

CROWN STREET LIBRARY TRUSTEE BOARD

Wednesday, 19 October 2022

PRESENT – Councillor Dulston, Elizabeth Dodds and Yvonne Richardson.

APOLOGIES – Matthew Roche

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Mike Crawshaw (Head of Leisure and Cultural Services), Suzy Hill (Library Manager), Luke Swinhoe (Assistant Director Law and Governance) and Ian Thompson (Assistant Director Community Services)

1 CHAIR

IT WAS AGREED – That Councillor Dulston be appointed as Chair of the Crown Street Library Trustee Board Meeting for the remainder of the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

2 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS.

The Chair welcomed the Trustees and Officers in attendance at the third meeting of the Crown Street Library Trustee Board.

3 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS BOARD HELD ON 22 OCTOBER 2021.

IT WAS AGREED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Board held on 23 October 2021 be approved as a correct record.

4 UPDATE REPORT ON CROWN STREET LIBRARY

The Library Manager introduced the report of the Group Director of Services (previously circulated) providing an update on the Crown Street Library.

In introducing the report, the Library Manager stated that the restoration of the Crown Street Library building was currently on-going; external and internal scaffolding had been erected; work in the 1930's section of the building and the roof was well underway; plasterwork was being restored; the original bookshelves would be cleaned, treated and returned; mechanical and electrical was being undertaken; and that new floors would be laid, prior to the furniture fit-out.

Particular references were made to the new toilet facilities; the main and accessible entrances; and the space that there would be around those entrances, which would be open, welcoming and would be used to display the most popular and current books, in order to engage with new readers. All areas of the Library would be vastly improved by the restoration work; more space available on shelves for books; multi-functional events and activity spaces would be available; and that the works would maintain the character of the building.

It was reported that the building was currently closed to customers whilst the restoration

works were taking place and that during this time, customers could return books, select and order titles from the Dolphin Centre, which had been selected as a 'pop-up' library in the Town Centre whilst the Library was closed, Cockerton Library or as part of the Home Delivery Service.

Following the completion of the restoration works, it was reported that the Adult Lending Library would provide a dedicated space for Darlington's largest collection of borrowable reading materials and the previous Reference Library would become 'The Study', where the non-fiction collection would be housed, offering a purposeful and practicable space for studying, and that the reference material would be relocated to the Adults Lending area.

Particular reference was made to Cockerton Library, which had benefitted from a modest refurbishment and had re-opened in November 2021 with a new team of dedicated staff, following that refurbishment. Following the refurbishment the activities taking place in the Library had increased and it was pleasing to note that borrowing figures were now higher than pre-pandemic numbers and that positive feedback was being received from customers on the refurbished facilities.

References were also made to the performance of the Crown Street Library which had seen Library loans increase by 55 percent from 108,030 in 2020/21 to 167,170 in 2021/22 although they were still behind pre-pandemic borrowing of 250,074 in 2019/20; the Home Delivery Service, which had continued to maintain its customers; and to book borrowing which had showed a 31 percent decrease from 198,979 in 2019/20 to 136,403 in 2021/22.

Discussion ensued on the benefits and the sustainability of the home delivery service, which was seen as a valuable service to the community; how to use the relaunch to try and engage with new members / groups to get the best use of the building and to increase footfall; the importance of encouraging people to read books; plans for the external facades of the building; and the plans for the site of the former Sports Direct building. The Leader, Assistant Director Communities Services, Head of Leisure and Cultural Services and the Library Manager responded thereon.

IT WAS AGREED – That the updated report be noted.

5 RE-OPENING CELEBRATIONS

The Assistant Director Community Services updated the Board on the plans for the re-opening of the Crown Street Library, which was scheduled for Spring / Summer 2023. It was reported that no detailed arrangements had been made to date; the Trustees would be involved in those arrangements to commemorate the re-opening; and that there were a number of factors that could impact on the re-opening date and completion of the refurbishment works. It was anticipated that the re-opening would not just be a one day event but that it would be a festival type event.

Discussions ensued on what those celebrations could consist of; linking it with the history of the town; when the building would become accessible again; whether it would be a phased re-opening; delivery of services; and the availability of the local studies service during the restoration works. The Leader, Assistant Director Community Services and the Library

Manager responded thereon.

IT WAS REPORTED – That the position be noted.

6 ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

Reference was made to the long term plans for the building in the current economic climate and whether there would continue to be funding available for the building and the library service.