

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

19 July 2017

**STATEMENT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER -
LIBRARY, CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

COUNTY COUNCILLOR GREG WHITE

Libraries

Summer Reading Challenge

Once again libraries throughout the County will be taking part in the highly successful Summer Reading Challenge. The Challenge which is organised nationally by the Reading Agency involves primary school aged children being challenged to read six books over the summer. In return there are fun rewards for them to claim when they have read the books.

The theme this year is Animal Agents and has been illustrated by the award winning children's author Tony Ross. The aim is to help children to keep interested and enjoying reading during the summer holidays. North Yorkshire Libraries have an excellent reputation for getting children involved in the scheme and young volunteers in helping to enrol the children and encourage them to complete. Over 10,000 children took part Countywide last year. The Challenge in libraries this year will be enhanced by the involvement, for the first time, of the new community library groups and their volunteers. Summer Reading Challenge begins in all libraries on Saturday July 15th.

Reading Well

Selected libraries across North Yorkshire will showcase a new collection of books designed to support people living with long-term conditions and their carers.

The Society of Chief Librarians and the Reading Agency, with funding from Arts Council England and the Wellcome Trust, have developed the new Reading Well scheme. The books have been chosen in collaboration with health partners, people living with long-term conditions and their carers.

The titles cover specific conditions, including diabetes, stroke and asthma, as well as common symptoms, including pain and fatigue. As with the existing Reading Well schemes, health professionals will be able to recommend titles on the list to patients. The titles will also be available for anyone to borrow for free through their library.

In North Yorkshire, the collections will be housed in the libraries at: Bentham, Filey, Harrogate, Knaresborough, Malton, Northallerton, Pickering, Richmond, Ripon, Scarborough, Selby, Sherburn, Skipton, Settle, Scalby and Whitby. All the libraries will have the new books on display and local health practitioners will be made aware of the collection. Customers can also reserve these items free of charge.

Community Libraries

Our community managed libraries continue to deliver an excellent service. Bentham and South Craven (formerly Cross Hills) are celebrating with events on 15 July.

Richmond Library re-opened on 29 May following a refurbishment – there were over 250 visitors over the two hour opening on a wet Bank Holiday Monday. The Chairman, Cllr Helen Swiers attended the re-launch of The Globe, Stokesley on 15 June. Author Philippa Gregory unveiled a plaque to commemorate the occasion.

It is also noteworthy that the first tranche of community libraries are celebrating 5 years of successful service delivery. Great Ayton celebrated on 5 June with a well-attended birthday party, Barlby hosted a Mad Hatters Tea Party on 30 June.

Archives

The Record Office held its seventh annual Archives at Dusk open evening in May. This informal evening of archive entertainment showcased unique documents from medieval times to the present relating to North Yorkshire people and their lives. Visitors were also given the opportunity to explore behind the scenes and to view historic archive film. Over 150 people enjoyed this popular event which, once again, attracted many visitors who had not visited the Record Office before.

Throughout May and June, the Record Office has held a number of study events with local groups and societies to raise awareness of the range of records held by the archive service. Study days have been held with groups researching manorial records, twentieth century family history, records of World War I and mining records. The days have been very popular and future sessions are planned.

Website

The council's website, www.northyorks.gov.uk has recently been updated, as contracts to support the website have recently come to an end. The website has been developed in-house by the council, using 'open source' technology and has used extensive customer feedback, along with statistics on how the website is used, to create the site. It is now more visual, is easier to find information, has an improved search facility and responds to the many different mobile devices that are used to visit the website. Work is currently underway to improve the content on the website, as well as provide more transactions online.

Parish portal

The council has now launched its parish portal, after an initial pilot with six of our parishes over a number of months. The portal, available online, to members of every parish, aims to speed up the process of reporting highways issues, which will also allow parish members to view comments, track progress and avoid duplication where the council is already aware of a fault. The system is designed to be easy to use, and officers are currently providing support and assistance to parishes in using the portal, and have provided step by step guides. However, as with anything new, parish clerks may need a little help getting to grips with it. I can assure Members that such help is readily available. After the first three weeks of its launch, 149 parishes had registered and 27 issues were reported online. Work is now underway to provide the data collected in both the parish and customer portals, to be reported to council members.

(This parish portal update was also provided as part of the statement of the portfolio holder for access, including highways, road and rail transport, public transport)