

7.3 Community Experience - Activity Update

Report To:	Local Services Committee
Meeting Date:	Wednesday, 11 March 2026
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Purpose

To provide the Local Services Committee with an update on the activities, achievements, and risks/issues for the Community Experience group.

Recommendation

That the Local Services Committee:

- a. Receives and notes the Community Experience - Activity Update Report (Resolve # 2026-89).

Executive Summary

The Community Experience group delivers a wide range of services that connect, support, and engage our community, from customer solutions and libraries to animal welfare and leisure facilities.

This report provides an operational update, highlighting key achievements including:

- establishment of a district wide Customer Solutions team
- strong library programme participation
- successful dog rehoming and community education initiatives
- growth in leisure participation and programme delivery
- further activation of Council spaces.

Challenges such as facility capacity constraints and safety risks at the Animal Shelter are actively managed to ensure services remain safe, accessible, and effective.

Overall, the group continues to provide high quality, inclusive services that enhance wellbeing, participation, and community connection across the district.

Context

The Community Experience group consists of the following teams and activities:

- Customer Solutions
- Libraries
- Animal Shelter
- Sports and Events Centre
- Plaza Theatre
- Pools

Discussion

Customer Solutions

In January 2026, Council established the new Customer Solutions team following recent organisational changes. The purpose of this change was to strengthen our front-line service delivery and create a more consistent, solutions-focused experience for customers across the district.

Previously, customer-facing services operated as four separate site-based teams (Tokoroa, Putāruru, Tīrau Information Centre and Tokoroa Library). While each team delivered well locally, the structure limited flexibility across sites and created inconsistencies in service delivery.

Customer Solutions now operates as a single, district-wide team under one reporting line. Staff work across multiple locations, and there is no longer a distinction between Council, Library and Information Centre customer service functions. This provides greater resilience, improves knowledge sharing, and enables a more consistent customer experience regardless of location.

To support the breadth and complexity of information managed by the team, dedicated training and capability development has been embedded within the service model to ensure consistent, accurate and high-quality service delivery across all sites.

The shift is from a transactional, referral-based model where customer enquiries were often passed to other teams, towards an end-to-end approach focused on resolving matters at the first point of contact wherever possible.

The result is a more accessible, consistent and efficient service for our communities, supported by stronger internal capability and greater flexibility across sites. This is about operating as one Council team, delivering a seamless experience regardless of where or how a customer engages with us.

Libraries

The Libraries team continues to deliver a broad range of services across technology, literacy, community engagement and digital inclusion, while preparing for the return to the refurbished Community Hub and Library.

Technology and Service Improvements

RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) technology was introduced during the move to the temporary Leith Place location. This enables customers to self-issue multiple items simultaneously without barcode scanning, reducing queues and improving efficiency. Uptake has been strong, with staff continuing to support and guide customers in using the system.

Additional technology enhancements underway include:

- Introduction of the APNK/Monitor customer printing service
- Implementation of RFID wand technology to improve stock location and accuracy
- Expansion of the e-platform through the addition of BorrowBox, increasing access to e-books, audiobooks, newspapers and magazines.

These initiatives are focused on improving accessibility, efficiency and customer experience.

Services for Tamariki and Rangatahi

Weekly Toddler Time and Wriggle & Rhyme sessions continue for pre-school children, alongside after-school Code Club and Lego Club programmes. The S.T.A.R.S. school holiday activities and Summer Reading programme also remain key features of the children's offering.

The 2025-26 Summer Reading programme saw 109 tamariki register, with 80 completing the programme. This is a significant increase on the previous year (57 registrations, 30 completions) and

reflects increased outreach, targeted promotion and positive storytelling through Council's social media channels.

Future focus areas include:

- Growing attendance across children's programmes
- Engaging emergency services personnel as guest readers
- Participation in National Simultaneous Storytime

To provide greater balance across age groups, work has commenced on developing programming specifically for teens and adults at both Tokoroa and Putāruru libraries. This includes strengthening the existing Love Crafty Hands group, investigating a Teen Club format, exploring an adult Puzzle Club concept, and developing a refreshed adult Book Club model.

Services for Adults

Book-a-Librarian and digital support services continue to be delivered in-house. Weekly Justice of the Peace clinics operate in Tokoroa and Putāruru, along with Inland Revenue tax clinics (June - August), aligning with the annual income tax assessment period. Digi-Coach Initiative.

The Digi-Coach initiative, delivered in collaboration with the Digital Inclusion Alliance Aotearoa and supported by the Ministry of Social Development, will provide 12 weeks of free, drop-in digital support.

The Digi-Coach programme aims to enable all to participate in a digital world, by providing access to information and skills. It provides an opportunity for jobseekers to strengthen their digital skills while at the same time gaining workplace experience.

Digi-Coaches are employed by DIAA on a part-time basis (typically 20 hours a week, but this can be up to 30 hours a week) for a 13-week placement in a public library or other community organisation to run daily Digital Drop-in sessions for people in local communities who need help using their digital devices or online services.

This programme will sit beside the permanent digital support services currently offered at the library on an appointment-basis.

Collections and Building Readiness

Preparation for the return to the refurbished Tokoroa Library and Community Hub has included a strategic review of the collection to ensure it remains relevant, high circulating and responsive to community needs. Planning for relocation and operational readiness is underway.

Risks and Issues

Capacity constraints at the temporary Tokoroa Library location have limited the ability to host larger events, with one recent event attracting almost 90 attendees.

The refurbished building will provide improved facilities; however, space constraints require careful management of the physical collection. Ongoing deselection of outdated or underutilised material is necessary to ensure the collection remains balanced, diverse and aligned with community demand.

Animal Shelter

The Animal Shelter team comprises two staff members (one full-time, one part-time) and is supported by four regular volunteers. The team cares for all dogs entering the Shelter, providing feeding, exercise, health monitoring, kennel maintenance, and behaviour assessment. Dogs suitable for rehoming are advertised through social media and meet-and-greet sessions with prospective owners, and all are microchipped and desexed prior to leaving the shelter.

So far this year, 35 dogs have been successfully rehomed. Notable rehoming successes include Marbs, a marble-coloured mixed breed who spent four years at the Shelter before finding his forever home.

Shelter Mascot - Mama

Mama had been our longest-staying dog at the Shelter until she was adopted by our shelter manager. Due to her gentle personality, she has become an important part of the team in her role as Shelter Mascot, and has participated in community events, including the Putāruru and Tokoroa Santa Parades. Plans are underway for her to serve as a companion-reading dog at the libraries this year.



Volunteer and Community Engagement

Volunteers play a key role in supporting shelter operations, including fortnightly visits from Ministry of Social Development staff who assist with dog walking as part of their community involvement initiative.

The Shelter's operations are heavily supported by donations, which help reduce the cost to ratepayers. Generous contributions have come from:

- The Pet Pantry
- Laser Electrical
- Waipa Dairy Limited
- Masterpet
- PAWS

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- Genera LTD
 - Vetora
 - local farmers
 - private donors.

Community Education Initiatives

A highlight in 2025 was the Parvo Education Day held in partnership with Vetora and their suppliers. The campaign provided free vaccinations, deworming, and microchipping to community dogs, with 70 Parvo vaccinations administered and at least 56 dogs microchipped. The event also resulted in 27 dog registrations and 19 new owner accounts, and donations of food, blankets, and toys were collected for the Shelter. This initiative is likely to become an annual event.

The Shelter also leverages public events, such as the Santa Parades, to promote responsible pet ownership and raise awareness of rehoming opportunities, resulting in increased enquiries and several adoptions.

Risks and Issues

The primary risk to the Shelter continues to be confrontational interactions with owners of impounded dogs, which can pose safety concerns for staff and animals.

This is mitigated through staff training in conflict management, clear protocols for handling aggressive owners, adequate staffing during interactions, and the use of lone worker devices.

Sports and Events Centre

This financial year, the Sports and Events Centre has hosted approximately 14 large events and 22 regular bookings, alongside successful school holiday programmes. Social league participation remains strong, reflecting the community's engagement in sporting and recreational activities.

Multi-Purpose Gym

The Multi-Purpose Gym is now managed directly by Council. Previous annual income of \$8,279 has increased to \$12,806 year-to-date. Programme growth includes

- open play sessions for children aged 0-8
- tricking sessions transitioned in-house
- the launch of the Jump & Roll Mini Movers programme, which offers four gymnastics classes per week for kindy and preschool-aged children.

Play Trailer

'Playler the Trailer' has secured a number of early bookings, with a focus on increasing use by schools, community groups, and private hires. The Communications and Community Wellbeing teams are working together to promote Playler and ensure its presence at all large community events.

Future Focus Areas

Future focus areas include:

- improving the customer experience for large event bookings
- strengthening partnerships with schools and clubs through Sports Waikato
- developing clearer participation pathways for tamariki and rangatahi
- delivering one sport/play course per term to build confidence and support transition into clubs.

Plaza Theatre

The Plaza Theatre has hosted nine large events and five regular weekly bookings so far, this financial year, alongside ongoing monthly movie screenings.

A key development this year is the activation of the Plaza office space for use by wider Council staff, including the Community Wellbeing team. This enables staff who engage directly with the community to operate from the Plaza, supporting events, programmes, and initiatives on-site and bringing the facility to life as a vibrant community hub.

Work is ongoing with the Communications and Community Wellbeing teams to increase promotion and awareness of this versatile space.

Pools

The Pop-Up Pool continues to deliver Learn to Swim programmes four days per week, alongside morning walkers and rehabilitation sessions five times per week, and Aqua Care classes twice weekly.

Engagement with schools is planned for Term 2, focusing on water safety sessions that incorporate both in-water and dry-side activities.

A review of the 2025-26 summer season for both Putāruru and Tīrau pools is covered in a separate report.

Options

N/A

Linkage to Strategic Plan Priorities

Vision: Thriving Communities - our diverse people are healthy and well, with ample opportunities to support their quality of life.

Goal 2: More people participate in community activities and events than ever before.

Consultation (Internal and External)

No formal public consultation has been undertaken, as this report provides an operational update.

Internal consultation has occurred with relevant service leads across various Council teams and groups to ensure accuracy and alignment with current operational priorities.

The activation of the Plaza Theatre office space has been coordinated internally to support cross-team collaboration and improved community engagement.

External engagement referenced within this report includes partnerships with community organisations and agencies such as:

- Ministry of Social Development (Digi-Coach and volunteer initiatives)
- Digital Inclusion Alliance Aotearoa
- Vetora (Parvo Education Day)
- Sport Waikato
- local schools
- event hirers

Ongoing collaboration with sponsors, donors and volunteers continues to support delivery across the Animal Shelter and Leisure Services.

Financial Considerations

The activities outlined in this report are delivered within existing operational budgets. No additional unbudgeted expenditure is sought through this report.

Risks

Operational risks across the services outlined include:

- Capacity constraints at the temporary Tokoroa Library location, limiting the ability to host larger community events
- Ongoing management of physical collection size within the refurbished Tokoroa Library and Community Hub footprint
- Confrontational interactions at the Animal Shelter involving owners of impounded dogs
- Reliance on community donations to support aspects of Animal Shelter service delivery
- Sustaining participation levels across leisure programmes in a changing economic environment.

These risks are actively monitored and managed through operational planning and regular service reviews.

Significance & Engagement Policy

The matters and recommendation contained in this report do not trigger Council's Significance and Engagement Policy

Reference

Attachments

None