



ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
22 JANUARY 2024

CREATIVE LEARNING SERVICES

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the purpose, performance and outcomes of Creative Learning Services (CLS).

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. CLS supports the following strategic outcomes, as part of the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26:

- a) Improved Opportunities - Through access to resources and services to schools proven to improve attainment, encourage learning for pleasure, foster creative learning environments, support the school workforce to achieve and allow children and young people to fulfil their potential regardless of their circumstances.

Reading and engagement with cultural activity is proven to improve mental health, wellbeing and reduce the need to access health care.

- b) Clean and Green - Through access to resources and workshops which allow schools to explore the challenge of climate change, the importance of biodiversity and the need for environmental awareness.
- c) Great Communities - Through access to museum learning and art workshops, including artefacts and artworks, which develops an understanding and appreciation of heritage and culture.

Background

3. CLS sits within the Communities and Wellbeing section of the Adults and Communities Department. CLS' focus is to provide children and young people in schools with access to a range of cultural learning opportunities, with the purpose of fostering a love of independent learning in pupils.
4. The service provides professional advice to schools in terms of library book stock management, working with art and museum objects, Continued Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and school librarians and promoting reading for

pleasure. It also offers workshops and programmes for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) pupils and Home Educators and is commissioned to deliver specialist advice and guidance on workshop-based learning to museums across the East and West Midlands.

5. CLS is a key delivery mechanism for the County Council's Libraries and Heritage Services to reach children and young people, in particular those in a school setting.
6. CLS provides learning and well-being resources to subscribing and pay-as-you go (PAYG) schools in Leicestershire, Leicester City, Rutland and surrounding counties. The digital offer can be accessed by schools nationally.
7. In 2020, CLS took the lead on the delivery of learning programmes to schools for Council's Libraries and Heritage Services. This approach enabled reductions and savings to be delivered as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), by removing duplication of functions across services. It also enables the Council's Libraries, Museums and Archive to meet statutory and/or accreditation requirements to provide access to a quality learning provision.
8. CLS has developed a responsive charging model which has minimised the cost of this provision to the authority, maximised access to the cultural assets the Council has in its care and ensures schools have access to a targeted and high-quality cultural learning provision, which is proven to drive attainment and improve child wellbeing and mental health.

Service offer

9. CLS provides a comprehensive offer for primary, secondary and special educational needs (SEN) schools which includes:
 - Museum and art workshops and activities using the County Council's collections;
 - Loans of original artefacts, artworks and library book stock;
 - Targeted library project resources;
 - Digital resources;
 - Whole school assemblies;
 - Reading and literacy workshops;
 - Programmes to support reading skills with parents and carers;
 - Bespoke reading and book challenges supported by author visits;
 - Staff CPD, covering reading culture, library advice and working with art and artefacts;
 - Bespoke tactile Touch Tiles and Held in the Hand resources.

Further information can be found on the service website www.creativelearning.org.uk.

10. This offer is accessed via an annual subscription which allows schools to tailor packages to meet their specific needs and budget. Core subscriptions range from £1,000 to £12,500 per school per annum. A PAYG option allows schools to add to a basic subscription, or 'buy' a more limited range of workshops, projects, programmes, advice and guidance as required.
11. The subscription model was established in 2016 and the whole offer, including charges, is reviewed on an annual basis. The school market is highly price sensitive

and the service works hard to maintain effective relationships with subscribing and non-subscribing schools to understand their changing needs and pressures, so the offer is constantly updated to best meet the priorities of schools and remain cost-effective.

12. The PAYG offer is particularly attractive to the many small primary schools (fewer than four classes) across the County, who can struggle to afford a full subscription.
13. CLS is integral to the delivery of the Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation funded programme of activity, especially 'Culture to You', which focusses on Oadby and Wigston as the County's only Levelling Up for Culture area.
14. CLS is also using NHS funding to pilot and evaluate provision for SEN schools and Designated Specialist Provision in mainstream schools.
15. Some aspects of CLS' work are core activities for Communities and Wellbeing, linked to statutory duties and/or accreditation, but cannot be charged for. These functions sit with CLS as this is where the expertise and resources are held. The relevant functions include:
 - Management of the Artworks collection, including loans to museums and galleries across Europe (museum accreditation);
 - Supports 'Looked After Children' service and provides resources and activities for Children and Wellbeing Service summer programme (corporate parenting);
 - Provides specialist research, consultation, recommendations, training and support to County Council museums to welcome families with SEND children (museum accreditation);
 - Delivers training and specialist advice for public library staff (statutory provision);
 - Specialist qualified children's librarians support the work of the County Council's public libraries (statutory provision);
 - Provides resources and activity for adults delivered through the Communities and Wellbeing Participation Team (Directorate priority);
 - Promotes public library services and reading to schools (statutory provision);
 - Provides the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and Museum Collections learning offer (accreditation requirement);
 - Manages the County Council's Art in Schools collection (formerly a corporate responsibility).

Performance

16. In April 2022, a new reportable performance measure was introduced for the Department - Local 17 "Number of attendances at CLS Workshops". Further information and measures of performance are detailed in below in paragraph 18 below.
17. In 2022/23, there were a total of 14,174 attendances at CLS Workshops (Local 17). Figures to the end of November 2023 show 9,433, a 38% increase on the previous year to date. By comparison attendance at school workshops provided across the five museum and heritage sites totalled 9,637 for 2022/23. These sites are also reporting an increase in school's attendance for 2023/24 of around 15%.

18. In addition, 2022/23 saw an increase in the number of workshops and resources delivered, the actual figures are shown below:
 - 77,650 books into schools and academies;
 - 900 project collections;
 - 400 hours of pupil workshops relating to reading/literacy and art;
 - 300 hours of museum learning workshops;
 - 100 hours of library advice;
 - 70 hours of professional development ;
 - 940 artefacts for work across the curriculum;
 - 240 original works of art into schools.
19. These services were delivered to over 68,000 pupils, students and staff and actual engagements were in excess of 100,000, due to multiple contacts throughout the year.
20. There are currently 104 subscribing schools and 32 regular PAYG customers. This represents 23.5% of all schools in Leicestershire and Leicester (576 schools total). Subscribing schools fluctuate year-on-year, but following a post-Covid pandemic drop, demand has largely recovered and remains consistent. What is more apparent is that schools need to maximise and clearly evidence the value of their subscription. CLS responds by offering support to schools on how best to tailor their subscriptions and when necessary staff work with schools to reduce their subscription banding, rather than lose the subscription entirely.
21. Engagement with CLS has been cited in OFSTED reports as being beneficial for learning outcomes and attainment.
22. There is no comparable alternative provision on the market and the current share of the total schools market, balances efficient use of available resources, including staffing against the income received . A significant increase in the number of subscribing schools would require investment in the infrastructure of the service, resulting in an increase in core costs as well as income.
23. Cost is the principal barrier to schools subscribing to the service, especially smaller primary schools, who find it difficult to prioritise this kind of curriculum support. Some schools have a lack of understanding of the benefits of this kind of resource and how they can use it to drive pupil achievement. Some schools prefer to purchase their own resources and see this as better value as they own the asset. However, in reality this can lead to resources becoming out of date and therefore less relevant quickly. All CLS resources are current, regularly refreshed and rigorously reviewed to ensure they are relevant and best meet the needs of schools.
24. CLS has achieved its 2023/24 income target of £344,000, despite increased pressure of school budgets The income target rises to £394,000 in 2024/25, in line with the MTFS. The service will seek to meet this substantial increase through a combination of revised subscriptions rates (from April 2024), additional subscribers and/or PAYG customers, commissioned work and continued spend efficiencies. The continued pressure on school budgets means there is a risk that schools do not continue to subscribe at existing levels. A reduction in the number of subscribing schools, or a reduction in the subscription banding, will directly impact income levels.

25. One of the best ways to understand the CLS offer is by viewing the information on the website and/or one of these short video clips. The following seven minute clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaYX-BPE18c&t=49s> outlines the offer for primary schools and this four minute clip <https://www.creativelearningservices.org.uk/whatschoolssay/> outlines the secondary school offer with feedback from one of the subscribing schools.
26. The service primarily promotes itself through the website, social media and word of mouth. In addition, CLS are commissioned to deliver training and advice through 'Reading Champions' conferences and these provide a valuable platform to promote the service to schools. These are primarily in the City and funded through 'Whatever It Takes'.

Loan of Artworks to Schools

27. As outlined above, access loans of artworks and workshops which support the use of art in the curriculum are part of the CLS subscription and PAYG offer. CLS offers access to over 1,000 original artworks, primarily from 20th and 21st centuries. Paintings, drawings, sculpture, prints and photographs are all represented in this unique resource.
28. Schools choosing the Artworks modules also receive free consultation and advice from the experienced Artworks Officer. CLS will deliver, collect and advise on hanging the works of art.
29. Some comments from participating schools on the value of this provision are: "The art depicts our local area and supports and enriches our history and geography curriculum"; "A diverse selection which opens the children's eye to different artworks and styles."
30. CLS has developed a range of digital/video sessions which can be booked by schools and support the delivery of National Curriculum, alongside the loans and in person workshops. This is a link to a taster session <https://youtu.be/CewCswnC7M>
31. There has been a small increase in take up of the art modules, following development of improved information on the website, work with schools and purchase of some new resources. The demand for workshops led by the Artworks Officer is continuing to increase. The most popular sessions over the previous year were 'Take Six Pictures', 'Aboriginal Art' and 'Take Flight', all of which use the collection in the classroom to give pupils direct access to the art alongside specialist knowledge.
32. Leicester University Museum Studies Department have subscribed to the service and are working with CLS to develop a module which would enable students to curate an exhibition and learn more about how the offer enhances learning in the classroom.

Resource Implications

33. CLS has a net revenue budget of £331,731, this includes an income target of £344,000 (rising to £394,000 in 2024/25). Costs are split between staffing, Book fund and operating costs (transport, IT, website). The service employs 11.1 full time equivalents, including the CLS manager.

34. Whilst CLS generates a significant amount of income it is not designed to be a traded service, as many elements of its activity cannot be charged for.
35. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Conclusions

36. CLS is a unique provision which has enabled the County Council to continue to support Leicestershire schools in providing children and young people with access to a rich variety of cultural assets and resources which enhances and extends their learning provision, drives attainment and improves wellbeing.
37. Alongside the core purpose of the service, the County Council is also able to ensure that valuable assets, such as the Artworks and Art in Schools collections, are appropriately managed, cared for and made accessible at minimal additional cost.

Background papers

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2022-26

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/about-the-council/council-plans/the-strategic-plan>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

38. None.

Equality Implications

39. There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report, but the CLS provides a valuable opportunity to promote the objectives of the Public Sector Equality Duty to which the Council is subject; this requires the Council to have regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not.

Human Rights Implications

40. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

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