

To: Council Board
On: 30th September 2021

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Renfrewshire Libraries Update

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 A motion regarding the recovery of Renfrewshire Libraries was brought to Renfrewshire Council on June 24th 2021. Members highlighted the role libraries have at the heart of Renfrewshire's culture and heritage, and that Council would work closely with Renfrewshire Leisure to ensure that as part of a COVID recovery programme, libraries would reopen as soon as possible, seeking to restore pre-Covid service provision. Further, the motion noted that Johnstone Town Hall is currently being used as a COVID 19 vaccination centre, highlighting concerns that this would adversely impact on the reopening of Johnstone Library housed in the Town Hall and whether the reintroduction of a mobile facility should be considered as an alternative.
- 1.2 The purpose of this paper is to provide a progress report on Renfrewshire Libraries' recovery programme, within the context of the breadth of activity provided by Renfrewshire's digital and library services. The report also provides details of the direct delivery model which serves those unable to visit one of our libraries in person.
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2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council notes the content of this report.
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3. **Background**

- 3.1 Throughout the pandemic, the library team has consistently reviewed and adapted services in line with Scottish Government restrictions and in response to the changing needs of communities. During the national lockdowns when physical access to libraries was not possible, the service adapted its provision to include increased digital lending and online service provision, as well as home delivery and befriending services. At all times, either during lockdown or in the preparation of restarting services, Renfrewshire Leisure has worked collaboratively with officers to agree safe operating procedures for staff and public at each stage. Engagement has also been undertaken with the trade unions in relation to staff safety and on-site safety measures.
- 3.2 Exiting each lockdown, in recognition of the importance of libraries at the heart of local communities, Renfrewshire Leisure reopened all library sites across Renfrewshire. Initially, in-person services were limited by Scottish Government restrictions to click and collect style services. Renfrewshire Leisure offered click and collect as soon as it was permitted, one of only two Council areas across Scotland to reactivate all public library sites. Renfrewshire Leisure continues to offer click and collect as a key service as we know some customers remain more comfortable with this provision than in-person browsing.
- 3.3 As soon as the Scottish Government's Covid-19 guidelines allowed, on 26th April 2021 Renfrewshire Leisure reopened all 12 of the region's libraries for in-person browsing, alongside the operation of click and collect services. A BBC news article (26th May 2021) highlighted that Renfrewshire was one of only fifteen Council areas that opened all its public libraries following this lockdown exit, with other Council areas indicating that they would not consider reopening some of their facilities until later in the year.
- 3.4 The April reopening also included the reinstatement of public access to PCs in all public library venues for the first time since restrictions came into place. Again, Renfrewshire Leisure focused on all sites in recognition of the importance of addressing issues around access and equality, helping to ensure that people without computer access at home can secure information of all kinds, and be provided with the staff support to do so.
- 3.5 Renfrewshire Leisure is now increasing overall library opening hours and restarting library programmes such as Bookbug. Whilst Renfrewshire Leisure has maintained a commitment to restart all sites, a key priority at all times remains staff and public safety. The careful recovery of opening hours and public programme supports the continued need for social distancing among staff and allows staff the time for additional cleaning to meet Covid protocols. Renfrewshire Leisure also elected to continue to provide a Home Delivery service even when all sites reopened. The Home Delivery service operates Renfrewshire-wide for everyone over the age of 70, anyone with a disability or health condition which limits their ability to access libraries, and to families with school-age children. The home delivery service was a new, additional service initiated during lockdown in recognition that, for many people, visiting in-person was still not possible, or preferable, and this remains the case.

- 3.6 Physical in-library operations are therefore now being delivered at the same time as a dedicated home delivery service, click and collect option still in place, alongside a vibrant online offering from the Libraries team. This variety of provision has been welcomed and strongly supported throughout the pandemic.
- 3.7 The impact of the pandemic has brought about a renewed focus on providing a service which is more responsive to the needs of the public, whilst ensuring the safety of staff and customers. Providing a Covid safe environment at all our sites, maintaining the standard of online service members have come to expect by investing more in our online resources to reflect the increase in demand for digital services, as well as the direct home delivery services, reflects the multi-platform nature of library provision now available to the community.
- 3.8 The library at Johnstone Town Hall opened at the same time as all our physical sites. Following the restart on April 26th, at which time the mass vaccination centre was already running at Johnstone Town hall, the library reopened with its own dedicated access via the entrance off Ludovic Square. A separate entrance/exit is in operation for the vaccination centre in Johnstone Town Hall.
- 3.9 Renfrewshire Leisure has provided regular updates for elected members about the work of our libraries - and other services – through the reopening phases and will continue to do so.

4.0 **Next Steps**

4.1 The table below shows the key dates for the next stages of the reopening programme, focusing on the following priorities:

- **Public libraries:** increased opening hours, reintroduction of Bookbug sessions and other community support time, increased access to pc terminals
- **School libraries:** increased pupil browsing and participatory activities within High school libraries and Primary School settings. The outreach librarian will provide on-site support to primary schools
- **Skoobmobile:** programme of school and community visits, working with Head Teachers and Education Services to ensure plans are integrated into school operation

<p>Public libraries</p> <p>From 16th August:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • move to 1m distancing for staff and customers • reintroduction of some library seating in line with Covid protocols • increase in number of pcs available • increase in total numbers permitted in libraries
<p>From 13th September:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase in opening hours

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> relaunch of Bookbug and other community activities (allocated community focus time)
<p>From 27th Sept</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> relaunch Macmillan services in libraries reintroduce children's activities (during community focus time) reintroduce adult activities (during community focus time) increase library seating available (to c. two thirds) reintroduce Digiteer sessions in libraries
<p>From 10th October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reintroduce children's activities (outwith community focus time) reintroduce adult activities (outwith community focus time) remove restriction on numbers in libraries restore final library seating
<p>School libraries and Skoobmobile</p> <p>From 16th August</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> increase numbers of pupils using secondary school libraries for browsing and activities with agreement of school
<p>From 23rd August</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skoobmobile to recommence primary school and nursery visits (with approval of local Head Teachers) Primary School Outreach Librarian to begin engagements onsite at primary schools with agreement of local Head Teachers

4.2 Digital literacy support / Online content

4.2.1 Renfrewshire Leisure's online membership figures grew by 133% during 2020 in comparison to pre pandemic 2019 figures, with the breakdown of e-lending types illustrated in the table below:

Downloads	2019/20	2020/21	Difference	% change
ebooks (Adult)	19,657	35,538	15,881	81%
ebooks (Children)	3,604	7,221	3,617	100%
eaudiobooks	8,825	15,655	6,830	77%
emagazines	14,323	22,078	7755	54%

2019 – 663
2020 – 1545
Increase – 133%

- 4.2.2 The table above shows the developing reliance on digital access which increased exponentially during the national lockdowns. Libraries all across Scotland are at the centre of the collaborative effort to ensure no one is left behind in the new digital landscape as envisioned in the Scottish Government's publication A Changing Nation: How Scotland will Thrive in a Digital World (2021).
- 4.2.3 1 in 7 people across Scotland experience data poverty, rising to 1 in 4 in lower income households. 1 in 5 of those experiencing data poverty depended on libraries for access pre-pandemic. Renfrewshire's libraries continue to offer vital digital access and digital support to address these statistics as well as to ensure as many people as possible have access to the opportunities that the digital world presents, including:
- **Animal Crossing:** Renfrewshire Libraries have created a own library island in this popular online game for children. The island comes to life during school holidays.
 - **Home Learning Hub:** providing curated resources and activities for primary pupils, parents, carers and teachers.
 - **Coding clubs (Coder Dojo and Silly Coding):** Two twice weekly online coding programmes for young people in partnership with the YMCA
 - **Just the Ticket with Dip into Digital:** Online session planned in partnership with Music Broth, Paisley YMCA Digital MakerSpace and ThinkScience. Planned activities include digital music making, coding and science activities.
 - **Study support:** drop-in sessions, email support, guides to online resources.
 - **C-Scape project:** provision of digital skills assistance to a group of adults with learning disabilities.
 - **Digiteers project:** Funded project enabling digital volunteers to provide basic digital skills support for people across Renfrewshire's communities
 - **Libraries Direct digital support calls:** Service developed in partnership with Neighbourhood Hubs to support those identified as digitally excluded and experiencing isolation
 - **Connecting Scotland project:** Scottish Government initiative in partnership with Renfrewshire Council and the neighbourhood hubs, providing digital skills support from library staff and Digiteers to learners.

4.3 Home Delivery Service

- 4.3.1 During the first lockdown Renfrewshire Leisure launched the Libraries Direct service as part of a collaborative response from the Council's neighbourhood hubs to provide additional resources to support residents across communities who were shielding. Support included friendship calls, digital skills support calls and home delivery of books and toys to vulnerable individuals and families.
- 4.3.2 To reflect changes experienced through the different phases of lockdown, the service was relaunched in March 2021 as a Renfrewshire-wide Home Delivery Service for everyone over the age of 70, anyone with a disability or health condition which limits their ability to access libraries, and to families with school-age children.

- 4.3.3 To access this service customers can choose to order online or can order by phone. Renfrewshire Leisure offer a personalised service in that staff will engage with telephone customers to help them with their selections. Customers receive a call to let them know when their books will be delivered. We are conscious that for many customers this personal touch is much valued and offers the engagement with library staff that they might otherwise miss by not being able to visit in person.
- 4.3.4 In the first 6 months of the Home Delivery Service, Renfrewshire Libraries have supported the delivery of 8339 book issues to members of the public within these groups. By comparison, the last full year of the mobile library issued 7687 books.
- 4.3.5 The mobile library offered a book lending service and a limited information service. There was a common misconception that the mobile library was in some way serving housebound residents. This was not the case, as customers were required to make their way to the mobile library in person as is the case with a static library. In contrast, user feedback (as set out in the Appendix) on the current home delivery service has highlighted that not having to leave home as what they liked most about the service.

APPENDIX

Home delivery Services - feedback comments received:

Feedback comments:

- It's been a fantastic service, one that I stumbled across. The library staff choosing for my children (and me) has been a fantastic introduction to new authors and styles.
- Wonderful assistance for me and my grandchildren to experience new authors.
- Great service thank you
- A great service staff very helpful
- As an avid reader aged 94, I am very grateful to have a regular supply of books without having to walk to the library.
- Gold star on service, has really appreciated all of the staff's efforts from choosing the materials to the delivery drivers!
- This is an excellent service for housebound and infirm people
- As a 90yr old library user for many years but poor mobility now makes me appreciate the home delivery service and excellent way it is carried out. I send grateful thanks to all involved.
- Excellent and reliable service. It has added greatly to my ability to obtain books and discover varying authors
- Marvellous service, I think it's wonderful.
- Delighted with the service. Enjoyed all books chosen for me.
- Grab & Go selection is an excellent idea. It has introduced me to authors I would have by-passed.

In addition:

Mrs X of Glenburn phoned to say thank you. She had called for information on the Library Service's Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Service which she had received, but "before she knew it ... had a delivery of talking books arranged". They arrived the next day. Mrs X described the delivery service as a lifeline as she receives palliative care and can no longer walk to her library and that she "couldn't praise the service enough".

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial - None.**
2. **HR & Organisational Development - None**
3. **Community/Council Planning – None.**
4. **Legal – None**
5. **Property/Assets – None**
6. **Information Technology – None**
7. **Equality & Human Rights** –The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety – None**
9. **Procurement – None**
10. **Risk - None**
11. **Privacy Impact – None**
12. **Cosla Policy Position – None**
13. **Climate Risk - None**

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