Little Chalfont COMMUNITY LIBRARY

Information ● Recreation ● Education ● Culture

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service
The MBE for volunteer groups

Establishing a Community Library

Key Decision

There are many types of Community Library models. Your library could simply be a stock of books in any type of building offering public access. For example a school or village hall. At the other end of the range it could be a full-blown library service offering everything a Council Library provides, and more. You will have to decide which type is right for your community.

We took the view that the full-blown library service was the right route for Little Chalfont and, although the information in the rest of this document relates to that model, it is also relevant, in whole or part, to other models.

Key Issues

Community

You will need substantial community support and you must be very sure that there is a strong desire in your community to retain your library and make a commitment to its success. This will be evidenced by pledges of financial support from individuals, groups, organisations, businesses and local authorities such as your Parish and District Councils. It will also be evidenced by individuals offering to volunteer their time to manage and run the library. You need to research both of these aspects.

You also need to consider whether the size of your community or catchment area is large enough to sustain a viable library. There is no hard and fast rule but useful data will be the footfall and stock issues over the last few years. Your Council should be able to supply this data that can then be analysed in the context of the population.

Financial Support

This can be obtained through a public appeal for one off or regular donations publicised by leaflet delivery to local households and through the local media. In addition personal meetings with all types of local organisations has proved to be effective.

You need to demonstrate a professional approach so put together a budget that demonstrates the level of financial support needed. A business plan would be even better.

Applying for grants is another way of obtaining funding. There are many sources of grants and you will have to invest time in tracking them down. Your District or County Council can often give advice on grant making bodies. Another good source of information is the National Council for Voluntary Organisations http://www.fundingcentral.org.uk/default.aspx.

Volunteers

You will need volunteers willing and capable, in terms of skills and time, of carrying out the work of managing a library "business". This covers everything from Financial Management to Health and Safety. Significant commitment in terms of time will be required of those in key positions.

You will also need volunteers capable of taking on librarian duties (once they have received training).

Once again a public appeal via leaflet delivery and the local press is effective. You will get volunteers but be sure you understand what type of work the individuals are capable of or willing to carry out. One way to get this information is to design a simple application form to collect their personal details and experience. You will need a range of skills so make this clear in your publicity material.

Library Building

An effective library needs a building designed for the purpose. The existing Library building is the obvious choice. You need to explore if you can secure the building and at what cost. You also need to establish what fittings and furniture will be included.

Stock

You will need to secure stock. The stock needs to include standard books, large print books and audio books. Is the existing Council Library stock available to you and at what price?

Another way to secure stock is by public appeal. Our experience is that an appeal will generate a significant number of donated standard books but not large print or audio books. These types of books are expensive to purchase so either build that into your budget and/or find out if Council stock can be accessed.

Library Management Computer System and IT

To offer the same facilities as a Council Library in terms of stock reservations, issues, returns, renewals and a range of other services your library will need to be linked to the Council's Library Management System. You need to check if your Council will provide the necessary link and equipment and at what cost.

You will also need to offer public access PCs. For a number of reasons buying your own PCs is not likely to be the solution so you need to check if your Council will provide the necessary IT equipment and software and at what cost.

Training and Guidance

The management team will need training and guidance on how to run an organisation staffed by volunteers. In Buckinghamshire, Community Impact Bucks can provide this
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Website: www.littlechalfontlibrary.org.uk

http://www.communityimpactbucks.org.uk/. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations is another useful contact http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/

The volunteers who will staff the library need to be trained to use the Library Management Computer System and also how to carry out librarian duties. You need to check what training your Council will make available and at what cost.

Even if volunteers have attended training sessions, until they gain sufficient experience, their work will need to be supervised by a professional librarian. We **strongly** recommend that you negotiate the provision of a professional librarian for at least the first 3-6 months after you take over the running of the library.

Organisation

You will need to decide what type of organisation you wish to be. You could simply be a "Friends" group or you could apply for charitable status. Our recommendation is that you apply for charitable status. Charitable status brings benefits in terms of being able to claim Gift Aid in respect of donations, 80% relief from Business Rates and being able to apply for grants.

Becoming a charity is not an onerous task. The Charity Commission website contains a wealth of information and guidance. Our suggested starting point is to consider becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Start_up_a_charity/Do_I_need_to_register/CIOs/ A CIO gives the Trustees financial protection, is relatively straightforward to run and only requires returns to the Charity Commission. For advice beyond the Charity Commission contact Community Impact Bucks if you are a Buckinghamshire community http://www.communityimpactbucks.org.uk/.

Further Help

Little Chalfont Community Library, a registered charity, has been in existence for over 8 years. It is a fully independent community-run library offering services equivalent to those provided by Council Libraries and more.

We have acquired a lot of experience and developed a wide range of documentation and practises that we are willing to share with other Community Libraries.

If you have addressed the Key Issues covered in this document and would like our help please email our Chairman, Jim Brooks at jimbrooksmbe@gmail.com

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