Lincolnshire
COUNTY COUNCIL
Working for a better future

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

Report to:	**Public Protection and Communities**
Date:	**19 July 2022**
Subject:	**Performance of the Library Service Contract - Six Year Review Report**

Summary:

This report is to provide an update of the contract performance information to enable the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny committee to fulfil its role in scrutinising performance of the sixth year of the out-sourced Library contract to Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL).

Actions Required:

Members of the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny committee are invited to consider and comment on the performance information included in the report and to:

(1) Consider and support the ongoing development and proposed Year 7 developments highligted in the report; and,

(2) Highlight any additional priorities for consideration.

1. Background

The decision to outsource LCCs statutory library service was taken to enable the delivery of a cost effective, high quality, library service in an on-going environment of financial constraint.

Key aims of this outsourcing:
- Increase levels of service performance
- Improved customer's experience
- Service transformation.

The Library Service contract with GLL commenced April 2016 for an initial 5-year period with an option to extend for a further 5-year period. This extension has been granted, taking the contract to 31 March 2026.

Appendix A illustrates the elements GLL have been contracted to deliver.

2. Review of Year 6

2.1 Review of Year 6

In year six of the contract (2021/22) GLL has continued to make improvements to library services, in spite of the changing landscape that the Covid-19 pandemic brought.

The year began with core and mobile libraries offering no contact Click and Collect services, with physical access to sites and browsing returning in mid-April to customers' delight. As national restrictions eased through 2021 library services transitioned through a variety of service delivery phases designed to ensure staff and customers felt comfortable and confident to deliver and make use of physical services and stock. Table 1 in Appendix A illustrates the offer available throughout the year.

Core and Mobile Libraries were visited over half a million times during the year and a total of 1,287,630 physical items of stock were issued. While use of digital resources dipped slightly from pandemic levels, usage remained strong with 381,535 digital issues and over half a million website visits. In person events and community activity made a welcome return between August and September, with teams working hard to re-engage with their local communities, tailoring activity to meet local demand and need.

Following the easing of COVID restrictions in person activities began their phased return from August 2021. The initial focus was on children's activities linked to the Summer Reading Challenge, with regular activities for children and adults, such as Story Times, Messy Mornings, Adult Crafting and IT Help sessions, restarting in September. Care was taken to provide a COVID safe environment to ensure those attending felt confident and comfortable to participate. While a reasonable proportion of customers did welcome the return of in person activities, a larger proportion were still reticent at spending time in busy indoor settings and fed back that they were not yet ready to participate. Those attending activities were though extremely happy and grateful for their return and appreciated the efforts made by staff to keep all attending safe. While a dip in participation was experienced during the winter, when the Omicron strain was prevalent, as 2022 moved into spring interest in and attendance at on site events began to grow. From their reintroduction in August 2021 to the end of March 2022 a total of 1,716 staff run on-site activities were held with 18,149 attendees.

Prior to August, staff continued to create takeaway children's activity and craft packs in lieu of half term activities. These were designed to provide children and their families with the same seasonal and reading related fun ideas and activities that would normally take place at site, but instead could be carried out at home. Following the return of on-site activity, in recognition of some families' nervousness to attend busy indoor sessions, staff

continued to provide craft packs and developed hybrid offers to meet the varying needs of their communities. This included on-site activities with the alternative of a craft pack or activities that were not tied down to a set time but could be completed at any point during opening hours, so that families could attend at a less busy times to suit their preferences. This new more flexible model of provision proved successful and often allowed many more families and children to participate than did at pre-pandemic fixed time activities and so will be continued, as fits the demand of site's local communities, in the future. A total of 5,711 children's craft and activity packs were gifted in 2021/22.

Alongside the restart of on-site activities, library staff also worked to reconnect with their local communities. It allowed staff to gauge community needs and interests to help inform what activities and/or provision the library could provide. Feelings of isolation and loneliness were a common theme and so all core libraries (excepting Bourne) launched weekly 'Connect over a Cuppa' sessions in October. These relaxed and informal sessions offered the chance to meet up and reconnect with other likeminded members of their community over a cup of tea.

By the spring of 2022 class visits by local primary schools began to once again take place and local organisations that had previously used the library also began to return in higher numbers. This work also established a number of new community links and opportunities for libraries to participate in new local initiatives. For example, Sleaford Library participated in the Town Council run Festival of Light in March 2022.

Following a successful bid to the Reading Agency, two hundred additional Summer Reading Challenge packs were provided for free to the Service. These were distributed via Food Banks/Community Larders so that children who perhaps do not get the chance to be taken to the library, got the resources and positive messages around reading. The Reading Agency also gifted the Service 500 copies of Steve Backshall's 'Shark Seas' book. Nearly 2,000 children signed up for the scheme meaning that 2021 participation was at approximately 70% of pre-pandemic performance and gave a solid foundation to build on in 2022.

Alongside the recovery of physical services, GLL undertook work investigating the social value of library services. The findings reveal that in 2021/22 core and mobile libraries generated £7,566,975 in social value for their local communities. Additional information can be found in Appendix B.

2.2 Performance Review, KPIs

In order to monitor the progression of the contract, 11 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were devised, alongside baselines for performance and monthly targets. This was completed in conjunction with GLL as per the contractual agreement.

In light of the COVID pandemic LCC suspended formal KPI monitoring in 2020/21 and 2021/22. Instead, performance data relevant to the service offer each month was submitted by GLL. The tables in Appendix C detail the variety of service offers during 2021/22 and also performance data relating to these offers.

The demand for physical stock seen during the lockdowns and restrictions of Year 5 continued in Year 6. In line with national trends, physical issues made a strong return during the year with 1,287,630 physical items issued by core and mobile libraries. Overall digital issues remained at the higher rates seen during the pandemic with a total of 381,535 issues. While the return of physical services did see a small decrease in eBook issues, as those using out of necessity returned to sites, demand for eAudio and eNewspapers and eMagazines particularly continued to grow, albeit at a smaller rate.

There is no doubt that the pandemic has brought about changes in how library stock is accessed and used and that our digital library has in essence become our 16th core library. However, the strong return of physical issues, alongside digital issues and active use of ePlatforms remaining at higher levels than pre-pandemic, seemed to indicate that the pandemic had not resulted in a simple shift from physical to digital.

To try and understand this better, work was undertaken in March 2022 looking at digital platforms against use of our physical lending platform Soprano. While extracting and comparing the relevant data across the four platforms proved extremely challenging, looking at usage between March 2021 and February 2022 we have been able to ascertain that of the active users of the 4 platforms:

- 80.28% were physical only users of lending services (i.e., physical stock)
- 11.46% were digital only users of lending services (i.e., digital stock)
- 8.26% were hybrid users of lending services (i.e., borrowed physical and digital stock)

Based on what we know about pre-pandemic digital performance, our instinct is that a significant proportion of digital only users were 'born digital', joining during the pandemic and has stayed that way, with a smaller proportion possibly converting to hybrid once we reopened.

For hybrid users our intuition tells us that a proportion of existing physical users converted to digital during the pandemic out of necessity, but once libraries reopened, they continued to use digital as fits their lifestyle, alongside returning to use physical service. Work investigating this will continue in 2022/23. This will help us understand how our customer base has perhaps changed and in turn inform how we shape future provision so that both physical and digital audiences' needs are met.

The pandemic also brought about significant changes in visit patterns through both the rise in home working and the need/desire to avoid contact with others in busy indoor public spaces. This saw users visiting less frequently, but as the issue figures show, still borrowing close to the same amount. As restrictions eased and the Service moved through recovery phases this pattern continued. Whilst visits did show signs of increasing over the late summer and early autumn, due to concerns over the Omicron strain they fell again during the winter, before again increasing from February onwards. This was evident in the monthly profiling of visits which saw a third of all visits happen in the last quarter of the contract year. Lincolnshire is not alone in this trend though and studies by Libraries

Connected on library return rates have identified this pattern nationally. They have also noted parallels with high street footfall as libraries in smaller market towns are recovering footfall at a faster rate than city centre locations, often again linked to home working and the habit developed during the pandemic of staying/shopping local.

2.2.1 IT

Since the IT infrastructure implementation, we have been able to obtain additional data on IT usage, which has shown that whilst customers, on the whole, are not staying on the public network devices for as long, there are more sessions being used. We know from customer feedback that many are getting what they need to get done in far less time, due to the speed of the new provision.

We have also been able to calculate how many hours and sessions of WiFi use there has been across all core sites, which is evidencing the increasing trend of customers utilising their own devices and their need for access to printing and secure scanning facilities. Due to the new Papercut WiFi printing system, customers can securely send their documents straight from their device to print, either while at site using WiFi or from home before their visit.

Over 39,000 hours of WiFi use was recorded in 2021/22 with over 19,000 sessions, giving an average WiFi session of just over 2 hours. However, this average time is slightly skewed by the fact that due to COVID measures, study space was not available for the first part of the year. When looking at the final months of 2021/22 average WiFi sessions were approaching 4 hours in length. This is reflected in the demand GLL have seen at sites for study space, particularly at the larger tier 1 libraries.

The new WiFi provision has also been of real benefit during the year's reduced service offers, especially during Click and Collect. It meant that staff could, from behind their screen at the entrance, help people connect on their phones/tablets and then guide them on how to join online themselves (so that staff only had to issue the card rather than take confidential information at the door), order items, find out how to use eResources or send documents for printing. During Lockdown 3 staff were also able to answer enquiries at entrances where, as PN use was suspended, staff within site could research the question and, if the individual at the entrance had a smart phone that could connect to WiFi, email them web links so they could check the information found was relevant and if so, were able to print the information or (more often) forms needed.

While students do still make up a good proportion of those using the study space and WiFi services, we are also now seeing a number of different users. These include people for whom home working has become the 'norm' due to the pandemic or those who, again due to the pandemic, have started their own small businesses and do not have the space or a suitable environment at home in which to work and prefer our offer of a calm and professional environment to that of a busy café.

Whilst many are choosing to utilise their own devices, a large proportion of PN users require extra support from staff in using the machines, navigating the internet to find the

information they require, or more often, accessing and completing the forms that are now only available online. The restrictions of the last few years have reiterated the digital inequalities in our communities and how those with no or limited IT skills and/or without access to IT facilities are now at even more of a disadvantage. The perception that everyone has a smartphone or tablet that will mean they can fully engage with the digital world, and that they can also afford the required WiFi and/or data charges, is inaccurate; there is still a need within our communities for the most basic IT support and access.

As well as responding to enquiries as they occur, staff also provide regular activities to support the gaining of digital skills and experience, such as 121 Computer Buddy sessions and support to access and work through the free courses offered by The Good Things Foundations through their Learn My Way provision.

2.3 Service Transformation/Innovation

Redeveloping the service to ensure a COVID secure environment and service was again a major focus during Year 6. As national restrictions eased through the first half of the year Core Libraries moved into a 'Recovery' phase, with services such as browsing and study space reintroduced. Site layouts, which had been amended due to social distancing measures, were returned to normal and activities were reintroduced through August and September.

The emerging digital trend around printing and WiFi use informed the successful LCC and GLL bid to the DCMA/Arts Council National Libraries Improvement Fund in 2021, securing £211k of capital investment funding. This 'Business Bubble' project will be delivered in 2022/23 and involves physical alterations at Lincoln Central and Spalding libraries to create small confidential working spaces that are available for hire by small and start-up businesses. Additionally, at Lincoln Central Library, redevelopment of the existing study booths will allow for the creation of an open plan business lounge area for working and meetings. Alongside the physical works, the Services digital offer will also be expanded to include COBRA, an online information resource for small and start-up businesses.

The project supports the Council's strategic objective of developing services and facilities offered by the library service to extend the benefits of libraries to small business, at a time when Lincolnshire is emerging from the pandemic to a new economic landscape. It also complements the Council's economic infrastructure offer to small businesses, which provides lettable office space, as the library-based Business Bubbles will take this offer to another level by offering space rentable by the day or hour.

Following the Library Management System (LMS) transfer in 2020/21 the next stage in GLL's modernising of stock and IT systems is the implementation of Collections HQ (CHQ). This is a software package that links to the LMS and provides staff with an additional tool to monitor and respond to stock demand and usage. As well as helping inform what GLL buy, it also helps understand what stock goes well where and so how to better allocate and distribute stock around the county to meet our customers' needs. Following the building and successful testing of the new CHQ system, it is being used to inform stock purchasing, particularly in relation to areas identified as under or over stocked. Late 2021

also saw all core site and mobiles working through 'dead stock' reports to ensure LMS data fed through to CHQ was up to date and accurate, ready for the set up and testing in spring 2022 of the software's circulation module. This module identifies stock levels and usage and informs local staff of what stock to move where so as to better meet demand.

With the rise in energy costs, and linking to GLL's green agenda, library managers undertook Energy Management training with the GLL Energy and Environment specialist. Alongside updates over utility monitoring and use, the session focussed on practical ways that staff could make a difference and included information and energy saving checklists for managers to share with staff, to ensure all played their part going forward.

During 2021 Lincoln Central Library was extremely fortunate to be chosen as one of only 15 libraries in the UK to take part in the national StoryTrails project, linked to the national Unboxed22 Festival. This unique immersive storytelling project, run by a team including The Reading Agency and StoryFutures Academy, will use state of the art augmented and virtual reality technology and transform the previously untold stories of local people into an immersive family friendly experience. Following the national launch of the project in October 2021 a Story Mapper and Story Maker were allocated to Lincoln Central Library and alongside the local team, worked to engage with the local community and gather and record the untold stories of local residents. The story gathering stage of the project concluded in early March ready for the process of stories being transformed into the digital experiences planned for an event weekend in late July 2022. While plans for this spectacular weekend are still evolving, they currently include a 6m curved interactive screen telling participants' stories through audio and video, VR experiences, 3D scanning and mapping of individuals linked to their favourite Lincoln locations and an AR Imp trail between the Central Library and Cathedral, linked to the story of a local female stonemason.

2.4 Community Hubs

2.4.1 Community Hub Background

The development of community hubs was driven by the desire to give communities more control and a bigger role in delivering services, whilst ensuring services remained affordable within the Council's reduced budget.

GLL provide on-going professional support in the form of Library Development Officers [LDOs], including operational management of book stock, volunteer training and development, support of volunteers as well as supporting hubs to be professional and safe places for the members of the public to utilise; ensuring that the national picture in libraries performance and innovation is reflected locally.

LCC provide the provision of computers for public use, volunteer use and access to GLL IT helpdesk. For those hubs that have chosen to remain in Council-owned premises preferable rates of a peppercorn rent for the initial years of their lease between the Community Hub and the Council were applied.

All Community Hubs have been supported financially with the allocation of £15K a one-off capital payment to assist with set-up/improvement works and an annual revenue payment of £5,167 whilst they remain operating as a Community Hub for a minimum of 6 hours per week for 50 weeks per year.

Overall, there is a commitment to support Community Hubs and during the period 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, GLL provided support to 36. Of these 36, 34 are community group run. A library provision is also provided at Belton Lane Children's Centre and all three Lincolnshire Hospitals; these are managed by the staff at each location but again supported by GLL. See Table 1 below:

Table 1: Community Hubs – for the period 01.04.21 – 31.03.22

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

 * *These 'hubs' do not receive the £5,167 annual revenue grant nor £15,000 capital grant.*
 They are classified as a hub for the purpose of the GLL support to community hubs contractual
 payment clause.

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.

As part of the contract with LCC, GLL has a small team of Library Development Officers (LDOs) whose job is to support and advise the 36 Community Hubs and the 700+ volunteers that help run these independent organisations.

In May 2018, following the closure of Learning Communities, and at LCC's request, GLL took on the running of Birchwood, Boultham and Ermine Community Hubs whist a new provider was sought. Two of the Hubs, Birchwood and Boultham were handed over to a

new provider, Ignite, in January 2019, with GLL's Library Development Officer providing detailed and extensive training and support. Ermine re-opened at the start of the month.

2.4.2 Hub Performance

Whilst Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are not measured for Community Hubs an annual review is conducted to examine sustainability and the positive impact a Community Hub has on their respective communities. There is a standard agenda to aid discussion covering risk; concerns; service to customers and best possible use of resources/finance. This decision was made to intentionally minimise the emphasis on traditional performance management in order to best enable these hubs to achieve independence and reflect community need. Due to Covid, the review did not happen in 2021/22, however regular discussions occurred with the LDOs.

Community Hubs need to be sustainable to ensure they will be there in years to come. Hubs have achieved this through a range of income sources/funding which they require to cover the costs of running activities, e.g., grants, donations, hiring out space, etc.

Community Hubs, all of which were closed throughout Lockdown 3, began their phased reopening from mid-April 2021. The reopening of Hubs was staggered over a six-month period in line with their wishes and volunteer availability. Library Development Officers (LDOs) supported groups in their planning, preparation and implementation of reopening.

3. Conclusion

Building on Year 6, GLL will continue to focus on the recovery of the service during Year 7 (April 2022 – March 2023), they will focus attention on the story trails venture and ensuring the business bubbles project is fulfilled.

We are also working in partnership with other areas, such as transport to promote and reach their target audience for the 'freedom never gets old' project this summer. This is to be achieved via drop ins at core sites, attendance at mobile stops, and sharing information with teams to pass on to customers.

4. Consultation
a) Risks and Impact Analysis

n/a

5. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Library Service – contract components
Appendix B	Social Value
Appendix C	Library Service Year 6 KPI data

6. 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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