

Summary of information in response to Unite report

Introduction

According to research undertaken by the Arts Council England, there are 425 community supported or managed libraries in England either currently in operation or in the planning stages. This equates to 12% of the service. Given that some library authorities are still reviewing their service options, this is likely to increase.

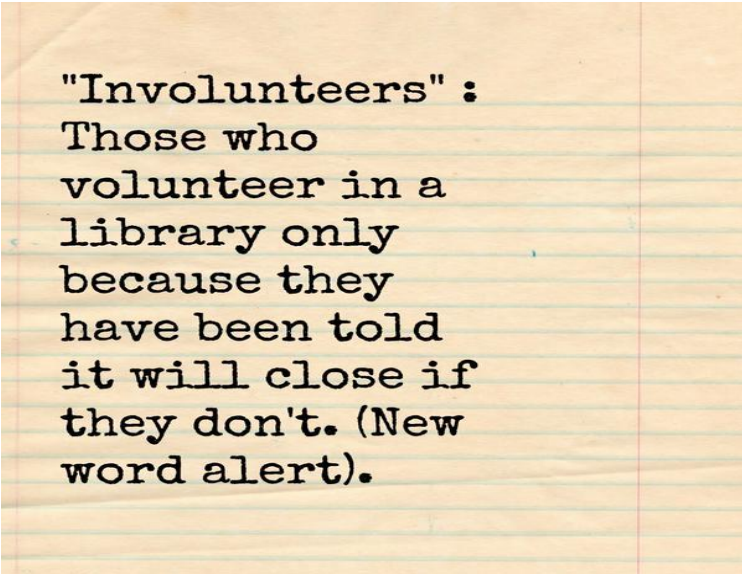
Recent information produced by Library Campaigners gives the following statistics

- Since April 2010 an estimated 381 library service points have closed
- 262 libraries are currently being run by volunteers
- A further 233 are known to be under threat of closure or transfer
- This suggests that 876 libraries (19% of the total five years ago) could be closed or managed by volunteers

Research shows that there are very strong recurring themes and opinions regarding the role of Volunteers in Public Libraries. Some staff feel threatened and under-valued by the introduction of volunteers, whilst others happily work alongside them in a training skill sharing capacity. Members of the public are in many cases unsure as to whether they should volunteer, battling their reluctance to replace paid staff with wanting to keep their local library open. The motivation for volunteering includes the following

Motivation for volunteering

See the definition below taken from a recent Public Libraries News posting



"Involunteers" :
Those who
volunteer in a
library only
because they
have been told
it will close if
they don't. (New
word alert).

In their recent response to the Library Service Strategy Proposals the United Secretary cites the opinions of Lincolnshire volunteers and how many feel pressurised into volunteering to ensure that their local libraries remain open. However regardless of their reasons or motivation for volunteering, volunteers are still coming forward and enabling libraries to remain open. Two case studies below detail the positive approaches taken by two different communities to continue to provide their local library services.

Case Study-Little Chalfont Library- One of the most successful Community Managed Libraries is Little Chalfont library in Buckinghamshire. Little Chalfont Community Library was opened in 2007 after Buckinghamshire County Council closed eight of its 35 libraries. Refusing to sit back and let it happen the village rallied together to re-open a state of the art library which provides the same services as the county council and continues to be popular. Although they set up the library because they felt there was no other way, there is great positivity about this library. Little Chalfont is now being used as a model example of how the Big Society can work by getting the community involved and giving more power to people. To help others Little Chalfont have written guidelines on how to set up a community library looking at the different models available and what is actually involved in running one

Totley Library-Sheffield. The plan to form a local community charity to operate Totley Library was approved by Sheffield City Council. From 29th September 2014 volunteers took over the running of the library from the council after setting up a charity to form the legal organisation that will manage the volunteers and run the library. The main aim for library users was for the group to take over the running of the library with as little disruption to the service provided as possible. The model used at Totley is that of an associate library, so anyone who is a user of the Sheffield City Library Service can continue to use Totley Library to borrow books, use the computers, attend groups etc. Customers can use the same library card and still be able to reserve books from anywhere in the city wide library service. The main difference is that the library is now staffed by volunteers and not professional librarians

Issues around Volunteers at Libraries

Alford blow as Library volunteers stand down-26th June 2014-Lincs Echo
This example was cited in the Union report and refers to Alford Library where volunteers stopped volunteering in protest at the consultation and redundancies of library staff. However this was not a Community Managed Library and these volunteers had not been solely managing the library. In order to support the community and increase opening hours, the volunteers had opened and run the library on Thursdays for the last 16 months before the Lincolnshire County Council announced changes to the way libraries would be run. Alford library still has a separate group who have put in a business plan to take over the library but this does not include the previous group of experienced volunteers that had been opening the library..

Delph Library-Oldham

This example was not included in the Unite report, however it is a valid example of a community management library arrangement that was not entirely successful, due to the model being used and the lack of support from paid library staff. Delph Library became volunteer-run in 2005 but has since suffered from a lack of volunteers and could not use library system computers due to data protection issues. Recently Oldham Libraries have agreed to bring Delph Library back into the Libraries' Network. There is a paid Library Assistant working alongside the volunteers

Community Partners

The Unite report cites a Community Group who really did want to save their library and felt compelled to submit a bid which they later found to be unrealistic. In most cases there are a number of organisations interested in running each library so a selection process is necessary. Detailed below are two case studies of Community organisations who are successfully managing Community Libraries using a variety of different models

- **Eco Computers-Runs 4 Lewisham Libraries Social Aims-**As a social enterprise, they 100% of our profits back into the community, supporting various community projects, such as IT training and elderly clubs,. Volunteering through their organisation helps the local Community
- **Alt Valley Community trust** Croxteth Community Library in Liverpool is run by Alt Valley Community Trust, a long-standing Locality member, and based in the Communiversity .The term 'Communiversity' is often used to describe all of AVCT's activities, simply because it was where the organisation began, and it still serves as their Head Office and the hub of their Community Engagement work. The Communiversity is also home to Adult Learning classes and the Communi-café.

Supporting Community Libraries

As part of the proposal for the 6 Community Libraries to be run by Community partners it is intended that these Libraries will remain part of our statutory provision and a minimum service specified and monitored. Although these libraries will be staffed entirely by volunteers they will be supported by a specialist team of Library staff recruited to work alongside them . This approach is in response to reports last year from the House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Select Committee that without professional support community libraries could wither on the vine. This has been factored into our approach. Community Managed Libraries will be supported by a range of technology including Open Galaxy Touch and RFID . Volunteers will receive support and guidance from Bromley Libraries & Shared Service Staff.

Falling Issues and visits at Community Managed Libraries

The Unite response document cites a reduction in visitors at the Community managed libraries in Manchester. Statistics have been circulated to show that issues at Lewisham's community libraries have also fallen significantly in figures published in 2011

<http://www.thebookseller.com/news/catastrophic-plunge-lending-lewishams-community-libraries>

However the figures analysed were for one month only and counting had been affected by interrupted technological issues. A full Comparison between issues in 2012-13 and 2013-14 revealed that Issues overall fell by 36% overall. Issues at Community Managed Libraries only fell by 33%, a slightly lower decline.

Case Study-Manchester Libraries

As highlighted in the Unite report, seven Manchester libraries have seen visitor numbers plummet by as much as 90 per cent since funding cuts led to them being run by volunteers. The reason for this is that the new arrangements soon led to drastically reduced opening hours. The Manchester situation is a completely different model ,not one that Bromley would wish to adopt. The current opening hours for the 6 Bromley Libraries under consideration for community management must be maintained , this will for part of the contract arrangement with any community partners

The decline in issues and visits is not just limited to Community managed libraries but is the picture overall .The CIPFA stats published in Dec 14 show Visits to libraries also fell 2% in the year down from 288 million visits in 2012-2013 to 282 million visits in 2013-2014. While active library borrowers fell from 10.3 million people in the same period to 9.8 million people, a fall of 4.2%. This compares to 322 million visits in 2009-2010 and 12 million active borrowers. Visits as a share of population have also seen a significant fall over the past five years from 5,213 per 1,000 people in 2009-10 to 4,404 in 2013-2014 a percentage fall of 15.5%The number of books lent has also dropped dramatically in the past few years. Last year saw a 6% decrease in the number of books lent from 262 million issues to 247 million. This is part of a trend that has seen the number of books lent drop from 309 million in 2009-10, meaning that over the past five years total books lent by local authority libraries will have dropped by 20%.

Utilising the skills and abilities of a Volunteer workforce

The unite report lists a wide of tasks currently provided by trained library staff including Organising and running events and activities, Internet technology support:, providing council services. Volunteers come from all walks of life and have a wide range of skills and qualifications and experience to share. The Bromley model proposes that a small specialist of library staff will fully train and support the volunteers . Therefore professionalism will still be at the heart of any library service. Community managed libraries can be professionally run, involving unpaid volunteers and paid professionals working closely together and a number of community groups also employ their own paid professional staff.”

To conclude there is no one size fits all model for Community Management. The key to the success of Community management at six Bromley libraries will be the models adopted , the community partner organisations chosen and the contract management arrangement which will ensure the current high standards are maintained