



Leicestershire
County Council

CULTURE
LEICESTERSHIRE

ANNUAL REVIEW 2024-25



OUR SERVICES

Culture Leicestershire's Libraries, Heritage and Museums, Collections and Learning and Cultural Participation teams create space to spark imagination, celebrate communities and enhance wellbeing.

We use our network of venues, unique resources and valued partnerships with other cultural providers to work alongside communities to create cultural activity that inspires, shares stories and celebrates our heritage.

Our work helps deliver the strategic outcomes of Leicestershire County Council and, as an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), the "Let's Create" Strategy.

We believe taking part in cultural activity is key to a healthy and fulfilled life and are committed to widening opportunities for the people of Leicestershire to experience, shape and improve their cultural provision.

Collections and Learning

The Collections and Learning Service are responsible for making sure that the archive and museum collections are preserved, cared for and made accessible for people to use and enjoy. The Record Office looks after the written, printed, sound and photographic records of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, whilst the museum collections reflect the natural history of the county and the people who have made it their home since pre-historic times.

Creative Learning Services (CLS) provide library, museum and art collections, alongside workshops, resources and professional advice and guidance, for local schools, academies and home educators. Designed to foster a love of independent learning, and with a wealth of cultural resources that can be used outside our own venues, CLS enables us to engage young people with the whole of our cultural offer.



Cultural Participation

The Cultural Participation team develop a range of cultural projects targeting individuals and groups who face barriers in accessing our wider services or don't feel represented in what we currently offer. With an emphasis on co-creation, we support local people to explore and give voice to how culture is understood, presented and appreciated. Through flexible processes our communities shape how we as Culture Leicestershire deepen our professional knowledge, understanding and delivery of future services.

Enhancing individual and community wellbeing and happiness is at the heart of everything we do. We also encourage participants, if they desire, to follow their aspirations into other areas of activity. In doing so we help ensure everyone has access to high quality progressions routes through our Libraries, Museums, Adult Learning and partner organisations. We also support people to create their own groups or bespoke solutions.

Our wider aim is to help build cultural capital in Leicestershire and generate new community networks.



Two kings - one day

The Battle of Bosworth 22nd August 1485



Heritage and Museums

The Heritage and Museums team welcomes visitors across our five heritage sites; Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre, the 1620s House and Garden at Donington le Heath, Melton Carnegie Museum, Harborough Museum and Charnwood Museum.

These sites showcase the rich history of the county, the treasures of our collections and enable us to work with communities to share untold stories that are relevant and important to local people.

We deliver a programme of high-quality activities, events, temporary exhibitions and an award-winning schools programme. We have a dedicated team that develops our programme and sites to be accessible and relevant to our communities encouraging life-long learning and engagement with our sites.

We are an important tourism asset for the county as we reflect local community heritage and showcase our nationally and internationally significant stories.

Libraries

The Library Service operates 16 council-run libraries, three mobile libraries, and the library at HMP Gartree, alongside supporting 34 community-managed libraries across the county. All libraries provide free access to books, information, and public PCs, and deliver a broad programme of events and activities, including regular Wiggly Readers sessions in all council-run branches.

We continue to expand our digital offer, providing access to a wide range of online resources and an extensive digital library catalogue. Guided by our library service roadmap, we align our work with the Libraries Connected Universal Offers to support our strategic objectives.

Located at the heart of their communities, our libraries also provide space for local groups and organisations. They play an important role in promoting, supporting, and delivering the wider activities of Communities and Wellbeing Services, helping the Council achieve its strategic outcomes.



CULTURAL BLUEPRINT



Enhancing Wellbeing

Culture to You is a bespoke pilot programme giving people in Oadby and Wigston the opportunity to enjoy unique collections of art, museum artefacts and interactive activities in their own homes or in their local community. Culture To You is free to all our participants and is entirely focused on enhancing people’s wellbeing and happiness.

Our At Home offer is a volunteer delivered service aimed at individuals whose circumstances may prevent them from engaging with culture and heritage, in traditional ways. It allows vulnerable or isolated customers to borrow items from a varied range of high-quality original works of art and museum objects and specimens. As well as supporting customers to select the things that may spark their individual interests, our volunteers can provide much needed social contact and the chance to share fun and engaging creative activities.

Working with a number of different local partners our Community offer delivers the joy of art, heritage and culture into local community venues enabling participants to connect with friends and other local people in a culturally enriching and convenient way.

Both the Home and Community offers are built around three menu strands; Art to You, Activity to You and Reminiscence to You, encompassing stimulating objects and artworks, thought provoking and exciting activities and multi-sensory prompts for memory recall with all of these able to be combined in bespoke packages.

This year with over 700 people attending 39 community events together with 35 home clients and 166 loan packages delivered, Culture To You has made a lasting impact on communities in Oadby and Wigston.



“I really think this work is beneficial and an incredibly thoughtful effort made to meet people in our communities that have challenges that keep them from enjoying art like the rest of us.”



Inviting Communities to be involved

We have prioritised inviting communities to be involved in helping shape our services to be accessible, relevant, inclusive and meaningful through our Community Connectors Network, Cultural Youth Forum, project working groups and volunteering networks.

This year we have involved over 40 local people in strategic planning and decision making by co-creating our Cultural Blueprint and 2025-27 priorities, supporting the development of the Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-28 and sitting on our National Portfolio Organisation Board. Local people have also taken part in commissioning suppliers, bringing new perspectives and opinions.



Sparking Imagination

Libraries celebrated our first ever Early Years Festival in October. The Wiggly Readers Festival was a huge success with eight events being delivered by creative practitioners. These included dance sessions based on Julia Donaldson's 'Room on the Broom'; edible nature printmaking and 'Once upon a Whistle-Tot', a story-inspired mobile play village. Over 200 under-5s and their parents/carers took part in the festival, which also helped to raise the service's profile with partners, including the Family Learning Team who host storytime sessions in libraries, as well as with other services such as Family Help.



8
Events
Delivered

200
Under 5s
took part





Our Creative Learning Service team developed and piloted brand-new services for learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Funding from the NHS means that we are now able to offer book loans, artefacts and sensory resources, object explorer and sensory story sessions, advice for school librarians, reading cafes, sensory art collections and experimenting with art workshops.



Encouraging Reading

Summer Reading Challenge 2024 was 'Marvellous Makers' and 7,154 Leicestershire children participated, with 4,073 completing and receiving their certificate and medal. 17,704 items were borrowed during the challenge, plus 8,550 e-loans.

In our Community Managed Libraries 2,792 children took part and 62% completed the challenge.

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Leicestershire children participated

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33
school
assemblies
delivered

61
events took
place



Over 50 volunteer SRC champions from across the CML network attended four information and training sessions held at Kirby Muxloe library in May. These sessions proved successful not just in highlighting the forthcoming challenge, but in providing a forum for the volunteers to network and discuss best practice in their libraries. Between them, 33 school assemblies were delivered and 61 events took place, with over 700 children and families attending.





45,000
Books lent
to local
schools

Creative Learning Services have lent over 45,000 books to local schools and delivered a range of activities designed to encourage reading amongst young people. These included the '8 for 8' Book Challenge for year 8 pupils, celebrating World Book Day in March and our amazing 'Book Talking' sessions which are tailor made for individual class groups.



“

“When my volunteer has been to visit I feel a lot brighter, and I feel I can cope...I think that’s because I’m having to use the old brain again...we chat away like old friends even though she is much younger than me.”

92 year-old client



Our growing, volunteer-led, Home Library Service delivers books directly to people in their own homes who are unable to visit our library sites. It offers standard print, large print and audiobooks as well as E-books and other e-resources. Loans are available on a three-month basis with no overdue charges. The Home Library Service can be accessed by those who are unable to visit our library sites due to being temporarily or permanently housebound. In these circumstances the service can be a vital lifeline for both social contact and customers’ mental health.

49

volunteers

74

clients



Celebrating our Heritage

The Museum collections have been able to acquire an early 17th century gold, quartz and enamel pendant which was found by a metal detectorist in the Grimston area of Melton in 2021. This important jewel was reported by the finder to the Portable Antiquities Scheme and declared to be Treasure. The museum was able to acquire it via the Treasure Act thanks to generous funding from the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society and Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund.

The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland welcomed over two and half thousand visitors in the search rooms and produced nearly ten thousand original documents to help them with their research. We answered over eight and half thousand further enquiries relating to our collections.



(V.E. Day Celebrations, Glossop Street, Highfields, Leicester, May 1945)



Supporting the local economy

Creative Practitioners

Our National Portfolio Organisation funding has enabled us to offer 44 new freelance opportunities to local creative practitioners whose specialisms vary from performance, filmmaking, illustration, puppeteering, poetry, storytelling, creative writing, dance, visual and mosaic art.



“I was overwhelmed by so many amazing people who got involved with making this mural to represent the World of Work in Harborough in 2024. Some tried painting for the very first time. Others helped their friends and family to express their creativity. It really brought different sections of the community together and it will be a lasting legacy for years to come”.

Handmade Theatre Company
Amy Nicholson



Information and Digital

The Museum Collections teams created a video showcasing the collections at the Collections Resources Centre near Barrow upon Soar – one of the three major collections centres where we care for nearly a million museum artefacts and natural life specimens, and where visitors can come and see them, accompanied by our expert teams. Parts of the Collections Centre are inaccessible for people with limited mobility so the film goes some way to make the collections more accessible for everyone. You can view the film, and find out more about our work at <https://leicestershirecollections.org.uk/behind-the-scenes/a-day-in-the-life-of-the-collections-team>



Playing Our Part



Museum Development Midlands was launched in April 2024 and Culture Leicestershire is a delivery partner, alongside Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. Funded by Arts Council England, MDM delivers great opportunities for development, training and grants to museums and heritage organisations across the Midlands. Together with IGMT colleagues we've delivered a programme which empowers Midlands museums to thrive, achieved a smooth transition to the new Midlands wide organisation, including a new oversight board.



Leicestershire Libraries play an active role in Libraries Connected, our sector-support organisation. Libraries Connected provides a valuable forum to share experience and expertise with library services across the country, as well as giving access to training, development and networking opportunities and advocating for the role of libraries. This year we have shared our experience of community managed libraries, supporting early years development and the Home Library Service, we have also provided the vice-chair of the East Midlands group.

CELEBRATIONS



The libraries provided by county councils between 1922 and 1927 were financed almost entirely by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust (C.U.K.T.), whose aim was to bring rural inhabitants the benefits of free access to books. Andrew Carnegie was a Scottish/American industrialist who, during the final years of his life, donated \$350 million, funding thousands of public or 'free' libraries. We still have Loughborough's original Carnegie Library used by customers today.



Quorn Community Managed Library received The King's Award for Voluntary Service. This is the highest award a voluntary group can receive in the UK and is equivalent to an MBE. Representatives of the library will receive the award and certificate from the Lord-Lieutenant of Leicestershire Michael Kapur OBE and two volunteers from Quorn Library will attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace later in 2025.



Markfield CML were awarded for their efforts and contributions to volunteering at the Community Libraries Network 2024 Awards. The award recognised the difference that they make not just to their community library and local area, but to the wider libraries sector across England & Wales.

We won the Society for Museum Archaeology Annual Awards for Excellence – Exhibition Category for the Hallaton Helmet Gallery at Harborough Museum



THE HALLATON HELMET



SPOTLIGHT





“We were deeply impressed with both the exhibition and its leading-edge, richly researched approach to interpretation and the organisation-wide groundwork that had been done at Culture Leicestershire to create the conditions for the programming and community engagement to proceed with care and confidence.”

Richard Sandell

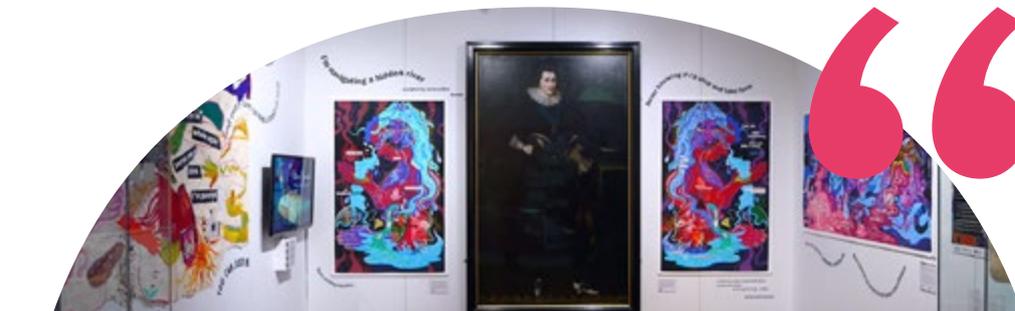
Co-Director,
Research Centre for
Museums and Galleries

Villiers Revealed

Arts Council funding enabled us to advance our commitment to sharing previously hidden or untold stories through our commissioning of Learning Curator Jon Sleight to explore LGBTQ+ connections within our museum collections and identify the potential to interpret them in new and different ways to allow us to connect with new audiences across the county.

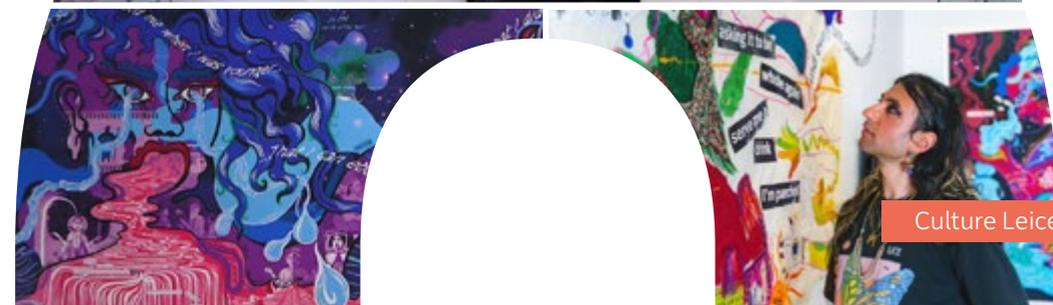
One of the pieces that immediately captured Jon’s eye was portrait of Georges Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, bought by Leicestershire County Council in 1938. We had the painting restored, reglazed, conservation cleaned and used it as the centre piece of the exhibition ‘Villiers Revealed’ at Melton Carnegie Museum. It allowed us to tell the story of this local man (born in Brooksby) who became one of the richest and most powerful men in Europe because of his relationship with King James I of England, VI of Scotland.

This portrait inspired a research and curatorial project which sparked dialogue, debate and reflection and has expanded the scope of how we understand the historical contributions of LGBTQ+ individuals locally and nationally. The exhibition has also meant that we have become part of the national Queer Heritage and Collections network.



“I have never been to a Museum before but this exhibition is groundbreaking, and I wanted to see it for myself”

Poet and artist participant



Cultural Blueprint

We completed our work to develop a Cultural Blueprint which describes our vision, ambition, priorities, and the way that we work. We have only been able to do this because of the time that local community representatives, volunteers, creative practitioners and stakeholders invested in helping to shape our future plans for the next two years.



Our eight priorities

- 1 Enhancing Wellbeing**

Launch an audience data strategy which will ensure we are measuring and evaluating wellbeing impact. Invest in volunteering and actively increase flexible participation. Champion the Home Library Service and Culture to You offer.
- 2 Inviting communities**

Support our Culture Leicestershire Board and Community Connectors network to champion, advocate, challenge and review our work. Continue to ensure that our network of community managed libraries remains effective and sustainable in delivering local library services.
- 3 Sparking Imagination**

Deliver our events and exhibitions programmes in Libraries and Heritage sites. Launch Creative Learning Services SEN cultural offer to young people in schools. Review and rationalise our cultural collections (Art Works and Art in Schools).
- 4 Encouraging Reading**

Provide modern, vibrant book collections in a variety of accessible formats to support reading for pleasure. Facilitate the Bookstart programme including universal book gifting at a baby's six-week health check. Invite all primary-aged children across Leicestershire to participate in the annual Summer Reading Challenge.
- 5 Celebrating our Heritage**

Retaining our Museum and Archive Services Accredited status and improving our collections facilities.
- 6 Supporting the Local Economy**

Continue to attract local visitors and tourists through Heritage and Library sites' displays and programming. Commission local creative practitioners to deliver high quality art and cultural activity.
- 7 Information and Digital**

Review our current digital inclusion support to develop opportunities to address customer need. Build on the implementation of a new library management system to explore new avenues for digital engagement with our communities.
- 8 Play our part in cultural landscape**

Retain our National Portfolio Organisation status and continue to fulfil our role as delivery partner for Museum Development Midlands.



My Jewellery My Story

We celebrate our heritage by supporting local people to tell stories which are important to them. The My Jewellery, My Story project was inspired by the Bronze Age Cossington necklace. Over 30 community groups and local organisations involving hundreds of people took part in artist led workshop sessions to share their personal connections to jewellery. It culminated in an exhibition at Charnwood Museum exploring people's memories, love, loss, wellbeing, myths and legends and treasured possessions. We showcased a giant community made necklace, a display of pieces from our World Culture Museum collection, digital storytelling films, gallery activities for children and families and a series of expert-led talks. Participants ranged from school children to crafting groups, university students to care home residents.

“

“Much of our valuable things are lost or broken because we have left everything behind when we left our families and fled our countries, but we still remember the stories. Now we are making new stories for our future because of this project.”

A young asylum seeker participant - Baca Charity



“

“It was an absolute pleasure to see ‘My Jewellery My Story’ by the talented Year 5 pupils of Cossington Primary School...I was blown away! The pupils’ designs brought ancient artefacts to life in extraordinary ways. Each piece showcased their artistic skills and deep understanding of history. Seeing how the children interpreted the past meaningfully and creatively was incredible. This exhibition is a shining example of how education, history and art can come together to inspire and amaze.”

Visit Britain Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS) assessor





Co-Creation Creative Expressions In Libraries Project

Local people help shape the stories we tell and how we tell them. Our bespoke Community Participation projects have involved 3650 participants in 170 workshops and events which contribute to project design, development and delivery.

Our Creative Expressions in Libraries projects have significantly enhanced and extended our library provision.



The Earl Shilton Intergenerational Library Project brought together a wonderful group of KS2 school children, and some amazing people aged over 50 who live in the local area. Adults and children alike created a fabric patch that reflected their connection to the community and shared some of the things that unite us whilst celebrating our differences. The squares have been brought together in a beautiful wiggly readers rug that can also hang in the library for all to enjoy.



The Wigston Library Multi-Sensory Project was a fantastic example of a successful co-creation partnership between pupils at Little Hill Primary School and creative practitioner Rachel Scanlon. Utilising an approach based on the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy the group created two big book multi-sensory resources that are now available for use in the library with the big books forming the basis for a new monthly sensory play session.

“I’ve never been able to get my child out of bed and to school very easily, however since the project started, every Wednesday he has leapt out of bed and practically ran to school.”
- parent of pupil involved in the Wigston SEND project.

5

projects

87

workshops/
events

1514

participants

Volunteering

We are proud to have 400 volunteers in our team this year who gifted us 21,718 hours of expertise, passion and support. Our roles continue to be diverse and unique and range from House Interpreters, where volunteers, sometimes dressed up in period costume, give guided tours of the 1620s House and Gardens, Archaeology Volunteers documenting and taking high quality photographs of the museum collections, befriending whilst taking Library books to people's homes and interpreters to enable more people to get involved in our services. Our commitment to promoting inclusive, flexible volunteering, which places wellbeing at the forefront is reflected in our new Culture Leicestershire Volunteering Roadmap. We launched the new Young People Volunteering Guidance supporting us to promote family volunteering and now young people are joining forces with their parents and grandparents.

400
volunteers

217,184
hours
volunteered

“My volunteer team are like my family. I help to put on a free and safe space for vulnerable and lonely people to come together each week, but it helps my mental health and wellbeing at the same time”

Friends Welcome Volunteer.
1620's House and Garden.

“I helped create the accessibility video for the Museum website so that people with disabilities like mine will feel more comfortable about visiting and can understand more about what to expect when they get there”

Go Learn Volunteer



Universities Partnership

Leicestershire Libraries are proud to be part of the Universities Partnership (DeMontfort University, University of Leicester, Loughborough University) which launched free access to their university libraries for Leicestershire residents in February.



Environmental



Fleckney Library secured £8k funding through the Rural Arts, Creative, Cultural, & Heritage Activities Grant. This money will fund new lighting throughout the library, greatly improving the library facilities and environment for the community and volunteer workforce.



Burbage CML have been awarded £17k VCSE funding. Following a successful bid for this government-backed fund they can go ahead with installing solar panels with battery storage to significantly reduce their utility costs.

Dynamism

Developing our approach to audience data across Culture Leicestershire has been a significant focus of activity this year. Working with external audience data specialists, Flying Geese, has allowed our service areas the space to take an in-depth look at how we currently understand our audiences, what data we gather now and the level of data expertise we have within Culture Leicestershire.

Understanding our strengths and weakness together with what strategic data questions and areas of insight we want to develop will enable us to better serve all our participants and target those communities and individuals that for many reasons don't currently use our services.

Stage 1 of the project setting out our strategic objectives, goals and broad implementation plan will be completed in the summer of 2025. This will be followed quickly by stage two of the project to deliver practical solutions across our cycle of data collection, analysis, management and data-based decision making.

PARTNERSHIPS

Arts Council England
Blaby District Council
Charnwood
Borough Council
Harborough
District Council
Leicester
City Council
Melton
Borough Council
North-West
Leicestershire
District Council
Rutland
County Council
ADHD Solutions
Support Group
Age UK
Anand Mangal
Ladies Group
Ancient Craft
Baca Loughborough
Belvoirdale
Primary School
Better Outdoors

The Book Trust
Brockhill
Primary School
Buzzing Roots
Charnwood Forest
Geopark
Coalville CAN
Community Action
Partnership
Countesthorpe Academy
Creative Leicestershire
Critchlow
& Kukkonen
Culture Club Melton
DeMontfort and Wigston
Rotary Club
Digital Culture Network
Dosti Leicester
East Midlands
Oral History Archive
Elliot Hall Community
Group
Forest Way
Primary School

Foxton Canal Museum
Foxton Primary School
GATE
(Gypsy and Traveller
Equality)
Go Getta Youth
Organisation
Go Learn! Leicestershire
Adult Learning
Greater Wigston
History Society
Greener Schools
Green Life Innovations
Harborough Woodland
Hallam Fields
Primary School
Heritage Volunteering
Group
Hijaz Trust
The Hub Club, NHS
Hugglescote and
Donington le Heath
Parish Council
Inspirate

Iveshead School

Leicester LGBTQ Centre
Youth Group

Leicester Museums
& Galleries

Leicestershire County
Council Children in Care

Leicestershire County
Council Environment team

Leicestershire County
Council, Learning
Difficulty Partnership
Board

Leicestershire County
Council Local Area
Coordinators

Leicestershire
County Council
Young Carers/Groups

Leicestershire
Family Hubs

Leicestershire
Partnership NHS Trust

Leicestershire
Shared Reading

Libraries Connected

Little Hill
Primary School

Longfield Academy

Loughborough College

Loughborough Library
Local Studies Volunteers
(LLSV)

Loughborough University

Maplewell Hall School

Melton Bid

MHA Aigburth,
Residential and
Dementia Care Home

Mulberry Court
Retirement Living

Museum Development

The National Forest
Company

Northern Pride

Oadby Youth Club

Pedestrian

Queer Coffee
Link Ups

The Reading Agency
Research England

Ridgeway
Primary School

Rotary club of Oadby

Thythorn Field
Primary School

School Development
Support Agency

Sikh Welfare Association

Sky UK

Social Prescribers
(internal / NHS)

St Simon and St Jude
Primary School

Thistly Meadow
Primary School

University of Leicester

University of Nottingham

VASL: Support for Carers

The Visitor Studies Group

Whatever it Takes

Wildlife Trust
Leicestershire & Rutland

Supporters

Market Harborough
Historical Society

The Museum of
Fox Hunting Trust

Friends of the
1620s House and Garden

Friends of
Melton Carnegie Museum

Friends of the Record
Office for Leicestershire,
Leicester and Rutland

Richard III Society

The Leicestershire
Archaeological and
Historical Society

FUNDING

Where does money come from?



Where do we spend the money?



PERFORMANCE

Visits to our venues

905,235

ROLLR
Document
Production

9,997

Museum and
Archive records
added to electronic
catalogue

7,437

Volunteer
hours

26,000

Number of
volunteers

400

Library Loans

2,533,501

Participants
in co-created
projects

3,650

in

24

Projects

Website views

914,800

Resources
delivered to
pupils and
teachers

69,446

Social media
followers

47,899

Library
Members

119,782

Children and
young people
taking part
in activities
and events
at our venues

31,269

Number of
workshops
generated through
NPO funded
activity

170

Museum
objects loaned
to other venues

237

Objects used
in temporary
exhibitions

450

Enquiries to the Museum
and Archive Collections

12,579

Archaeological
Archives
deposited

29

Home Library
Service
Clients

74



