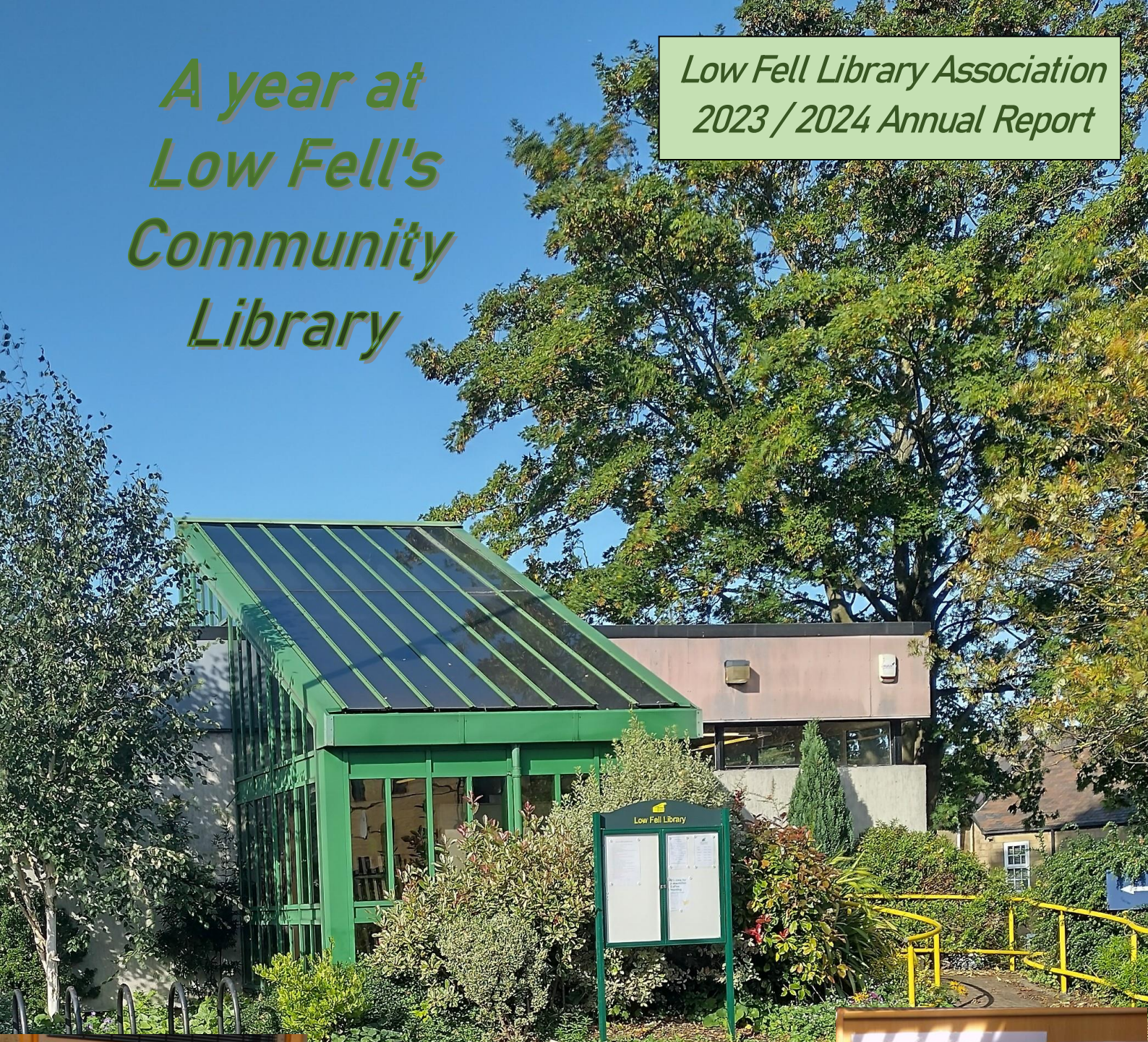


A year at Low Fell's Community Library

*Low Fell Library Association
2023 / 2024 Annual Report*



Low Fell Library, 710A Durham Road, Low Fell, Gateshead NE9 6HT
www.low-fell-library.org.uk facebook.com/LowFellLibrary
Registered charity no. 1153726

LOW FELL LIBRARY – ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

Introduction from the Chair

Welcome to the eleventh annual report from Low Fell Library Association, which is made up of the volunteers who keep Low Fell Library going.

2023/2024 has seen much more of a return to normality for the library's operations. The library has had a full programme of activities across the year, which are described in more detail below.

The library has continued to be affected by the energy and cost of living crisis with gas and electricity bills, continuing to have a noticeable effect on the library finances over the winter of 2023/24. The library is a designated Warm Space and provides a location for anyone needing this facility, in addition to the more usual book lending and computer use.

As ever, many thanks are due to all the volunteers and trustees who give so much time and energy to running the library and ensuring that residents in Low Fell and beyond have a thriving local community library.

Frank Hindle – Chair, Low Fell Library Association

Some comments from our library customers:

I have loved the year I have been coming to the library, it's so cosy!

The children really enjoy the Rhyme Time sessions and the volunteers for this are great

The computer course is comprehensive and helpful, a very worthwhile course

Low Fell Library Association

Low Fell Library Association is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (charity registration number 1153726) and is made up from the volunteers who run Low Fell Community Library. We work with Gateshead Council and other organisations to deliver a community library service and to ensure that the library building and facilities continue to provide public benefit to the surrounding communities.

The formal statement of the Charity's objectives, as set out in our Constitution, is:

- To advance education by the provision of a library facility and service and other educational community resources and activities for Low Fell inhabitants and the surrounding areas.
- To further benefit the said inhabitants without distinction of sex, sexual orientation, race or of political, religious or any other opinions by associating together the said inhabitants and the local authorities, voluntary and other organisations in a common effort to advance education and to provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation, leisure time, occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life for the residents.

Low Fell Library, 2023 / 2024

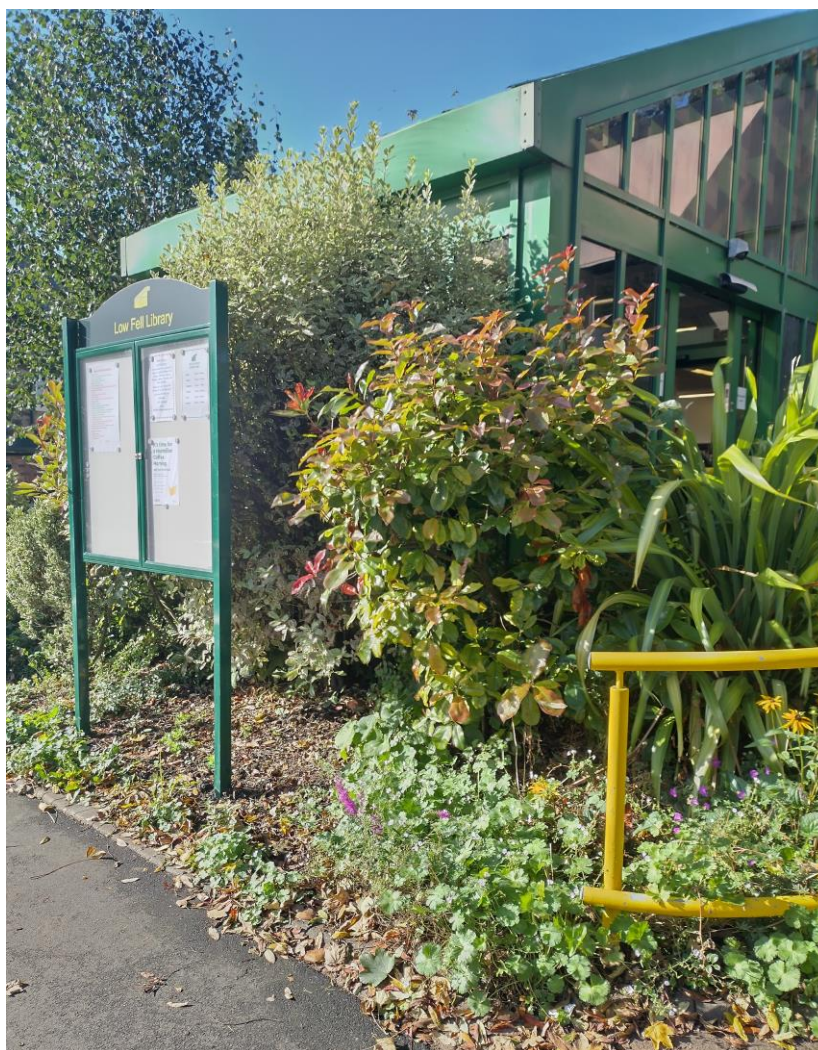
Introduction

In 2023/24 the library returned to a much more normal series of activities and has had a full programme of events and activities over the course of the year.

The number of Rhyme Time sessions has continued to run with the extra sessions added on Monday and Friday mornings and there are now five sessions each week, on Mondays, Tuesdays (two sessions), Thursdays and Fridays. Knit and Natter sessions have been continuing on a Wednesday morning.

Unfortunately, more leaks to the roof required the library to be closed for almost a week in June 2023 but the repairs were put in place quickly, minimising disruption to customers and library services.

Throughout the past year our library garden has been beautifully maintained by the volunteers from Low Fell Gardeners, and we thank them wholeheartedly for their ongoing commitment to this.



The library continues to act as a collection point for the Gateshead Food Bank and also provides facilities for the recycling of used printer ink cartridges and batteries. The receptacles for these are located in the main library (food bank, printer cartridges) and in the foyer (batteries).



Our customers' experience

We get a lot of positive feedback from our customers and visitors but it is often difficult to capture comments that are made in the course of a conversation. However, we have a diverse range of customers, who come back to the library regularly.

Here are just a few examples:

- Some customers come in every week, not for books or IT, but for a cup of tea and a chat with the volunteer staff they now regard as friends.
- Customers who come in to enjoy a warm place and some time on the computers.
- Our Knit and Natter group who love our library and make us loads of knitted goods to sell at our Easter and Christmas fairs.
- Our Rhyme Time parents and children who come back week after week, enjoying not only Rhyme Time, but time in the library playing and chatting after the sessions. We even enlist their help from time to time!

Events in the library in 2023 / 2024:

In April 2023 the library held two sessions of beginners' computer classes, three weeks each, running into May 2023, covering basics including keyboard skills and other techniques. These were run by Gateshead Council's Learning Skills and well attended with many attendees continuing to attend similar, subsequent sessions.

April 2023 also saw two children's craft sessions, held in the Easter holidays, and run by Creative Stars Art and Design Club, making Easter bunnies and bee mobiles.

On May 4th 2023 the library served as a polling station for the local elections, opening between 7.00 am and 10.00 pm.



The library celebrated its ten year anniversary in July 2023 with a morning of music, food and drink and entertainment including face painting. The celebrated local mural artist, Gemma Lynas, created a fantastic mural for the wall of the library's community room with the help of local children making butterflies from craft materials.

The library would like to thank the National Lottery Community Fund for the financial support that assisted with the hosting of this event.



Craft sessions for children continued in the summer holidays, with five events provided by Calisto, Artventurers and The Kiln, running from July to August 2023. Also running throughout the school summer holidays was the LFLA summer reading challenge for young children. This was in addition to the scheme run by Gateshead's library service. Children were required to make three visits to the library to borrow books, receiving stickers on their first visit, a face mask on their second visit and an age-appropriate book on the third visit.

In August 2023 a Session was hosted in the library by the Dogs Trust, for attendees to learn how to approach dogs safely.



In September the Macmillan Coffee Morning which raised £150 for the charity.

Also in September 2023, the library held a book sale to raise funds for Oakfield School.



At the end of October 2023, two 'Witch & Wizard making' workshops were held in the library, run by Creative Stars.

The library Christmas Fair took place in November 2023 and was very well attended, with lots of activities for children, Santa and his helper were present, and there was a variety of refreshments and stalls selling crafts, bric a brac, plants and books amongst other things.



Beginners' computer classes provided by Gateshead Council's Learning Skills once again took place at the start of 2024, with five classes in January / February and a further five classes from late February onwards. Again, these were very well attended and well appreciated by those who attended.

Some comments from those sessions are:

"Would just like to let you know how informative the course has been for me - I have learned a lot more about how to use my I-pad and some very useful tips. Thank you for all your help."

"It has been a pleasure to be part of your Computer Class. I have amazed myself how much I have learned and, it's all up to you. I hope that if you ever do another class in the spring I would like to be considered. Thank you for having me."

"Just to say Joan and I really had a great time at the courses (back to back) and did learn new things also we refreshed a lot. Thanks again for a great time."

"I have enjoyed the classes with such a pleasant class and your guidance and would love to attend further classes next year."

"The course is comprehensive and helpful. A very worthwhile course."

In February 2024, Creative Stars ran two 'Crazy Cactus pebble painting' workshops in the library, which were greatly enjoyed by everyone.

The 2024 Easter Fair took place in March 2024, with plenty of stalls and activities as well as excellent refreshments and was once again very well attended. Particular thanks are due to the local businesses, One Stop and the Rare Drop, for their generous donations to the raffle and the tombola.



Customers commented afterwards as to how nice the Fair was, such a 'jolly affair' and a happy atmosphere; and also that their children had had a good time on the craft activities.

Throughout the year, the library has been used by the University of the Third Age which meets monthly for their book club.

Dickens Fellowship has also continued to meet on a monthly basis.

Gateshead Children and Young People Primary Mental Health Service has been providing mental health consulting services for young people, their parents and professionals, held on a monthly basis, with a different topic under consideration each month. Our community room has been hired when 'one to one' consultations are required.

Other library facilities and services:

- Photocopying and printing from the public computers has been available throughout the year and continues to be a popular service.
- Room hire of the community room is ongoing.
- Informal tables for meetings and tutoring are available.
- Newspapers are not provided due to financial constraints. Staff have kindly continued to donate magazines for customers' use.
- Information services, including hotel locations, travel directions, social services support are provided.
- The Food Bank collection point in the library continues to provide assistance to those in need.
- Donated books, CDs and DVD sales are available to the public, although the numbers accepted are limited due to limited space available for storage of these.
- A range of hot and cold drinks are available for a nominal charge with a free refill.
- Recycling facilities are provided for batteries and printer cartridges.
- NHS hearing aid batteries are provided free of charge.

Library usage statistics for 2023 / 2024:

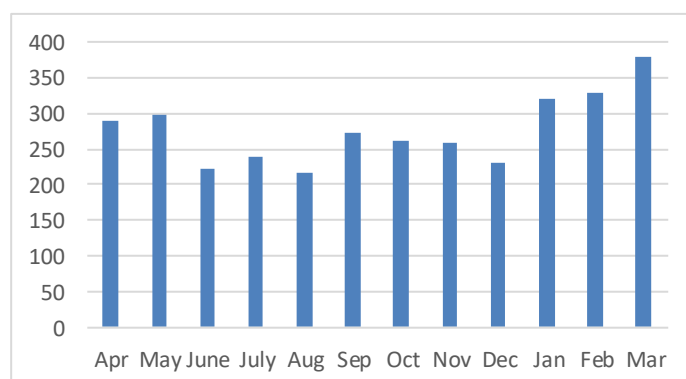
The following information provides a snapshot of the usage statistics for 2023 / 2024 (including comparisons with the previous year):

	2023 / 2024	2022 / 2023
Total hours during the year when the library was open	1690	1732
Mean weekly footfall	276.3	240.7
Mean numbers of active borrowers	149	147
Mean numbers of books borrowed in the year	656	754.2
Mean time in minutes, for each computer use, per month	81	70
Mean new members per month	14	17
Mean numbers of Rhyme Time attendees per month	170	181.5

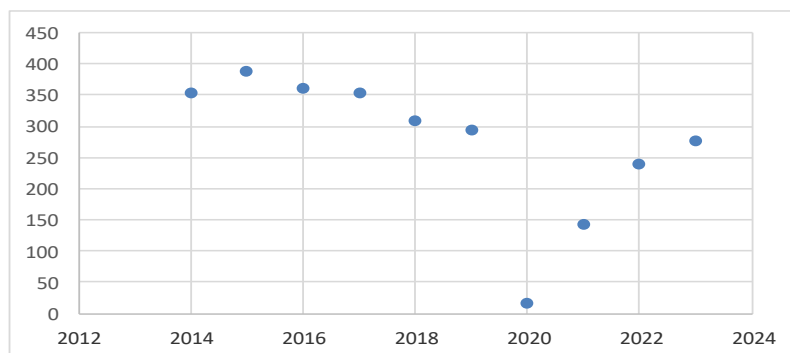
Footfall

This is based on the number of visitors per week measured from numbers recorded in the second week of each month.

The footfall figures for 2023/2024 are shown below. There was a general rise in footfall through the year, with the usual exception of December. Numbers were higher in the winter months. In accordance with the ethos of the 'Warm Spaces' scheme, customers are not asked for the reason for their visit, but this increase in the winter months suggests that some visitors are probably using the library for this purpose.



The below graph shows the average weekly visitor numbers since 2014 and demonstrates the continuing recovery, post-Covid.

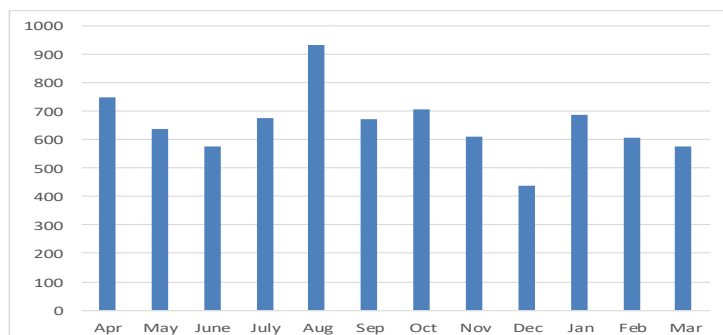


Borrowing of books

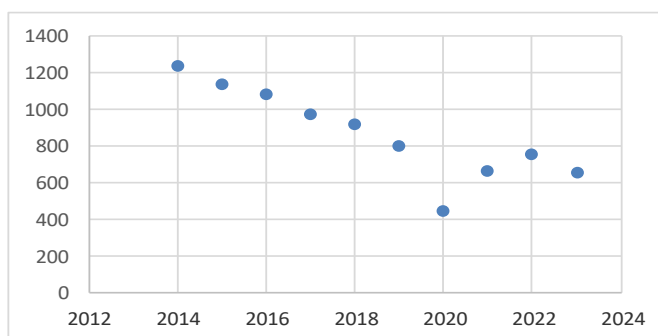
The information provided in the graph below is based on a monthly report provided by Gateshead Central Library, detailing the books borrowed throughout the month.

As usual, the number of books borrowed peaked in the summer months, possibly due to the Summer Reading Challenge. Numbers are continuing to recover, post-Covid. The reduced opening of the library over the Christmas period has a tendency to affect the numbers of books borrowed in this month.

Monthly numbers of books borrowed:

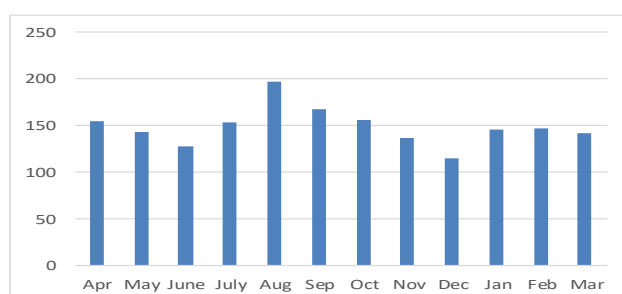


Average numbers of books borrowed monthly, year on year:

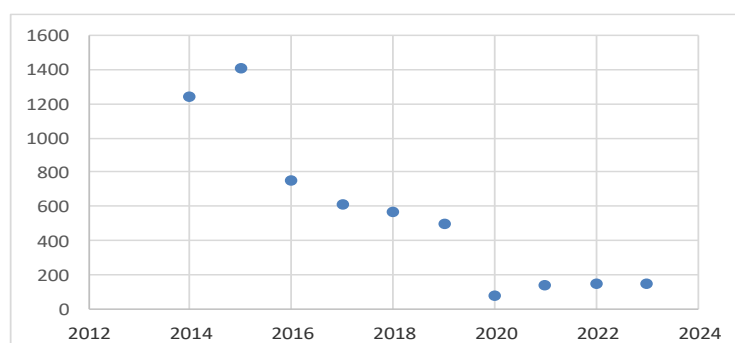


Numbers of active borrowers

This is based on a monthly report from Gateshead Central Library detailing the number of active individual book borrowers throughout each whole month. Again, December is traditionally low and August is likely to be improved by the Summer Reading Challenge.



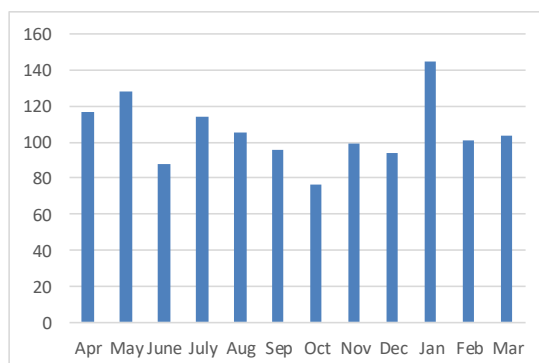
The monthly trend, year on year is shown in the graph below:



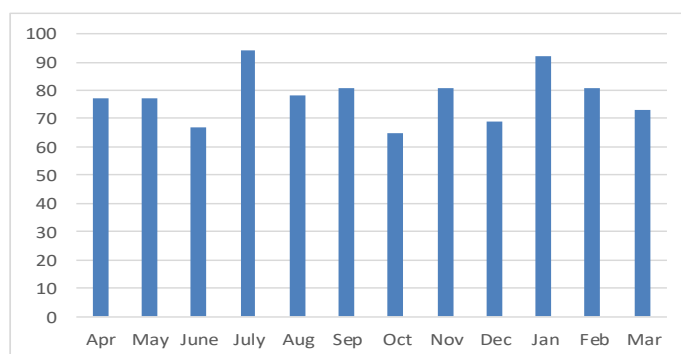
Whilst the number of active borrowers has declined dramatically in the years running up to 2020 and Covid, since then these are showing a gradual improvement. The uncharacteristically high values for 2014 and 2015 may be the result of a different method of calculation of these by Gateshead Central Library.

Public Computer utilisation

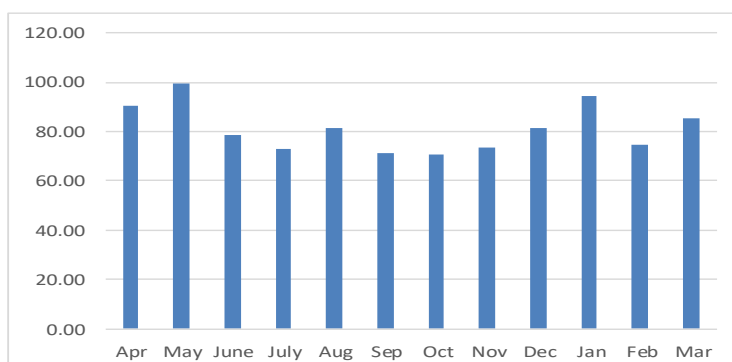
During 2023/2024, all five public computers have been in use. The below information is based on the total hours of usage of all of the public computers in any one month, as recorded on the sign-in sheets.



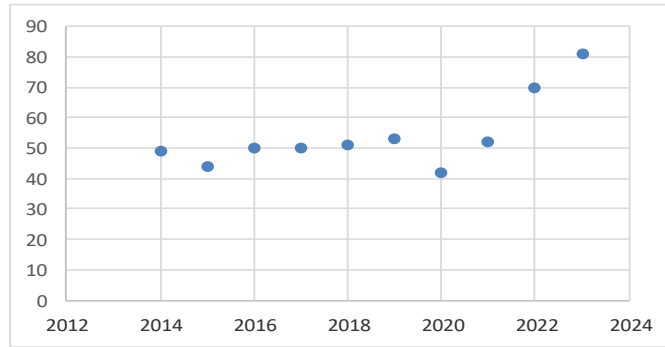
The provision of free WiFi also encourages people with their own computers or tablets to use the library space. The below graph demonstrates that computer usage continues to improve since Covid.



The average time (in minutes) of each computer use per month is shown below:

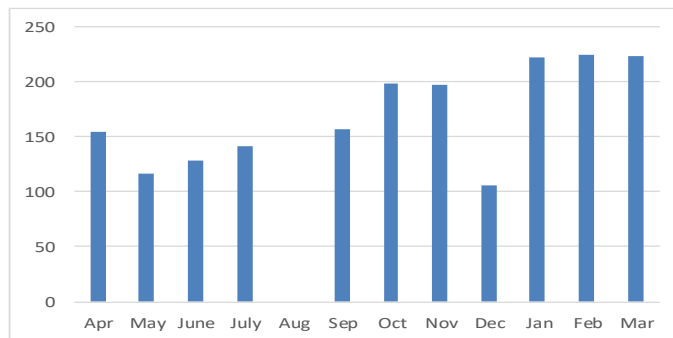


This appears to show an increase in the average time spent per use, on the public computers, in the colder months, which may be as a result of the library providing a 'Warm Space'. As shown in the graph below, the number of minutes of computer use per visit has increased significantly over the year, potentially reflecting the pressures of increased heating costs encouraging customers to spend longer in the library.

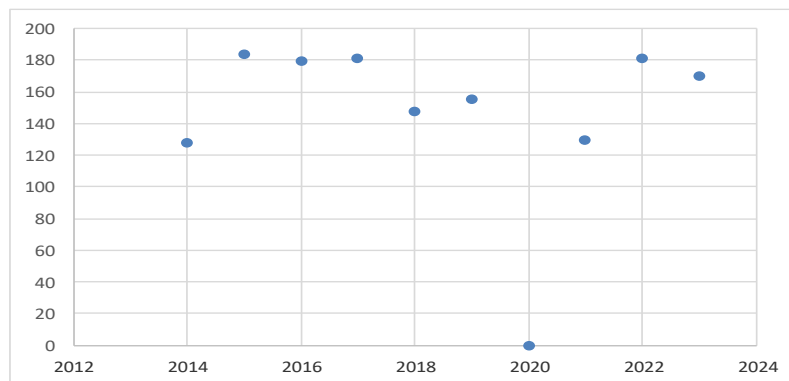


Rhyme Time

The graph below shows the total number of children attending each month, based on the records for all sessions of Rhyme Time held each week.

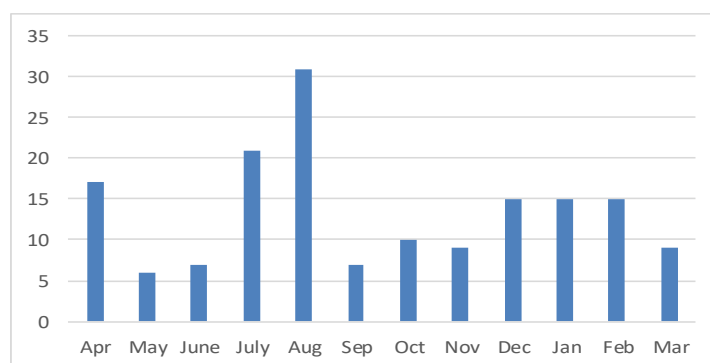


The numbers of children attending Rhyme Time has recovered well since Covid and has been helped by the introduction of additional sessions in 2022/3. This has assisted in spreading the numbers across the various sessions each week. There are no Rhyme Time sessions in August to give the hard-working volunteers a well-deserved break! December is traditionally a poor month given the closure for Christmas and other demands on parents' time.

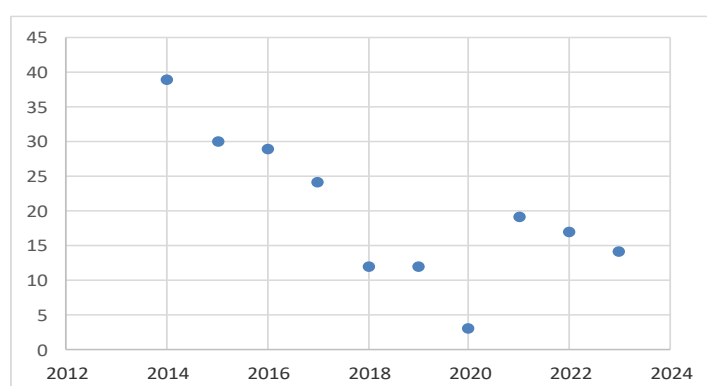


New members

The library has continued to sign up new members, as shown below. This is based on the register used to record whether or not the new member has agreed to receive library marketing information. These figures are less reliable than in previous years when membership sheets were printed and counted.



The library has seen a steady influx of new members throughout the year. The spike in August probably relates to the Summer Reading Challenge encouraging more younger readers to join the library. Year on year numbers of new members have declined, and whilst these had stabilised, post-Covid, at slightly higher levels than in the years before 2020, this is again showing a slight decline.



Other information

Craft sessions for children during the various school holidays were reinstated, funded by a Lottery grant, and the total number of children attending these throughout the year was 143, a significant increase on the previous year's number (87).

Work experience has continued, with two students benefitting in the year, one from Lord Lawson Academy and one from St Thomas More Academy. Feedback from these students indicated that they were excellently supported through the process, by the volunteers, and also found the experience both rewarding and useful.

Seven customers were given **advice on their CVs** with two receiving interview coaching. Four of these are known to have obtained employment within a short time period, with no feedback from the others.

School visits were reinstated with regular visits from the Cedars School. The pupils borrow books on a staff ticket and are controlled by the staff of the school. Throughout the year there were 375 children who visited the library from the Cedars School. Oakfield School also recommenced visits, with two visits occurring, comprising a total of 48 students and 11 staff members, with books borrowed by staff so as to support the interaction with literature, with the children.

Computer courses, as mentioned previously, were conducted using Learning Skills and initially funded by a Lottery grant. Subsequently Learning Skills has used the library facilities to run their own courses, with a total of 139 attendees during the year.

Other activities, as detailed above, have included the Christmas Fair (199 attendees); Easter Fair (173 attendees); 10th Anniversary celebrations (157 attendees including past and present volunteers); Dog's Trust presentation (10 attendees).

Volunteering at Low Fell Library

Low Fell Library has been fortunate to continue to be supported by an enthusiastic and hard-working team of volunteers. The library has offset those volunteers retiring due to personal reasons by adding a number of like-minded people over the past year. These people work behind the desk during their library shifts and some carry out more specialist tasks including social media, publicity and marketing, and general administration. We are extremely grateful to everyone who helps at the library, whether this is briefly or long-term.

New volunteers are eased into the library's processes and procedures, starting with an introductory meeting with two or three of the key officers, to discuss the skills, experience and interests the volunteer brings to the library, and how, when and where they can best be of assistance. An induction into the library (and Association) operation is provided, together with information on our standards, the service agreement with Gateshead Council, health and safety and safeguarding practices and procedures. Training on the Soprano (library book issuing) system is provided for volunteers working on the desk, and DBS clearance obtained for those whose role requires this.



After a few weeks the new volunteers have the opportunity to discuss, in confidence, any issues or concerns. The library holds regular meetings for all volunteers to attend, where strategic policy and operational issues are amongst the matters discussed and agreed.

Anyone who is interested in joining us to help in any way is asked to get in touch – we'd be very pleased to hear from you. Email lowfelllibrary@gateshead.gov.uk or talk to anyone on the library desk.

Governance

Low Fell Library Association operates under a constitution approved by the Charity Commission. The provision of a core, community library service is done in accordance with a service agreement with Gateshead Council and via a rent-free lease agreement for the building, the maintenance of which remains the responsibility of the Council.

The Association holds regular meetings with trustees (elected by the members at the Association's AGM) and members (volunteers), at which policy matters and other major decisions (such as agreeing the annual budget) are discussed and agreed. Trustee meetings are held on a six-week cycle with day to day management carried out by the officers, in accordance with policies and decisions that have been previously agreed by members and trustees. Advice from the Charity Commission, including on rules and regulations, guides trustees and the Council's Library Service provides advice and assistance in relation to the building fabric and library matters.

An 'Activities Group' of Association members meets on a regular basis to plan and oversee the programme of activities at the library and reports back to the trustees and the Association as a whole.



Finances

In addition to the donations of time and effort made by library volunteers, the operation of the library continues to require funding. Gateshead Council's contributions to the library running costs ceased in 2015, but various Government grants and donations have enabled the library to meet its bills and other spending commitments over the course of 2023/2024. These included monies from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Local Community Fund, enabling the library to run a range of activities during the year.

A steady inflow of funds is needed to plan for the future and enable the library to continue to function and as such, all donations – large and small – are welcome and will help with this.

Donations can be made via the 'donations' tubs on the library desk or via the library website. If you want to know more about the library's financial needs, or would like your donation to be used for a specific purpose, please ask to speak to the Chair (Frank Hindle).

Reserves policy

The Association maintains an unrestricted reserve equivalent to six months of core operating costs (this currently equates to a reserve of £7,500.00). If it becomes necessary to draw on this reserve, the trustees will urgently review the situation and identify potential actions that could be taken to rectify the position. This six month period ensures that there is time to either seek additional funding, or (if that is not possible) to wind up the Association in an orderly manner, meeting any obligations and commitments, were that to prove necessary.

Statement of accounts

This is attached as a separate document.

Business plan

The Association's three year business plan for the period 2016-2019 is now behind us and is in the process of review and revision in anticipation of a resumption of some sort of post-Covid normality.

In conclusion

After over eleven years' experience of running the library in Low Fell and developing an ongoing programme of events and activities, written and verbal feedback from users and residents continues to be extremely positive.

We are an enthusiastic group of volunteers, committed to improving the services and events offered by Low Fell Library. Our sincere thanks to all our partners and donors who have enabled us to achieve the outcomes described in this report, and who have put us in a healthy position in order to progress in the future. We appreciate and welcome all feedback and suggestions and look forward to the future continued success of Low Fell Library.

Low Fell Library Association

Registered Charity No. 1153726

**Financial Statements
for the Year Ended 31 March 2024**

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Notes to the Accounts	Pages 7 - 8

Charity Name: Low Fell Library Association

Charity No: 1153726

Registered Office:
710a Durham Road
Low Fell
Gateshead
Tyne and Wear
NE9 6HT

Trustees:
Frank Hindle (Chair and acting Treasurer)
Gillian Beauchamp (Vice-Chair)
Susan Le Jeune (Secretary)
Terence Wileman (Health and Safety Officer)
Alyson Barratt
Ross Brown (Vice Health & Safety Officer)
Brenda Buxton (to 1st November 2023)
June Hesslewood
Jennifer Johnson
Elsie Neville (to 24th July 2023)
Mike Nye (from 1st November 2023)
Janice Thomas (from 3rd April 2023)

Independent Examiner:
Darren Thompson
FutureSkills North East CIC
53 Kirkdale
Spennymoor
Co. Durham
DL16 6UH

Bankers:
Lloyds Bank PLC
17 Ellison Walk,
Gateshead,
Tyne and Wear
NE8 1BF

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT

Report to the Trustees	Low Fell Library Association (LFLA)
Charity No	1153726
On the accounts for period ended	31 March 2024
Set out on pages	5-8

Respective responsibilities of the Trustees and Examiner:

The Trustees of the charity are responsible for the preparation of accounts. They consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144 of the Charities Act 2011 and that an Independent Examination is needed. Having satisfied myself that the charity is not subject to audit under company law and is eligible for independent examination, it is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts (under section 145 of the 2001 Act.
- follow the procedure laid down in the General Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of the independent examiner's statement:

My examination was carried out in accordance with General Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from the Trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view,' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

Independent examiners statement:

In connection with my examination, no material matters have come to my attention which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- the accounts do not accord with such records; or
- the accounts do not comply with relevant accounting requirements under section 396 of the Companies Act 2006 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination; or
- the accounts have not been prepared in accordance with the Charities SORP (FRS102).

I have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



Darren Thompson
FutureSkills North East CIC
53 Kirkdale
Spennymoor
Co. Durham DL16 6UH

Date: 5th August 2024

Low Fell Library Association

Receipts and Payments Account 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024

	Notes	Restricted	Unrestricted	2024	2023
		£	£	£	£
Receipts					
Grants & Donations	4	-	861.00	861.00	12,172.00
LFLA Fundraising		-	2,616.00	2,616.00	3,912.00
Library Takings		-	3,949.00	3,949.00	2,143.00
Other Income		-	2,081.00	2,081.00	1,732.00
Bank Interest		-	583.00	583.00	92.00
Total Receipts		-	10,090.00	10,090.00	20,051.00
Payments					
Library & Community Events		4,634.00	519.00	5,153.00	1,785.00
Library Running Costs	5	541.00	9,079.00	9,620.00	12,279.00
Office & General Expenses	6	313.00	175.00	488.00	496.00
Volunteer Costs		-	34.00	34.00	71.00
Governance costs	7	-	778.00	778.00	835.00
Donations		-	76.00	76.00	149.00
Miscellaneous		746.00	266.00	1,012.00	205.00
Total payments		6,234.00	10,927.00	17,161.00	15,820.00
Surplus/Deficit for the period		(6,234.00)	(837.00)	(7,071.00)	4,231.00
Total funds brought forward 1st April 2023:		10,000.00	45,749.00	55,749.00	51,518.00
Transfer between funds:		-	-	-	-
Total funds carried forward 31st March 2024:		3,766.00	44,912.00	48,678.00	55,749.00

**Statement of Assets and Liabilities
as at 31 March 2024**

		2024	2023
	Notes	£	£
Current assets:			
Cash at bank and in hand		48,678.00	55,749.00
Total current assets:	8	48,678.00	55,749.00
Current liabilities:			
Donation still to clear		43.00	-
Total current liabilities:		43.00	-
Net assets:		48,635.00	55,749.00
Represented by:			
Restricted reserves		3,766.00	10,000.00
Unrestricted reserves		44,869.00	45,749.00
Total funds:	9	48,635.00	55,749.00

The financial statements were approved by the following members of the Board of Trustees:

Signed: *D. De Jorne* Position: SECRETARY LFLA

Signed: *Hindl* Position: CHAIR

Low Fell Library Association

Notes to the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024

1	<p>These accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention with items recognised at cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant note(s) to these accounts.</p> <p>The accounts have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) – Charities SORP (FRS 102), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Charities Act 2011.</p>
2	<p>Low Fell Library Association is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, Charity No.1153726 registered on 9th September 2013. The organisation is governed by a Board of Trustees. The organisation has no paid staff, the library is operated by a team of volunteers.</p>
3	<p><i>Corporation Tax:</i></p> <p>The charity is exempt from tax on income and gains falling within section 505 of the Taxes Act 1988 or section 252 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 to the extent that these are applied to its charitable objectives.</p>
4	<p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations to the charity - £742.00 • Donations received on behalf of other charities - £119.00
5	<p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilities - £7,461.00 • Repairs and renewals - £541.00 • General running costs - £1,618.00
6	<p>This includes items such as publicity, furnishings, and small items of equipment.</p>
7	<p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPL PRS - £13.00 • ICO - £35.00 • Gateshead Council - £69.00 • Accountancy costs - £473.00 • Insurance - £157.00 • Fundraising - £31.00

8	<p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash at bank and in hand as at 31st March 2024 - £48,678.00. This is held in a range of accounts, including a current account, savings accounts, and a cash float.
9	<p>This includes:</p> <p><i>Unrestricted reserves:</i> Money available to the charity. The charity has a reserves policy which sets out a commitment to maintaining reserves that are sufficient to meet the anticipated operating costs for a period required to give notice on any lease or service level agreements that the charity has entered into.</p> <p><i>Restricted reserves:</i> Money available to the charity for a specific purpose as agreed with the funder.</p>