

Returning to service: LiveWire Libraries and COVID-19

1.0 Background

On 20th March 2019 Warrington's Libraries Partnership Board approved the progression of LiveWire and Culture Warrington to move forward with plans to refurbish the current library and museum building located on Museum Street. The intention was to establish a creative hub offer for the town within the building; creating a rich heritage resource for the town that tells its stories well and a place that inspires learning for all ages.

The proposed plans identified a series of changes aimed at introducing a revised collaborated offer. The purpose was to improve the customer service experience for all visitors to Warrington Museum and Central Library; helping to mitigate the year on year decline in visits to both the library and museum services. The three specific areas of focus were:

- Physical changes
- Marketing and branding
- Integration of the services' offers

Throughout July and August 15 stakeholder engagement sessions were conducted across the borough; these were attended by approximately 188 members of the public and other stakeholders. Feedback received throughout the consultation period was reviewed and influenced the final proposals for the site.

2.0 Improvements to be made

Warrington Museum and Central Library closed their doors on 1st September 2019 for a two week closure period; this enabled the following cosmetic works and improvements to take place:

Physical Changes

- Relocation of the main library counter to left of the main entrance
- Introduction of a small merchandise offer on the ground floor of the library and in museum
- Creation of an cultural space on the raised level of the main library
- Creation of an exhibition space on the raised level of the main library
- Review of storage in ancillary spaces
- Review and improved entrance door access for both the library and museum
- Creation of specific areas within the library space - including one for use of customers' own devices, a study area and a health area

Marketing and Branding

- Museum Entrance – improvement of the sight line from Golden Square down Bold Street by the use of wayfinding signage
- Museum Lobby and Stairwell – improved signage and way marking throughout the space
- Library Entrance – improved signage and way marking throughout the space
- Archives and Local Studies – raise awareness of the location of the service through internal signage
- Improved signage and way finding around the whole building including a revised map of the building
- Creation of an annual joint marketing plan promoting the whole building offer through a programme of activities and resources on offer
- Development and delivery of a digital strategy to open up the museum and library to wider audiences and re-engage with audiences who haven't used the services for a while (or who are unable to travel to the building)

Integration of the Service Offers

- Alignment of opening hours across all services - including weekend opening
 - Monday – Tuesday: private groups
 - Wednesday – Saturday: 10am – 4:30pm
 - Sunday: 11am – 3pm
- Improved stock flow from the main library throughout the whole building by introducing specialist collections that complement exhibitions displayed in the museum's gallery and exhibition spaces
- Synergy in the programming of exhibitions, events and learning initiatives across Culture Warrington and LiveWire, i.e. a whole building approach with key themes throughout the year

3.0 Reopening Warrington Museum and Central Library

Warrington Museum and Central Library reopened its doors on the 14th September 2019. In celebration of this, a full programme of weekend activities was created – attracting nearly 900 participants.

Highlights of the opening event included:

- The unveiling of three new murals in the museum and library
- Members of the popular 99th Garrison Star Wars group patrolling the building
- A 'Moon-inspired' dance performance choreographed by Kate Jackson and performed by students from Priestley College; this was linked in with Warrington Contemporary Arts Festival
- Poetry performances

- Star Wars craft activities
- Artist talk by Pip Woolf about her exhibition Matter of Identity
- Choir performance by Wired for Sound
- Dance workshops by Wired: Up Dance Company, a Warrington-based contemporary dance company

3.1 Events and activities at Warrington Library

Since the reopening, the two teams of LiveWire and Culture Warrington continue to collaborate to create a joint and diverse events programme which, where possible, encompasses the whole building. Adopting a holistic approach provides an improved and more effective access to services, greater response to need and an opportunity to attract new visitors.

A summary of the library's events and activities programme between September 2019 and March 2020 is set out below:

Month	Name of event/activity	Description
Ongoing	Conversation and coffee	ESOL: Weekly class teaching English as a second language
	IT Buddy	2 volunteers recruited to assist users with IT basics
	Wonky Writers	Monthly creative writing group which was sustained following a successful writing workshop delivered by Read Now Write Now and funded by ACE
	Wire Writers	Monthly writing group
	Reading Group	Monthly reading group
	An evening of poetry reading	Monthly poetry group
	Primary School Class visits	Programme of class visits to the library Total of 518 pupils attended as part of the visits
	Rhymetime/storytime	Weekly session
	Pre-school class visits	Programme of preschool visits Total of 32 children attended as part of the visits
	Job Club/Budget boosting	Weekly drop in sessions delivered in partnership with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
	Tai-chi	Weekly classes commenced Feb. 2020
Sept. 2019	Camera Club	Weekly sessions aimed at participants aged 6 years and over delivered in partnership with Express Arts.

		Following a successful project at Culcheth Library this short course on building confidence and self-esteem by exploring photography, film making, animation, acting for film, post processing as well as meet new friends and learn new skills.
Libraries Week 5 – 14 Oct 2019		
	Fun Palaces (in collaboration with Culture Warrington)	<p>A full weekend of activity - bringing members of the community together to showcase and share their skills and interests.</p> <p>Over 750 people participated in the weekend</p> <p>Feedback: <i>Brilliant! Great to have so many things to try. We would never have done otherwise. We have visited the museum before but not the library.</i> [outcomes = enjoyment, positive attitude in relation to an experience, behaviour]</p> <p>Also demonstrates success of joint working between library and museum</p>
	Food for Fines	<p>'Food for Fines' scheme aimed to help raise much-needed donations to Warrington Food Bank by allowing library members to donate items of food in place of paying a fine on any overdue book.</p> <p>For each item of food donated, library staff reduced the amount of fines owed on overdue books by £1.</p>
	MakeFest Augmented Reality (AR) books (event in support of Libraries Week in collaboration with Culture Warrington)	<p>Libraries Week provided an opportunity to deliver an activity to introduce the new augmented reality books</p> <p>385 adults and 344 children attended</p> <p>Feedback: <i>Lovely staff, with very educational information and free activities for children. My son who is nearly 6 just getting interested into planets, etc. "Loved It"</i> [outcomes = enjoyment, learning something new, positive attitude in relation to an experience]</p>
	A Homes for the Muses (event in support of Libraries Week in collaboration with Culture Warrington)	<p>Well-known local author, Janice Hayes, delivered a presentation about the fascinating story of Warrington Museum and Central Library</p> <p>19 attended</p>

		<p>Feedback: <i>Very interesting talk; I learnt quite a lot of information which I wouldn't have found out about otherwise.</i></p> <p>[outcomes = being surprised, learning facts or information]</p>
October 2019 activities for children		
	Spooky stories and activities	<p>Holiday activities</p> <p>Cross promoted with WMAG holiday activities</p>
	iDEA (Inspiring Digital Enterprise Award) Workshop (in collaboration with Culture Warrington)	Digi workshop for families
	Spooky coding workshop (in collaboration with Culture Warrington)	Digi activity for children
	Halloween mask making	<p>Holiday activities for families</p> <p>Cross promoted with WMAG holiday activities</p>
November 2019 activities		
6 Nov	Great North West Read author event	<p>Phaedra Patrick – author of <i>The library of lost and found</i> talked about her work/book signing</p> <p>18 attended</p> <p>Feedback: <i>A worthwhile event. Phaedra gave an inspiring talk. I'm glad I came.</i></p> <p>[outcomes = positive attitude in relation to an experience, being inspired]</p>
9 Nov	Viking Event (in collaboration with Culture Warrington)	<p>Time travel event exploring a different era, remembrances and celebrations</p> <p>Taking centre stage in the library was a group on Viking re-enactors who entertained audiences by inviting them to take part in a number of authentic games and live music, while Thor and Loki from <i>Imagining History</i> delivered two 45-minute performances regaling families with their wit and humour</p> <p>Visitors could then take a historical journey throughout the whole building casting their eyes</p>

		<p>over intriguing artefacts, trying their hands at making Thor's famous hammer pendant and sampling some Viking foods and drink</p> <p>Over 800 participants attended the event</p> <p>Feedback: <i>I liked learning about the Viking influence on Warrington and the surrounding area.</i> [outcomes = knowledge and understanding/making links and relationships between things]</p>
	AR colouring activity	Activity for families
December 2019 activities		
12 Dec	Unplugged Sundays	Unplugged Sundays was introduced on 12 th December to encourage families to spend quality time together by enjoying a range of traditional games
Dec 2019	Christmas crafts x 2	Holiday craft activities for families Cross promoted with WMAG holiday activities
January – March 2020 activities		
Jan 2020	Holocaust exhibition : No child's play (in collaboration with Culture Warrington)	<p>A panel exhibition of toys, games, art, diaries, poems, and stories of children during the Holocaust – on loan from International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (United Kingdom) Ltd</p> <p>The exhibition received lots of visits including from Woolston and Latchford St. James CP. Children indicated on monitoring forms they found the exhibition interesting, thought provoking and informative</p>
2 Feb 2020	Celebration of Top Borrowers	12 library borrowers (age range from 6 – 82) and their friends and family were welcomed at a special event to celebrate a love of reading
	Half term break crafts	Holiday craft activities for families Cross promoted with WMAG holiday activities
	Parachute games	Family activity
5 – 12 March	From Prejudice to Pride (in collaboration with Culture Warrington)	In partnership with Body Positive, a Cheshire based sexual health charity, and Silver Rainbows, a social network for older LGBT people in the area.

		<p>An exhibition was on display for a week; presenting a potted history telling the story of LGBT history in Cheshire from 1800 to the present day.</p> <p>The exhibition was aimed at raising awareness of the prejudice faced by the LGBT community and how the Pride movement came about.</p> <p>The exhibition was supported by two free social events called 'Tea & Tattle' on 5th March where people were invited to drop in and enjoy a brew and a chat.</p>
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3.2 Other joint initiatives

Alongside the programme of activities highlighted in section 3.1, the collaborative working model at Warrington Museum and Library has supported the delivery of the following initiatives:

Made.Digital

The Made.Digital project is an externally funded project between LiveWire and Culture Warrington aimed at delivering coding, digital and physical computing workshops to young people and vulnerable adults in schools, central and neighbourhood libraries and businesses within Warrington. Warrington Museum and Library are located at the heart of the project as ultimately the aim is to create a digital makerspace at the site.

Throughout February and March Continual Professional Development (CPD) workshops were delivered at Warrington Library to both library and museum staff based at the site. The workshops focused on upskilling staffs' digital knowledge - equipping them with ability to deliver digi sessions at their home site; 24 staff received the training.

Warrington Contemporary Arts Festival (WCAF)

'The space between us' project was part of WCAF 19. This provided an opportunity for 20 children and young people from Wired Young Carers and a local dance group to take part in a mixed arts programme through creative writing, dance, film and art. As part of the project two dance workshops were held in Warrington Library during September 2019. Subsequently, the library hosted the project's final film on a newly installed projector screen in November 2019.

Museum school/ education bookings

Allocating Mondays and Tuesdays for private group bookings has enabled the Museum Team to support larger class visits as part of their education programme; with schools sending groups of up to 90 pupils in one visit.

Heritage Network Meeting

Warrington Library hosted the town's Heritage Network meeting on 20th January 2020. Culture Warrington are key members of the network and this provided the team with opportunity to show case the site and resources available to the network's members and key partners.

4.0 Performance Data

*Statistical information included in the summary below is for the period 14th September 2019 to 21st March 2020

Since the reopening of Warrington Library on 14th September there has been:

- 43,358 Visits
- 33,610 Book issues
- 163 Activities delivered
- 4,158 Participants at activities
- Seven museum education classes hosted in the library attended by 410 participants
*this figure is double the capacity the Museum Team can usually deliver across seven sessions in the Museum Classroom

5.0 Looking ahead

Given the current situation, it is too early to fully evaluate the impact of the changes undertaken at Warrington Museum and Central Library in September 2019. Due to the impact of COVID a number of actions set out at the beginning of the project are still to be implemented. These include:

- Continuing to build on the joint approach to marketing the services
- Reviewing the current education offer across all services and make better use of the combined resources to extend the offer to new users and audiences through the development of a joint workshop. This will enable Warrington Museum and Central Library to better support schools to deliver the national curriculum framework
- Expanding the archive and local studies offer into community libraries
- Working to further engage specific group visits and private use of the building from Education, Community and Special Interest Groups on Mondays and Tuesdays

- Developing a 'Friends of Warrington Museum and Central Library Group' to support the programming and events at the site and to act also as advocates for the service
- Continue to work collaboratively on the activity programme ensuring a whole building approach with key themes throughout the year

However, the teams recognise that such priorities for the site will need to be reviewed in line with the town's Post-COVID Recovery Plan. As a creative hub, Warrington Museum and Central Library have a vital role in supporting the wellbeing and recovery of Warrington's residents. As a result, developing programmes and delivering activities to support this will continue to be explored and implemented.