

The impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has made 2020 / 2021 a challenging year for Suffolk Libraries, as it has for many organisations. Libraries were forced to close towards the end of March 2020, and they remained closed throughout the whole of quarter 1, reopening again to deliver limited services from around the start of July. During quarters 2, 3 and 4, the services provided by Kesgrave Library varied depending on the infection rates. Other than a short period in September and October when limited browsing was permitted, book borrowing has mostly been on a 'select and collect' basis, whereby customers contact the library to request certain types of book and staff choose books for them. Libraries were forced to close again at the start of 2021 but reopened in February to provide the select and collect service.

Due to the pandemic, no events or activities took place in the library during 2020 / 2021. This is particularly frustrating as it has been an area of success for the library over the last few years. In 2019 / 2020 there were 10,278 attendees at 342 events and activities.

Quarter	Visitors					
	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Q1	10453	11046	11471	10623	13848	0
Q2	15279	16345	16058	16893	17032	2070
Q3	10149	11366	11033	11658	11698	9421
Q4	11159	10482	10580	10403	8743	4388

	Book Issues					
	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
	9536	15519	16250	17487	17752	0
	11299	19808	21935	22293	22475	5619
	10338	14856	15640	16223	17235	6701
	11545	15657	16050	18147	17354	2513

Avg.	11760	12310	12286	12394	12830	3970
Totals	47040	49239	49142	49577	51321	15879

10680	16460	17469	18538	18704	3708
42718	65840	69875	74150	74816	14833

The figures highlight the impact that covid has had on the library service during the year. The library was closed for around four months of the year, and when it has been open, it has been delivering a significantly restricted service. The library has been operating with reduced opening hours due to the additional tasks that need to be carried out when the library is closed, such as cleaning, organising quarantined books and selecting books for customers.

In line with the lifting of restrictions, Kesgrave Library will be reintroducing limited browsing from 12th April, and as restrictions are hopefully relaxed further, events and activities will be reintroduced.

Adapting to the situation

Suffolk Lifeline

When libraries were first forced to close towards the end of March 2020, Suffolk Libraries staff quickly adapted to new ways of supporting their communities. A new phone service was launched – Suffolk Lifeline – whereby library staff phone up customers – focussing primarily on people who are older or who they knew may be particularly isolated or lonely - to check on their wellbeing and have a general chat. During the first lockdown, the Kesgrave Library manager was calling between 20 and 25 people regularly, and other staff were also calling some customers. The manager continued to call one or two customers beyond the first lockdown who she identified as being particularly isolated and lonely. Here's a selection of Kesgrave staff reports of the calls that they made:

“Customer had phoned the library when she found out we were closing; was quite upset we were closing for foreseeable future. She mentioned to another staff member she was feeling lonely. I rang her and we had a

general chat. She mentioned the difficulties she had been having getting prescriptions for her husband, but it was being sorted. I asked if she would like me to ring each week and she said yes. Very pleased I had taken the time to ring.”

“Regular customer with underlying medical conditions. Wanted to check she was ok. Very pleased to hear from me. We talked through when the books were due back and what I was doing now the library was closed. To ring every week.”

“General chat and well-being check-up. Asked about the e-library in particular Pressreader, as would like a daily newspaper. Talked them through how to set this up. Chatted about what was I doing as the library was closed. When would we be open? To ring again when have an answer as to what sort of service we will be providing.”

“General chat and well-being chat. Praised Kesgrave Library and the role we have in the community. Said they were missing coming in. Asked what I was up to - was I working? Will ring again in few weeks.”

Engaging customers through Facebook

Staff also started to provide a range of content to customers through the library Facebook page, including the following:

- Filmed Wordplay sing-along sessions for children – two or three per week during periods of closure.
- Craft sessions – two per week during closure.
- Lego challenges – as many as six per week during closure.
- Regular quizzes – six per week during closure, with Friday’s quiz aimed at children.
- Wildlife Watch – five per week during closure. Customers invited to send in photos of wildlife and flowers they have seen on their daily walk.
- Storytime
- Short book reviews.
- Promotion of Suffolk Libraries digital services.
- Celebration of National Pet Month, inviting customers to share pictures of their pets

The first tables below shows the number of activities that Kesgrave Library provided through Facebook during each quarter. The second shows the number of daily engagements with the Kesgrave Library Facebook page.

Activity	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Wordplay	25	9	0	12	46
Craft	23	12	5	10	50
Lego	77	1	0	1	79
Quiz	63	0	0	0	63
Story	2	0	0	9	11
Other	1	0	1	1	3
Total	191	22	6	33	252

Engagement measure	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Average daily Engagement	41.2	10.28	4.49	17
Highest single daily engagement	175	87	56	58

Other activities

- Kesgrave Library Community Group has successfully bid for an East Suffolk Bounce Back grant to enable staff to resume their early years activities of Tot Rock, Baby Bounce and Story Time in the Community Centre for six months. This was applied for due to the lack of space in the library and the popularity of the sessions. The aim is to reduce the isolation that many families with young children are experiencing due to the pandemic. It is hoped to begin these in May depending on Government guidelines. The grant will also enable staff to run a couple of weekend fun afternoons using the Community Centre's outside space to encourage families back to reusing the library and making it part of their routine again.
- The Home Library Service has resumed with our volunteer visiting customers who are house bound and unable to visit the library to collect items for themselves.
- The manager was recently contacted by a long-standing customer to say that they were no longer able to use Kesgrave Library, as they had had a very bad fall and had moved into a care home a long way from Kesgrave. The manager organised for the Home Library from the nearest branch to the customer's care home to visit with a selection of books which will continue to happen on a monthly basis. The customer has recently contacted the library to thank them for organising this and to say how thrilled they were that they could still access the library and have a selection of new books delivered to them.
- Staff have recently begun an Instagram account which is proving popular with 106 followers in the first few weeks.

Conclusion

It has been a tough year for everybody and Kesgrave Library is no exception. However, the staff have worked hard to continue to deliver a valuable service to the community, even when libraries were closed. They are now looking forward to being able reintroduce services in the coming weeks and months.