

# Director Recruitment at Explore York Libraries and Archives



# explore

## Libraries and Archives

V4 May 2026

Explore York Libraries and Archives Mutual Limited is registered in England and Wales under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, registered no IP032357. Explore is a not-for-profit organisation recognised as charitable by HMRC for tax purposes.

## CONTENTS

A message from the Chair of the Board of Directors.....	2
An Introduction to Explore York Libraries and Archives Mutual Limited.....	4
What we do (and why it matters).....	4
Our reach and results (2025–26).....	5
Our model and finances.....	6
Our strategy: secure the foundations, build the future.....	6
Our media channels.....	7
Our Governance.....	7
Our 'Objects' (purpose).....	7
The composition of the Board.....	8
After you join us.....	10
How to apply.....	11

## A message from the Chair of the Board of Directors

Dear Applicant

Thank you for your interest in joining the Board of Directors at Explore York Libraries and Archives Mutual Limited. As a Board member, you will have a unique opportunity to be part of our story, helping shape the future for libraries and archives in York.

Explore has a contract with City of York Council to provide the statutory public library and archive service for the city, with 15 libraries including York Explore – our flagship library and home of the City Archive – a mobile library, a home library service and 7 Reading Cafes. The City Archive tells the story of over 850 years of York's history, the most significant continuous civic record outside London.

Explore is also a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) delivering the [Let's Create strategy](#), supported by Arts Council England.

Explore is a different kind of public service – an independent organisation owned by our staff and our community members with a unique place in the City of York. With this in mind, we are looking for applicants who have the right blend of relevant skills and experience to take on the responsibilities of a Director and are also genuinely enthused by this unique opportunity.

We are always looking to diversify the Board, and we welcome applications from all sectors of the community. Please take the time to consider this Recruitment Pack, which sets out the legal duties of all Directors, as well as the specific skills or experience we are looking for in this recruitment round.

If you welcome a challenge, are inspired by our plans for the future and are ready to take on a Board role, then please do send in your application. If you have any questions before you apply, I would be happy to talk these through with you. You can contact me by emailing [chair@exploreYork.org.uk](mailto:chair@exploreYork.org.uk)



Rosemary Cook CBE  
Chair of the Board of Directors

If you have any questions about this pack, or need it in an accessible format, then please email Gillian Holmes, Secretary to Explore [gillian.holmes@exploreYork.org.uk](mailto:gillian.holmes@exploreYork.org.uk)

## An Introduction to Explore York Libraries and Archives Mutual Limited

Explore is a different kind of public service: a mutual owned by our staff and our community members. We are dedicated to enhancing lives in York in our trusted spaces; providing library, archive, learning, and creative activities; reflecting and developing a lively, inclusive community. We offer opportunities for people to read, meet, learn, imagine, create and belong.

Explore was formed in 2014 from the City of York Council libraries and archives service and is now co-owned by our staff and hundreds of community members. This model of community ownership shapes how we work and the decisions we make.

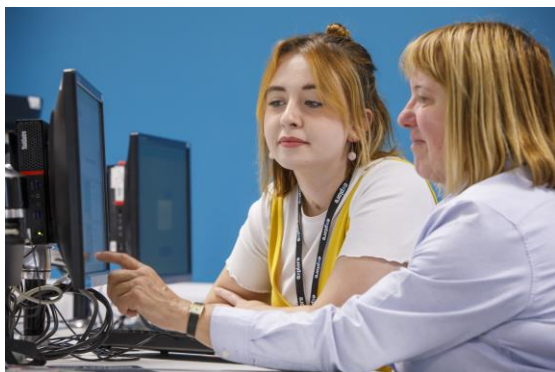
We operate across the city of York with a network of 15 libraries, including York Explore - home of the central library and the City Archive, three Explore centres (in Tang Hall, Acomb and Clifton), a mobile library, a home library service, and seven Reading Cafés. All provide social, creative and learning hubs in their local areas. Explore is part of the local community and plays an important cultural role across the city. We care about doing things well and making sure everyone feels welcome.

### What we do (and why it matters)



#### Reading, literacy and learning

Explore libraries champion the joy of reading for all ages, from rhyme times for under 5s and reading challenges for children, to book groups and author events for adults. We lend over 1.2 million physical and e-books each year demonstrating the continued relevance of libraries in the 21st century.



#### Information and digital inclusion

Our libraries provide free Wi-Fi and free public PCs and digital help for those who need it. In 2025-26 our users accessed over 47,000 free PC sessions, as well as targeted drop-ins with trusted partners.



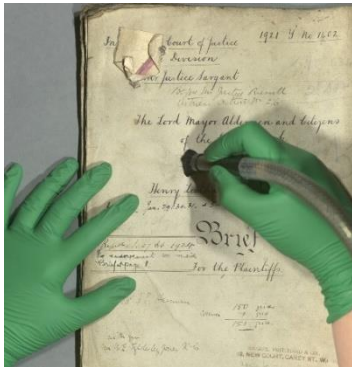
### **Culture and creativity**

Explore became an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation in 2023. Since then, we have worked with local and national partners to deliver a three-year programme that brings high-quality arts and creativity into communities, with work across dance, art, theatre and music, inspired by the archives.



### **Wellbeing, place and connection**

Explore libraries are trusted spaces where people can find reliable information, expert signposting and friendly knowledgeable staff. Our Reading Well book collections support health and wellbeing, our creative cafés reduce isolation and build confidence, regular Family Hubs in partnership with City of York Council provide trusted information for families and young people.



### **Custodians of York's memory**

The City Archive spans over 850 years and is one of the most significant continuous civic archives outside London. We've modernised our collections care, strengthened cataloguing, improved digital preservation, and expanded community and higher education engagement, and we were re-accredited by the National Archives in 2026.

## **Our reach and results (2025–26)**

- 915,854 physical library visits
- 1,237,282 physical and e-library issues
- 45,281 PC sessions
- 3,581 public events with 55,965 attendees
- 95,275 engagements with the Archives
- 23,315 volunteer hours

Visits increased from 821,837 in 2023–24 to 895,093 in 2024–25 with a target of 915,854 visits in 2025–26. These numbers tell a clear story of growing engagement with people across York choosing Explore more often as a trusted place to read, learn, connect and belong.

## **Our model and finances**

Explore is a mutual society registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 and is a charity in law.

We have a 15-year contract with City of York Council (to March 2034) which provides around two thirds of our income. The rest comes from grants, café trading, room hire, and fundraising. In 2024–25 Explore’s audited group income was £4.37m.

In 2024, City of York Council announced that, due to its own budget pressures, it needed to reduce the value of its contract with Explore by £600,000 per year. Explore has been in discussion with the council about what services it wishes to change to achieve this reduction. This will be a significant challenge for Explore as we will need to re-profile what we do, while strengthening income generation, so that communities do not experience a disproportionate reduction in services.

Explore manages all inflationary pressures, energy costs and essential estate works with discipline. Our cash resources are sufficient, our going-concern basis is confirmed by auditors, and our balance-sheet deficit has reduced from £1.1m in 2019 to £0.67m in 2025. We control all our costs, and we are strengthening margins through income growth across cafés, room hire and events.



## **Our strategy: secure the foundations, build the future**

2026 is the final year of Explore’s three-year strategy which has been about securing our foundations while developing our capacity and reach beyond our contract with City of York Council. We aim to thrive, not merely survive. To do that we need to review and develop a model that protects our values and is entrepreneurial, capable of seeking and maximising opportunity. Our three strategic priorities are:

**Getting the Basics Right** – Reviewing our foundations ensuring we are looking after our finances, our people and our contractual, regulatory and statutory requirements.

**Engaging Our Communities** – Continuing to build our understanding of our communities, evaluating how they see us now, what more they want of us and how we measure success within this

**Building the Future** – Developing new ideas and ways of working to build towards a new vision of who we are and where we want to be.

## **The next chapter**

Explore has spent its first decade demonstrating that we can transform what a public library and archive can be.

The next chapter will be about how we build on that potential, reaching more deeply into communities and demonstrating the power of collaboration to overcome challenges and take advantage of all the possibilities the future holds.

## **Our media channels**

Find out more about Explore's work on our media channels.

Website [www.exploreymork.org.uk](http://www.exploreymork.org.uk)

YouTube [Challenge Your Imagination](#), [Our Dreams Start Here](#) [Colourful History](#)

Read our latest [Annual Review](#)

Follow our Socials: [Facebook](#) [Instagram](#)

Discover our [Events and Activities](#)

## **Our Governance**

Explore York Libraries and Archives Mutual Limited is an Industrial and Provident Society with charitable status set up in 2014. Explore is registered with the Financial Conduct Authority under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Society Act 2014. Explore is a non-profit organisation and is treated as a charity for tax purposes by HMRC.

Registration number: IP032357

Address: Library Square, Museum Street, York YO1 7DS

Tel: 01904 552 828

The governing instrument is the Rules of Explore (copy available on request from Gillian Holmes, Secretary to Explore [gillian.holmes@exploreymork.org.uk](mailto:gillian.holmes@exploreymork.org.uk)).

## **Our 'Objects' (purpose)**

Our objects as stated in our Rules are the legal foundation for who we are.

'The objects of the Society shall be to carry on business for the benefit of the community by:

- Advancing education, culture, arts, heritage, and history for the public benefit particularly (without limitation) by providing and maintaining library, archive, learning and related services for the people of York and the surrounding area; and
- Providing for the public benefit facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation of individuals who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances or for the

public at large, in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the condition of life of such people.' Introduction to the Board

## The composition of the Board

The full board has 9 members called Directors:

- 3 Community Directors, elected by our c850 community members who own 2/3 of Explore
- 1 Staff Director, elected by the c 100 Explore staff who own 1/3 of Explore
- 3 Co-opted Directors, appointed by the board for their skills and knowledge
- 1 Director nominated by City of York council, and
- the Chief Executive Officer, ex officio.

All our Director roles are voluntary positions. Directors are entitled to reclaim expenses incurred in the course of their duties as a Director.

## Legal duties of Directors

All Directors must comply with the Seven Statutory Duties set out in the Companies Act 2006. They are to:

- **Act within powers** Follow the company's constitution (Articles of Association) and use powers for their intended purpose.
- **Promote the success of the company (Section 172)** Act in good faith to benefit the members (shareholders) as a whole, while considering employee interests, supplier/customer relationships, community impact, and long-term consequences.
- **Exercise independent judgement** Do not delegate powers or act under the influence of others, even if authorised.
- **Exercise reasonable care, skill, and diligence** Act with the care a reasonable person would, considering the general knowledge/experience of a director, plus any specialised knowledge they possess.
- **Avoid conflicts of interest** Avoid situations where personal interests conflict (or may conflict) with the company's interests.
- **Not to accept benefits from third parties** Refuse gifts, lavish hospitality, or bribes given due to their position.
- **Declare interests in proposed or existing transactions** Formally disclose any personal interest in a company contract or arrangement.

## What does the Board do?

- The Board routinely meets once a quarter, in person, at an Explore library in York and normally holds two awaydays for Directors each year. Where the need for extra Board meetings may arise, in addition to those mentioned, we will do our best to accommodate availability and can offer online meetings where appropriate.
- Directors read papers in advance and come ready to actively participate and contribute thoughts and ideas. Generally, a half-day is allocated for in-person Board meetings.
- We have an expectation that Directors will join sub-committees, and such other sub-groups/working Groups as may be set up from time-to-time to lead on and work with the Executive on a specific issue.
- We expect that Directors will try to attend some of our public events and activities
- Community and Staff Directors serve for 3 years on the board. If they are willing, they may be elected for a second 3-year term. Co-opted Directors (chosen for their specific skills and knowledge) are appointed for a specified term by the Board and are subject to an annual review. No Director may serve for more than 6 years in total.

### **Why join the Board now?**

Explore is at the beginning of a new chapter. Our foundations are strong, our communities are engaged, and our ambition is growing. We are seeking a Director who is energised by the chance to guide an organisation which transforms lives every day.

### **What do we need from you?**

We are looking for a co-opted Director who recognises how public libraries and archives shape fair, creative and connected places -and who wants to help lead Explore into its next decade with imagination and confidence

### **A leader who believes in our mission**

You will bring a deep commitment to Explore's purpose: to enhance lives through reading, learning, creativity, culture and connection. You will recognise the importance of trusted public spaces, understand how much they still matter in times of challenge, and be motivated by the idea that libraries and archives can be transformational for individuals and communities.

### **A strategic thinker who can help shape our future**

Directors play a central role in determining Explore's strategy, culture, values and long-term direction. We are looking for people who can bring clarity to complex discussions, see the bigger picture, and help us set a course that is both ambitious and achievable.

### **A steady hand on governance and responsibility**

As a Director, you will ensure Explore meets its legal and regulatory duties, uses its resources wisely, safeguards its reputation and upholds its values. You will bring good judgement, an ability to ask thoughtful questions, and a willingness to speak your mind with honesty and tact.

### **People who enjoy working collaboratively**

Explore's Board is a team which values openness, contribution and constructive challenge. You will be someone who works well with others, contributes generously, and helps create the

conditions for honest, purposeful discussion. Directors review papers, participate fully in meetings, and provide guidance in areas where they have expertise.

### **Independent thinkers**

You will bring independence of mind, curiosity and the courage to ask the question others may not. We also expect you to be kind and respectful because Explore is a people-first organisation, and our culture is built on mutual respect, inclusion and trust.

### **Time, commitment and a desire to make a difference**

Being a Director means investing the time to understand Explore, attend meetings, join committees and take part in development sessions. The role of a Director is voluntary, but its impact is profound-Directors help shape a service that reaches hundreds of thousands of people each year and carries a legacy into the future.

### **A commitment to public value**

All Directors must uphold the Nolan Principles of Public Life - selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. These principles guide how we work together, how we serve our communities, - forming the ethical foundation on which public value is created.

### **What skills are we looking for in this recruitment?**

Experience in finance, commercial growth and cost management

For this recruitment, we are specifically seeking a Director who can help strengthen Explore's financial resilience. This includes:

- an understanding of how organisations manage and monitor their finances.
- experience of identifying or developing commercial opportunities that align with mission and values.
- insight into cost control and the levers that support long-term sustainability.
- the ability to support and challenge our thinking on income generation, operating models and investment.
- this role will chair our Finance Committee which meets quarterly online.

This does not require being a qualified accountant (though it may be helpful), but it does require confidence around financial strategy and organisational economics.

### **After you join us**

Experience of governance and acting as a Director or Trustee is not essential, as we are committed to providing a full and appropriate induction. This will include providing and discussing key organisational documentation including the governing document, planning documents, policies relating to Directors, Annual Accounts and Committee Terms of Reference.

On appointment, regular conversations with the Chair will be arranged and also an annual one-to-one meeting. Board members will attend development days and other development opportunities where appropriate.

## How to apply

If you have questions before you apply, you can contact the Chair, Rosemary Cook, at [chair@exploreYork.org.uk](mailto:chair@exploreYork.org.uk).

When you are ready to apply, please send your CV and supporting information demonstrating how well you fit with the Director Person Specification and why you believe you can contribute to our success, by email, to Jenny Layfield, Chief Executive [jenny.layfield@exploreYork.org.uk](mailto:jenny.layfield@exploreYork.org.uk).

You will then be invited to a formal interview. We look forward to meeting you.

