and social distancing, risk assessments to ensure that staff working in the County Emergency Centre (CEC) are kept safe and adapting existing policies and procedures to deliver a mixture of core teams that are physically working supplemented by remote working to support the command and control arrangements as much as possible.

During this time the CEC was six weeks from completion of its refit and upgrade but with the assistance of LCC property services, Kier and Lindum, a way was found to safely complete this work and the centre is now operational again with only a few more pieces of equipment to be installed. This has enabled the team to adapt to new ways of working including the use of Teams and Zoom to hold command and multi-agency meetings. This is something that will be further developed as this software evolves. The completion of the CEC will also provide additional meeting rooms that can be utilised by all LCC services if required when the centre is not operational and staff can safely return to work.

Blue Light Collaboration

The South Park Tri Service Station is well established now and the Fire, Police and Ambulance teams are settling in well. In addition, the Blue Light Steering Group (which includes Police, Fire, Office of PCC, Ambulance and LCC) has restructured the various working streams into a single Collaboration Delivery Group. Both groups are currently revisiting the collaboration scope to plan for future opportunities.

Fire and Rescue Inspection

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) inspections were curtailed during the Covid-19 pandemic and these are due to be resumed in spring 2021.

There will be a themed review of how fire services responded during Covid to inform learning for the sector. This is due to take place in October 2020.

People

We are pleased to confirm that our 11 new whole-time fire-fighters completed their training which had been disrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic with all new recruits joining whole-time stations. We have a good number of potential on-call recruits but course numbers continue to be limited by Covid-19 precautions and we are investigating how the training may be delivered differently in order to allow us to maximise the number of new entrants.

Operational training continues to be high priority and we are using a variety of delivery methods e.g. digital training as well as practical where necessary to ensure that operational competence is maintained. We are also moving into Phase 3 of our Learning Management project ensuring that all learning and development activities are planned and recorded in one central location accessible by all staff remotely via the website.

We continue to be on track for roll-out of the new Scania fire engines with the final one in place on station by January 2021. Our Operational Support team are also managing projects on the Breathing Apparatus refresh, the additional flood pumps and the replacement water carrier.

Registration, Celebratory & Coroners

Following closure to the public due to the Covid-19 regulations, all offices with the exception of Bourne Registry Office are now open once again for the registration of births, taking notices of marriage/civil partnership and conducting ceremonies.

Due to the office in Bourne not being able to meet the social distancing guidelines, an alternative location for the delivery of services is being actively sought.

The birth registrations that should have been completed during the period of closure have now either been completed or are in the process of being completed. It may take some months before the entire backlog is cleared and the processes are back to normal.

Death registrations are still taking place over the telephone and will continue to be done this way for the foreseeable future. We continue to work with Hospitals, Bereavement Centres, GP surgeries, Nursing Homes and Funeral Directors to ensure that the impact on bereaved families is kept to a minimum.

Some wedding ceremonies (at registration offices and at Licensed Venues) are going ahead, subject to Government guidelines with appropriate risk assessments in place. However, many couples have chosen to postpone their ceremonies to a time when they hope that there will be fewer or no restrictions and they are able to have the ceremony they choose. Unfortunately, this has had an impact on our ability to generate income and has put pressure on our overall budget projections.

The service has managed to complete all Citizenship Ceremonies that were outstanding due to Covid-19. We have only received a minimal number of certificates for new citizens since the Home Office have started to issue them again post Covid and ceremonies for these have been arranged.

The uncertainty of the time and the changing processes have created a large increase in the public contacting the service which is proving to be a strain on our resources but the team are working hard to manage this increase in workload.

The Coroner's Service workload has remained fairly steady; no uplift has been seen due to Covid-19. Certain types of inquests have now resumed in earnest post lock down, utilising the Myle Cross centre. Jury inquests are unlikely to be able to commence until restrictions are eased further.

Daily business carried on through lockdown due to the essential nature of the service. Colleagues are continuing to work primarily from home with office visits where necessary. Workload remains high which is challenging for the teams. Despite the time of year, there are no signs that this will ease and historical trends indicate the workload will begin to increase significantly as we approach the end of summer and the beginning of autumn.