



Open Report on behalf of Andy Gutherson, Executive Director - Place

Report to:	Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date:	09 November 2021
Subject:	Community Hubs - Five-Year Update

Summary:

This report provides an update on the Community Hub Model.

Actions Required:

Members of the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee are invited to consider and comment on the information included in the report and highlight any additional priorities for consideration.

1. Background

2016 saw the introduction of a new model of service delivery for Lincolnshire Libraries. The aim and objective was to 'create an affordable Library Service, which meets Lincolnshire's needs'. This required a new way of delivering services and the creation of new partnerships with the communities.

Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) were awarded a five-year (+5 year) contract to deliver 15 core libraries across Lincolnshire. Community groups were approached to deliver the remaining former Tier 3 libraries under the banner of 'Community Hubs'.

The development of Community Hubs was driven by two council priorities. The first was the desire to give communities more control and a bigger role in delivering services. The second was ensuring services remain affordable within the council's reduced budget.

Community Hubs are community-run facilities, operated by volunteers under a grant agreement with the council. The hubs receive finance support from the council under this agreement and professional library support from GLL. The Community Hubs are independent and so have autonomy around opening hours, activities available and other potential utilisation of the site. All income received is retained by the hub, for

reinvestment into the site. They are open for a minimum of six hours per week, offering a range of services, such as book lending and internet access.

2. Current Position

There are currently 34 Community Hubs in operation, as shown below, with library provision also being provided at a Children's Centre and all three Lincolnshire Hospitals; these are managed by the staff at each location but again supported by GLL.

Ref	Name	Ref	Name
1	Alford	19	Kirton
2	Belton Lane (Children's Centre)*	20	Metheringham
3	Birchwood	21	Navenby
4	Boultham	22	Nettleham
5	Bracebridge	23	North Hykeham
6	Bracebridge Heath	24	Pinchbeck
7	Branston	25	Ruskington
8	Burgh le Marsh	26	Saxilby
9	Caistor	27	Scotter
10	Cherry Willingham	28	Spilsby (Co-op)
11	Crowland	29	Sutton Bridge
12	Deepings	30	Sutton on Sea
13	Donington	31	Swineshead
14	Ermine**	32	Waddington (Co-op)
15	Heckington	33	Wainfleet
16	Holbeach (Co-op)	34	Welton
17	Ingoldmells	35	Wragby
18	Keelby	36	Hospital Hub*

* These hubs are included in the numbers from a contractual perspective but are not operational like the other Community Hub sites; they do not receive the financial support from LCC

** This site is currently managed by GLL, due to the former tenant entering difficulties and becoming insolvent. A new provider is in discussions with LCC over negating the management of the hub from GLL.

2.1 Service Delivery Update

Since the commencement of the Community Hub model, the Hubs have gone from strength to strength. Many have established customer groups, have invested in redeveloping the sites and have increased the use of the Hubs with the implementation of additional activities such as story-times, Lego Club, craft activities.

All sites have transferred over to the GLL IT network and have had new public computers, volunteer computers and printers installed. They have also transferred to the new Library

Management System (LMS) that was included within the wider IT transfer project. Volunteers have received training on this, and they continue to receive support from GLL's Library Development Officers, offering advice on queries, providing information, weeding stock, continually training new volunteers and supporting existing volunteers.

2.2 Covid-19

The 2020/21 operational year (year 5) saw all the Community Hubs close, in line with the Core Libraries and as a result of Central Government advice in response to Covid-19.

The majority of the hubs are operated by volunteers who fall within the vulnerable category, either because of their age or underlying health conditions. This created a slight delay in hubs entering the recovery phase of re-opening. Sites were permitted by Central Government to open for click and collect from July 2020.

Due to the complications previously mentioned, it wasn't until August/September 2020 before sites came back online, where 20 commenced service delivery, offering a book deposit and collection provision. Towards the end of September, many of these sites started to move to the browsing phase of recovery, wherein customers could access the sites, browse stock and utilise the PCs available. A further 6 sites opened during October 2020. Unfortunately, they only remained open for a couple of months as another national lockdown enforced their closure from January 2021 in order to support the 'stay at home message'. The decision was taken to close them, in light of the fact many volunteers were vulnerable and would not be comfortable opening the sites due to their increased risk, and because they are a non-statutory service provider. Sites remained closed until the April. 7 more hubs re-opened during Summer 2021 and one final hub (Ermine) is still closed whilst transitioning to a new provider; it is due to open shortly.

As expected, physical issues were significantly down for sites, when compared with the previous non-covid year (2019/20); especially considering they were only open for four or five months for the whole year; on average only 6.67% stock issued from the former year. Scotter and Deepings were the highest performing sites, achieving 18% performance of the 2019/20 period. North Hykeham and Welton each managed over 1,000 issues in 4 months and Deepings issued nearly 7,000 during this time. For the majority of the groups, the issue figures for 2021/22 have been increasing month on month and some are almost back to the same number of active users they had before lockdown in March 2020.

Prior to re-opening, each site was taken on an individual basis and certain prerequisites required before re-opening was approved. This included submission of a covid risk assessment, evidence of screens in place at counters and photographic confirmation that the NHS QR code poster were on display.

Comments from customers returning to use the library were very favourable and they expressed relief that books were (are) readily available again. The feedback has been wonderful and highlights the importance of these assets to members of our communities;

- Excellent for mental wellbeing
- A haven of loveliness and good books
- Always warm and welcome
- Long live our libraries!
- Volunteers helpful and friendly
- Provides a wonderful community space
- Pleasure to visit
- Super resources for the people
- Doing a wonderful job
- A fun place for adults and kids!

A Bracebridge Heath volunteer said that when the library re-opened for Click and Collect, some of the customers were nearly in tears as they were so grateful the library was accessible again.

2.3 Current position

Since 12 April 2021 all 34 hubs have re-opened to the public, including Belton Lane Children's Centre, with all sites offering browsing.

10 hubs are operating at their pre-covid hours and the remaining 24 are currently open for fewer hours than 2019/20, however as an entity, the hubs are open for 416.5 hours per week. There is a gradual increase in opening hours which is a good indicator of volunteer/customer interest.

Due to the size of the community hub and social distancing, many of the hubs are only offering the use of one public computer. Return to using these computers has been slow with some sites having very little uptake. People are still quite reticent about being in enclosed spaces and are spending less time in the library.

Most of the hubs have been concerned about how difficult it is proving to attract customers back since they have reopened. It seems a lot of customers have found alternative sources for their books whether online or through informal swaps or generally got out of the habit of library use. However, it is very encouraging to note that customer registrations are increasing every month. This hopefully compensates for the customers who have lapsed for whatever reason.

Volunteers, on the whole, have been very keen to return to the libraries as their involvement is a really important part of their lives. The volunteers missed the friendships and camaraderie they have forged. There have, of course, been some who have not returned mostly due to health conditions either for themselves or family members or fear of being exposed to COVID. However, there has been a steady flow of new volunteers who are being trained, ready to take over the role from those who haven't returned. It is worth highlighting how well the volunteers have adapted to working within COVID secure rules as well as coping with a new computer system.

2.4 LDO role

The Library Development Officer's continue to:

- Offer support and advice regarding government guidance and Libraries Connect toolkit
- Share details of HSE sport check phone calls and site visits
- Provide Refresher training in the new IT
- Provide Refresher training in library procedures
- Deliver full training for the many, new volunteers
- Undertake ongoing stock work, including weeding old stock, re-distributing non-issuing books and talking books, stock checking and monitoring reservations
- Schedule additional visits and undertake trouble shooting

341 volunteers have been trained, through a mixture of scheduled full training for new volunteers and refresher training for those volunteers returning. During site visits, they provide coaching and support in relation to all aspects of the role. Due to COVID guidance and social distancing, multiple training sessions continue to be undertaken at each site, with each session accommodating between 2 or 3 volunteers and lasting about 2 hours, which equates to approximately 352 hours.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/a

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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