

Meeting: Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee

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Title: Whitley Bay Customer First Centre

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Service: Environment, Housing and Leisure

Wards affected: All

1 Purpose of Report

To present Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee with an outline of the work and activities delivered through Whitley Bay Customer First Centre (CFC) in the context of the Council's wider move towards the development of community hubs.

2 Recommendations

The committee is invited to note the report and suggest areas for further consideration.

3 Background

Whitley Bay Customer First Centre is a £7.075 million PFI new build facility (supported by PFI credits of £7.5 million) that opened to the public on 2nd April 2013. The facility replaced the old Whitley Bay library on Park Road that was no longer fit for purpose, the Tourist Information Centre that was attached to the library, and the Customer Service Centre that was located on Victoria Terrace.

The building was designed not only to provide modernised facilities, but to locate a number of services under one roof to provide convenience to customers and efficiencies associated with the closure of a number of older buildings. It is located in a central location, with good transport links and close to the central shopping area.

The building is leased from Lift Co over 25 years. Facilities management including repairs and maintenance is carried out by Robertsons.

4 Facilities

The building offers a large library over two floors and a dedicated Customer Service Centre, with self service payment kiosks for Council payments such as rent and Council Tax. There are a number of community rooms that can be used for activities

and hired by the community (two large rooms that can be split into four smaller rooms). An art exhibition area offers local artists and crafts people a space to display their work. A separate health suite is available on the first floor, which currently houses the locality teams for the area, who run birth registrations, a baby clinic and a stay and play session from the building.

On the second floor, in addition to the Customer Service Centre, there is a large office, which currently houses Adult Social Care teams, who were moved from other obsolete buildings such as Camden House.

The library provides a range of modern services, including a good selection of books for all ages, self service loan, return and renew, public access PCs, free wifi, online resources and e-books and study facilities. It is popular with a range of customers using the building for a variety of purposes and is particularly popular with young people using the library to study. There are public toilets on every floor of the building, including a Changing Places facility for those with severe disabilities.

5 Community Activity

The facility offers a range of activities and events that support the local community, including regular room bookings from a diverse range of community groups and businesses. The centre is also used regularly by the Council for public consultation and engagement events.

Regular library activities include:

- Three Bounce & Rhyme sessions per week – two sessions coincide with Locality Team activities: the baby clinic and Stay & Play. This has boosted attendance figures. A recent sessions had 42 adults with 46 babies.
- Two Toddler Tales sessions per week.
- An after school craft activity
- A weekly Marching Tots songs and movement activity.
- Lego Club drop in every Saturday.
- Weekly Knit & Natter group.
- Weekly Make Do & Mend craft group – Age Takes Centre Stage Awards 2017- commended in recognition of their achievements and contribution to older people in their local community.
- Weekly Coding Club for children.
- Weekly class visits from Rockcliffe School.
- Weekly Walking Group.
- Film Club Fortnightly - 15 – 20 regular attendance.
- Regular events organised by our events team – History Wardrobe (100 attended) – Gail Curry Poetry Event (122 attended) – Ann Cleeves Author Event (fully booked).
- Regular exhibitions in the exhibition space

Regular room bookings and other centre users include:

- Two weekly Kumon classes – approx 30 children plus families per class.
- Two weekly Slimming World sessions – very well attended.
- Weekly Baby Clinic – looking at a second weekly session.
- Weekly Stay & Play activity sessions.
- The Avenue Friendship Group weekly meetings – approx 50 attend per week
- Age Takes centre Stage Awards 2017- Commended in recognition of their achievements and contribution to older people in their local community.
- Talking Therapies host a weekly drop in.
- Care & Connect weekly drop in.
- Cruse Bereavement counselling.
- The WEA host weekly courses.
- ALA courses including the Job Club, French language course, basic computing and art appreciation.
- Coastal Knitters craft group.
- Acorns choir weekly rehearsals – also perform at Xmas etc.
- Tyne & Wear Museums regular bookings – working with elderly people.
- Monthly meditation group.
- Regular Transport Users Group meetings.
- Regular Councillor Surgeries.
- Regular Regeneration consultations and displays.
- Meetings for public and local businesses with NTC and police on issues including anti social behaviour, fly tipping etc.
- Save a Baby's Life – monthly baby first aid courses.
- Fostering and Adoption open evenings.
- We sell tickets on behalf of the Whitley Bay Film Festival – this has worked extremely well with the public queuing outside to buy tickets on the day of release.
- Regular competitions in partnership with the Playhouse.
- Regular themed community days to promote volunteering, starting your own business etc and getting active with local sports clubs and groups.
- Rockpool School – weekly educational activities for children to learn about the sea shore.
- North Tyneside Woman's Voices – regular bookings.
- Parent factor ADHD – regular bookings.
- Hear to Help – Hearing Aid Support drop in.
- Embroiderer's Guild – monthly meeting.

6 Performance

In the last financial year (2016/17) there were:

- 299,389 visitors
- 115,718 items loaned
- 38,378 logins to the public PCs
- 8,706 people attended events
- 923 room bookings
- 17,077 Customer Services payment kiosk transactions
- 16,949 visitors to Customer Services

Approximately 63% of library loan transactions are currently self service and there is an average of around 4,000 enquiries each month.

7 Conclusion

Whitley Bay Customer First Centre functions as an effective community hub for the Whitley Bay area, combining a wide range of services and a high level of community access. The interaction which the CFC provides supports community cohesion objectives and helps break down social isolation for many vulnerable members of the community.