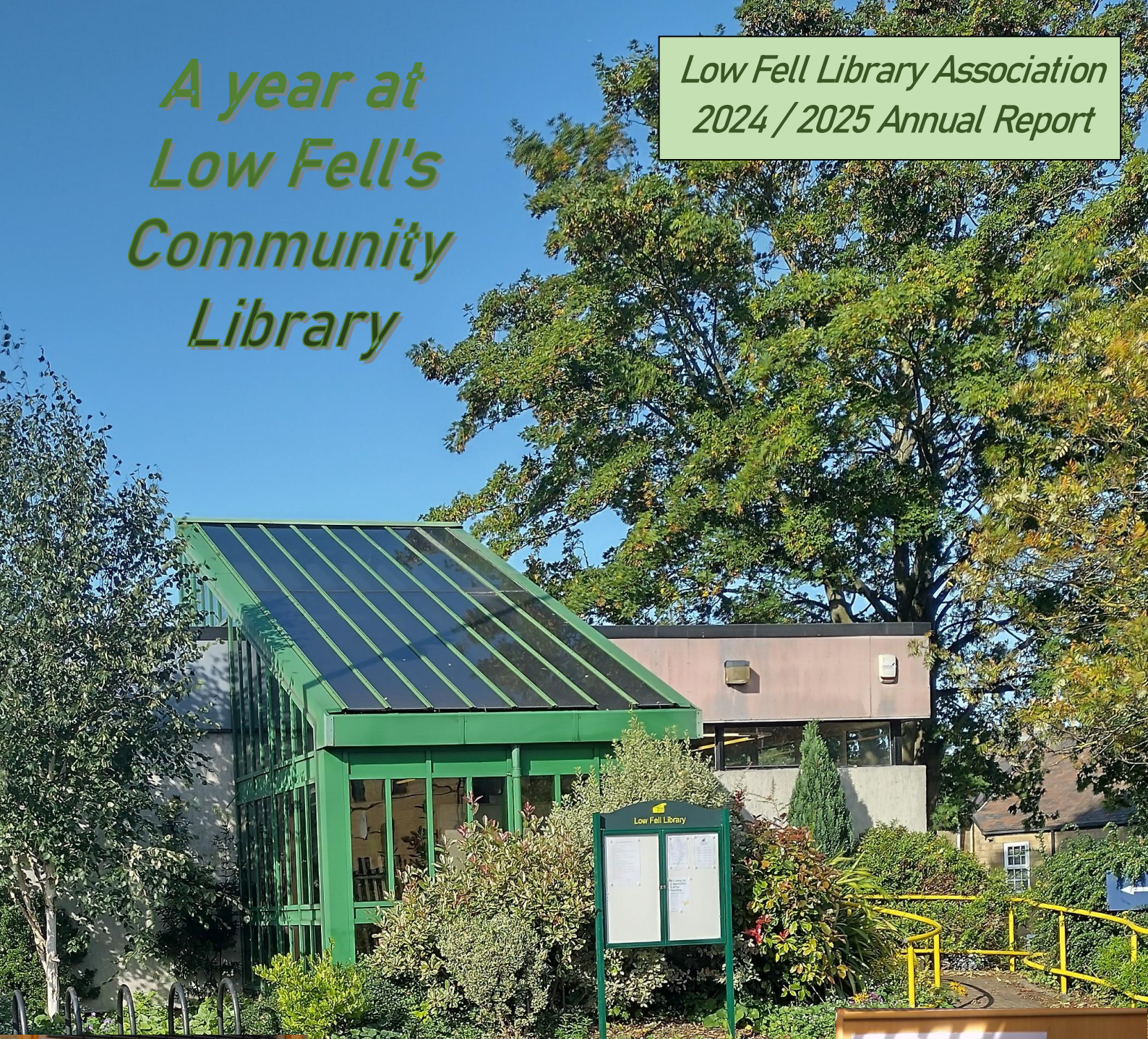


A year at Low Fell's Community Library

Low Fell Library Association
2024 / 2025 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 2024-2025

Introduction from the Chair

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

2024/2025 has seen a normal year of library operations, with a full programme of activities across the twelve months; these are described in more detail below.

The library remains affected by the energy and cost of living crisis, with gas and electricity bills over the winter of 2024/25 continuing to have a noticeable effect on the library finances. The library continues to be a designated Warm Welcome place, providing a location for anyone needing this facility, in addition to the more usual book lending and computer use.

During the year the library saw the unexpected passing of two volunteers, Mike Nye and Mariam Dunlop, both sadly missed.

As ever, many thanks are due to all the volunteers and trustees who give so much time and energy to running the library, so 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 love the year coming to the library, it's so cosy!

Children really enjoy Rhyme Time sessions, 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, 2024 / 2025

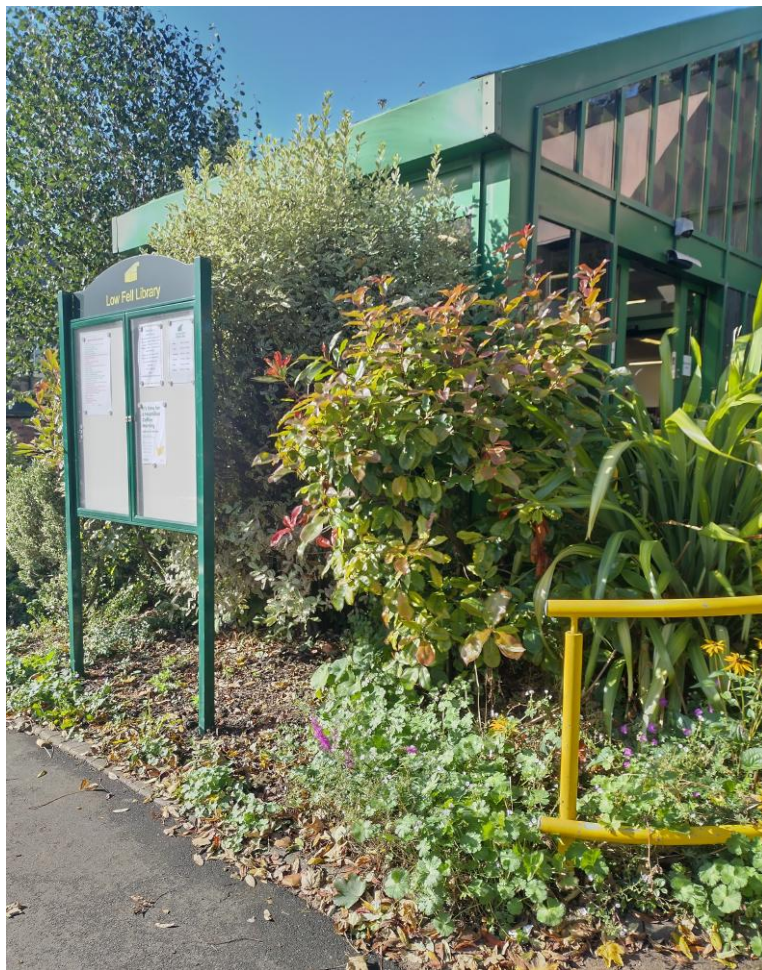
Introduction

In 2024/25 the library had a full programme of events and activities over the course of the year.

The number of Rhyme Time sessions has continued with five sessions taking place each week, on Mondays, Tuesdays (two sessions), Thursdays and Fridays. Knit and Natter sessions have been continuing on a Wednesday morning. The University of the Third Age (U3A) holds monthly reading group meetings in the library and the Dickens Fellowship also meets once a month.

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.

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) and in the foyer (batteries, printer cartridges).



Our customers' experiences

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 2024 / 2025:

In April 2024 the library held two children's craft sessions during the Easter holidays and a series of eight beginners' computer classes commenced at the end of the month, running into June 2024. These covered a range of basic computer / IT skills and related aspects of being online. These were run by Gateshead Council's Learning Skills and were generally well attended.

Between April and August 2024, the library hosted regular (weekly) sessions relating to children's wellbeing and autism.

On May 2nd 2024, the library served as a polling station for the local elections, opening between 7.00 am and 10.00 pm.



In addition, in May the community room hosted an art exhibition by local artist, David Coburn.

In early July the library hosted a well-attended talk by the local author, Susan Willis, whose quirky crime books are now available to borrow from the library.



Later in the month, there were two children's craft sessions held in the community room and the summer reading challenge (for children aged between 2 and 11) started, with two challenges – one run by Gateshead Council and one by LFLA.

Two adult craft sessions also took place in the community room at the end of July and in August 2024.

At the end of August a further two children's craft sessions were run in the library and were well attended and thoroughly enjoyed.

The Macmillan Coffee Morning, held at the end of September, raised £165.00 for the charity, with a lot of home baked cakes and savoury items on sale in the library.



The library sold poppies and other Remembrance Day items during October and the end of the month saw the usual Halloween displays and a half-term children's craft session.



Computer classes recommenced in November 2024, with five sessions stretching into early December.

The annual Christmas Fair took place in the library in late November 2024 and was very well attended, with activities for children, refreshments tables, stalls selling crafts, bric a brac, plants and books as well as Santa and his helper providing a focal point for the children.



December 2024 saw an adult wreath-making craft session taking place in the library, which was well attended and very much appreciated by those participating.

In January 2025 the library's community started to be used by the Purple Bear Music Group, with weekly sessions enabling children to experience making music by using a range of musical instruments.



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 and provides a small revenue stream.
- Informal tables for meetings and tutoring are available and are regularly used.
- Staff kindly continue 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 free of charge thanks to a grant supporting the 'Warm Welcome' initiative.
- Recycling facilities are provided for batteries and printer cartridges.
- NHS hearing aid batteries are provided free of charge.
- The library provides work experience for students from local schools and they contribute a range of skills, including (right) developing bookmarks for the children's books section of the library.



Library usage statistics for 2024 / 2025:

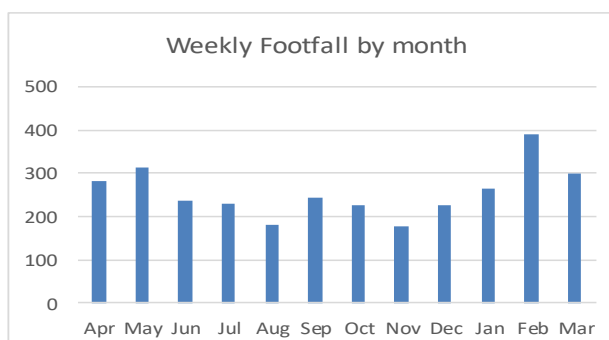
The following information provides a snapshot of the usage statistics for 2024 / 2025 (including comparisons with the previous year):

	2024 / 2025	2023 / 2024
Total hours during the year when the library was open	1936	1690
Mean weekly footfall	255.9	276.3
Mean numbers of active borrowers	143	149
Mean numbers of books borrowed in the year	642.1	656
Mean time in minutes, for each computer use, per month	75	81
Mean new members per month	15	14
Mean numbers of Rhyme Time attendees per month	157	170

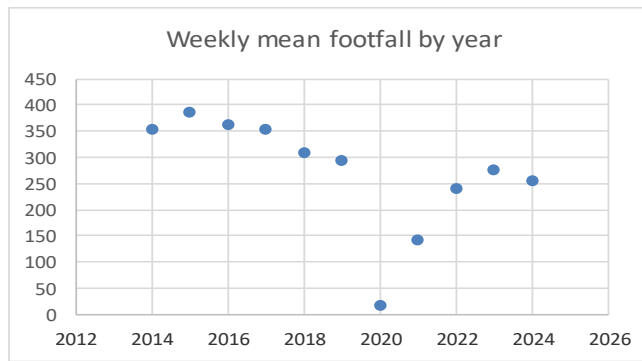
Footfall

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 2024/25 are shown below. The donation of magazines to the library for public use has been seen to have generated some additional interest in visits to the library. Numbers were, as usual, higher in the winter months. In accordance with the ethos of the 'Warm Welcome' 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, albeit with a slight decline in 2024/25 compared with 2023/24.



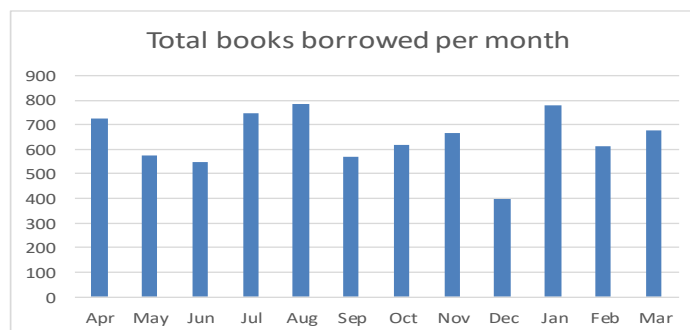
Post pandemic numbers appear to have stabilised and are, on average, some 25% down on pre-pandemic footfall. This reflects the sort of levels experienced by other libraries regionally and nationally. Overall, we still maintain a strong and loyal customer base. Oakfield school has made one visit (in February 2025), with more planned, and Cedars school pupils and staff are regular visitors

Borrowing of books

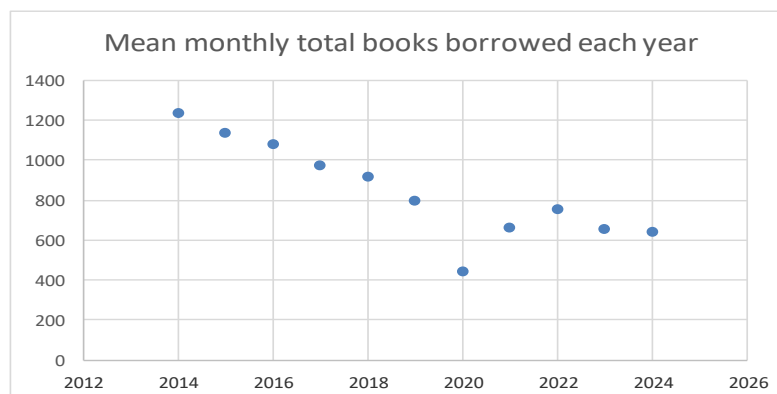
The information provided in the graph below is based on a monthly report provided by Gateshead Central Library, detailing the books borrowed throughout the month.

As usual, the number of books borrowed peaked in the summer months, possibly due to the Summer Reading Challenge, but levels have also been high in the early part of 2025 and it is to be hoped that this trend will continue. 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:



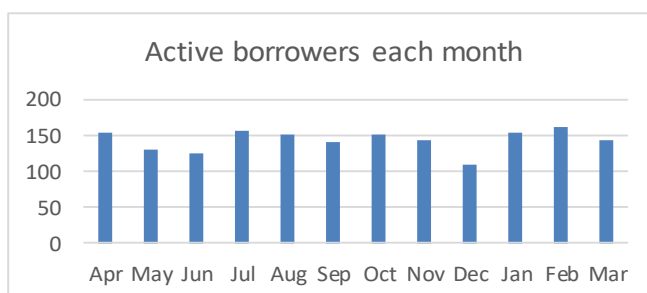
Average numbers of books borrowed monthly, year on year:



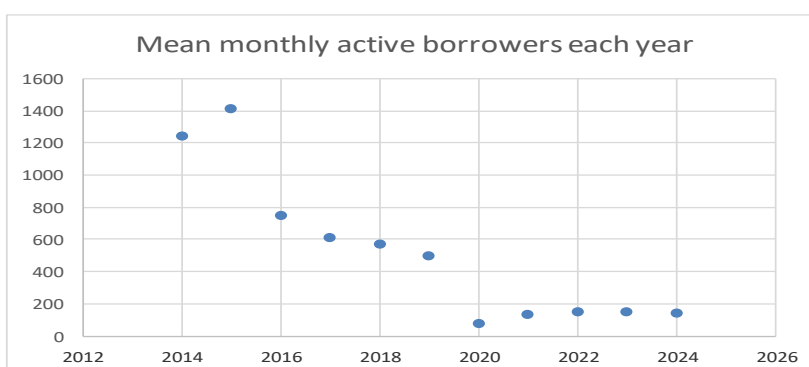
Whilst there has been a recovery from the effects of Covid, the increase in borrowing over previous years now seems to have levelled off.

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 while borrowing in the summer months is likely to be improved by the Summer Reading Challenge, levels are broadly similar across much of the remainder of the year.



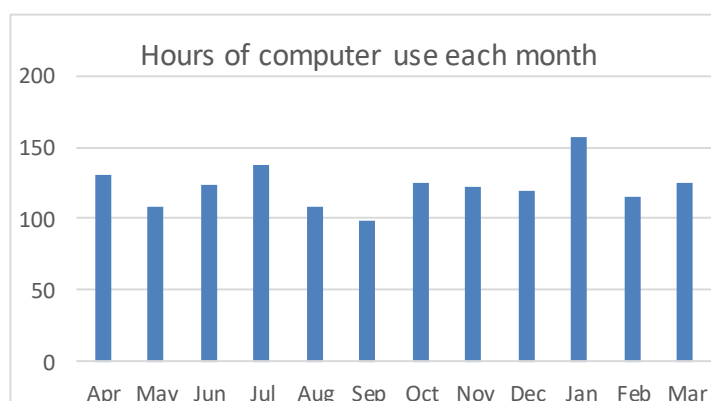
The monthly trend, year on year, is shown in the graph below:



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

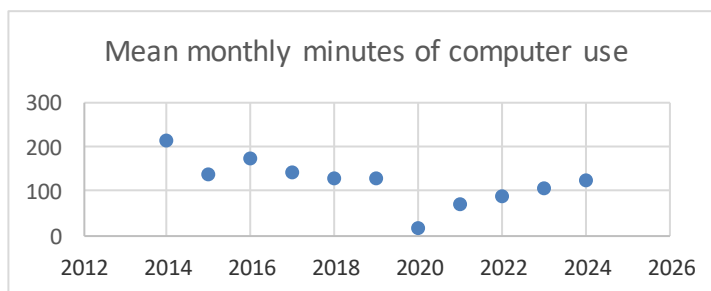
Public Computer utilisation

During 2024/25, all five public computers have been in use. The information below is based on the total hours of usage of all five of the public computers, in each month during the year, as recorded on the sign-in sheets.

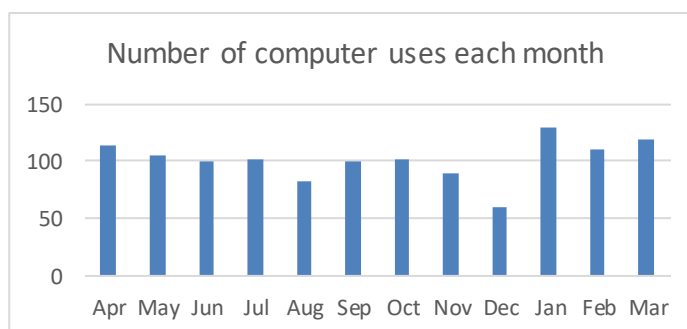


The provision of free WiFi also encourages people with their own computers or tablets to use the library. The graph below demonstrates that library computer usage continues to improve. The time seems to be split between customers staying for several hours and those who call in for a few minutes, mainly for printing documents. There is also a demand for printing from the use of a memory stick as well as from mobile phones, via email and the staff computers are used where necessary to support these requests.

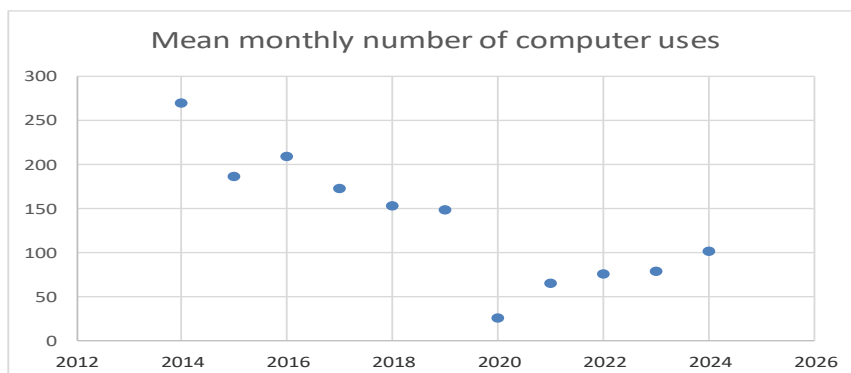
The average time (in minutes) of each computer use per month is shown below:



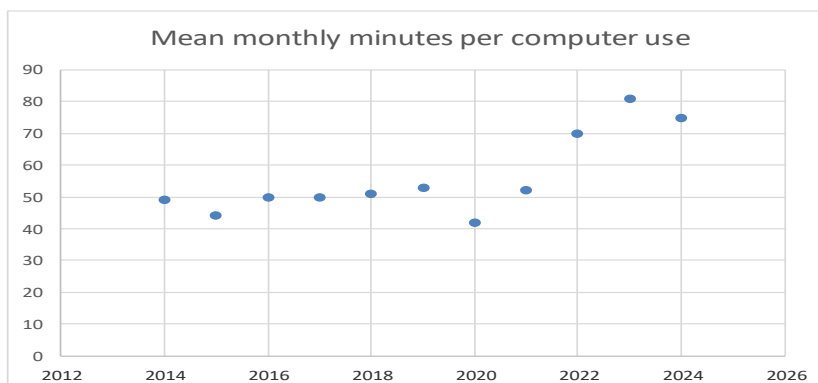
Looking at the number of computer uses in each month throughout the year (see below), the winter months (with the exception of December, when library opening is reduced) showed an increased level of use, possibly as a result of the 'Warm Welcome' initiative.



The graph below shows that the trend for the average number of uses of the public computers, per month, has continued to improve, despite people being likely to have computing facilities at home. The cost of printer ink, or lack of any home printer, is often given as the reason for use of public computers and the library printer.



The average time spent using public computers has stabilised in recent years, as shown in the graph below.

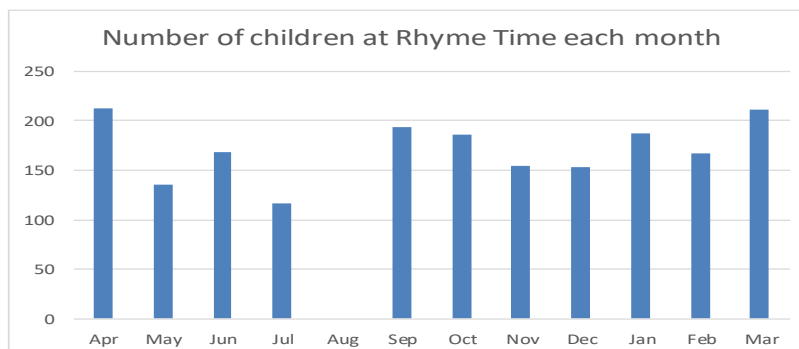


Children in Rhyme Time

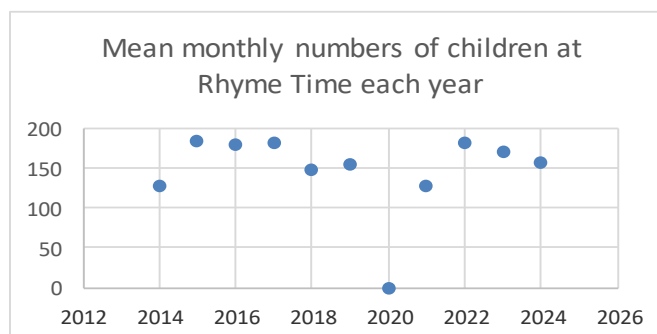
The graph below shows the total number of children attending each month, based on the records for all sessions of Rhyme Time held each week.

There are no Rhyme Time sessions in August to give the hard-working volunteers a well-deserved break! While December is traditionally a poor month, given the closure for Christmas and other demands on parents' time, in 2024 the drop in numbers for that month was less than in previous years.

The library has, for the most part, run five sessions per week, with only occasional weeks when staffing issues or library events have reduced the number of sessions.



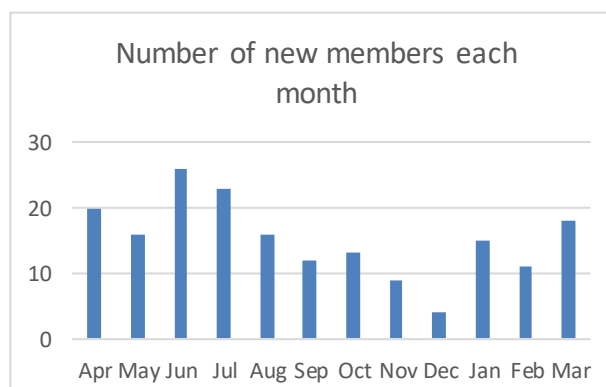
The number of children attending Rhyme Time has returned to pre-Covid levels, as shown by the graph below, albeit with a slight decline in numbers over the past two years.

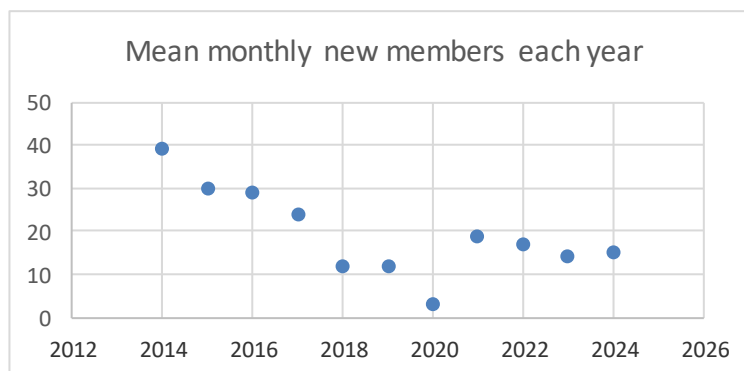


New library members

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.

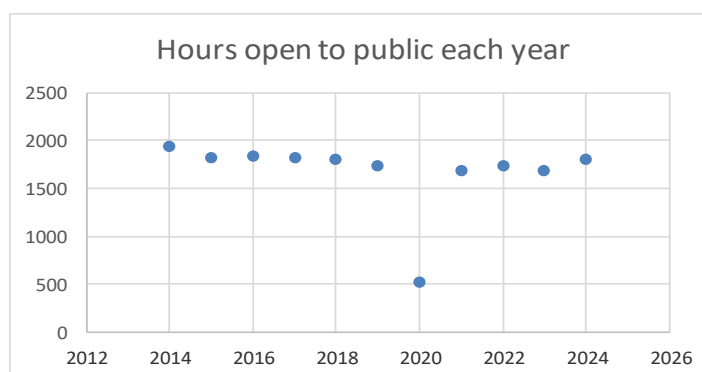
There was a steady influx of new members throughout the year. The spike in the summer months is probably as a result of the Summer Reading Challenge, encouraging more younger readers to join the library. Following the post-Covid spike in new members, the average yearly numbers are relatively steady and slightly up on 2023.





Hours when the library is open

In 2024/25, the library was open for a total of 1,807.5 hours, the highest number since Covid. There were only a couple of small closures, largely as a result of staff unavailability / works to the building.



Other information

Craft sessions for children during the various school holidays were funded by a Lottery grant, and generally well attended. The total number of children attending these throughout the year was 136, which is comparable with the previous year's number (143).

Adult craft sessions were also held during the year, making Christmas wreaths, Japanese purses and beadwork brooches. These also proved popular.

Work experience has continued, with four students during the year, one each from the Lord Lawson Academy, St Thomas More Academy, Emmanuel College and Cardinal Hume Catholic School. Feedback from these students indicated that they were excellently supported through the process by the volunteers, and that the students also found the experience both rewarding and useful.

Some nine customers were given **advice on their CVs** with five 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 continued, with regular visits from the Cedars School. The pupils borrow books on a staff ticket and are controlled by the staff from the school. Throughout the year there were 303 children who visited the library from the Cedars School. Oakfield School also visited the library, with 44 children attending, and books borrowed by staff so as to support the interaction with literature and current projects, 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 56 attendees during the year (reflecting a reduced number of courses in comparison with previous years).

Other activities, as detailed above, have included the Easter Fair (173 attendees); Christmas Fair (139 attendees); and the Susan Willis author event (25+ 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 can bring to the library, and how, when and where they can best be of assistance.

An induction into the library (and Association's) 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.

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 2024/2025. 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

Following confirmation of further investment in our premises by Gateshead Council, in 2025 / 26, we anticipate completing an updated business plan in mid or late 2026.

In conclusion

With more than twelve years' experience of running the library in Low Fell and developing an ongoing programme of events and activities, the 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 2025**

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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)
June Hesslewood
Jennifer Johnson
Mike Nye (To 14th December 2024)
Janice Thomas (To 26th November 2024)
Eileen Donnelly (From 6th November 2024)

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

Bankers:
Lloyds Bank PLC
11-12 The Shopping Village
Kingsway
Team Valley Trading Estate
Gateshead
Tyne and Wear
NE11 0EN

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT

Report to the Trustees	Low Fell Library Association (LFLA)
Charity No	1153726
On the accounts for period ended	31 March 2025
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: 3rd September 2025

Low Fell Library Association

Receipts and Payments Account 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025

	Notes	Restricted	Unrestricted	2025	2024
		£	£	£	£
Receipts					
Grants & Donations	4	1,106.00	20,821.00	21,927.00	861.00
LFLA Fundraising		-	3,530.00	3,530.00	2,616.00
Library Takings		-	4,217.00	4,217.00	3,949.00
Other Income		-	2,109.00	2,109.00	2,081.00
Bank Interest		-	1,327.00	1,327.00	583.00
Total Receipts		1,106.00	32,004.00	33,110.00	10,090.00
Payments					
Library & Community Events		1,384.00	873.00	2,257.00	5,153.00
Library Running Costs	5	500.00	14,676.00	15,176.00	9,620.00
Office & General Expenses	6	1,450.00	2,383.00	3,833.00	488.00
Volunteer Costs		-	79.00	79.00	34.00
Governance costs	7	-	787.00	787.00	778.00
Donations		99.00	130.00	229.00	76.00
Miscellaneous		-	69.00	69.00	1,012.00
Total payments		3,433.00	18,997.00	22,430.00	17,161.00
Surplus/Deficit for the period		(2,327.00)	13,007.00	10,680.00	(7,071.00)
Total funds brought forward 1st April 2024:		3,766.00	44,912.00	48,678.00	55,749.00
Transfer between funds:		(889.00)	889.00	-	-
Total funds carried forward 31st March 2025:		550.00	58,808.00	59,358.00	48,678.00

Statement of Assets and Liabilities as at 31 March 2025

		2025	2024
	Notes	£	£
Current assets:			
Cash at bank and at hand		59,358.00	48,678.00
Income received still to be banked		12.00	-
Total current assets:	8	59,370.00	48,678.00
Current liabilities:			
		-	43.00
Total current liabilities:		-	43.00
Net assets:		59,370.00	48,635.00
Represented by:			
Restricted reserves		550.00	3,766.00
Unrestricted reserves		58,820.00	44,869.00
Total funds:	9	59,370.00	48,635.00

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

Signed: *D. de Jure* Position: SECRETARY

Signed: *g. Hink* Position: CHAIR

Low Fell Library Association

Notes to the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2025

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 - £20,821.00 • Donations received on behalf of other charities - £56.00 • Gateshead Council Local Community Fund - £550.00 • Gateshead Council Warm Spaces Grant - £500.00
5	<p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilities - £6,601.00 • General running costs - £3,584.00 • Cleaning costs - £4,991.00
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"> • Governance - £142.00 • Accountancy costs - £488.00 • Insurance - £157.00

8	<p>This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash at bank, in hand and income to be banked as at 31st March 2025 - £59,370.00. This is held in a range of accounts, including a current account, savings accounts, and cash floats.
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>