

Community Independent Libraries

The Arts Council conducted research in July 2012 across England's 151 library authorities and highlighted the rapid growth of community libraries. This found:

- more than one in three library authorities had at that time at least one community library operating within their area, including some in every region of England;
- in authorities run by all of the main political parties, as well as in urban and rural areas. In quite a number of these areas there are multiple community libraries.
- the research found over 170 community libraries in operation at that time, representing approximately five per cent of all public libraries in England.
- The total number of community libraries which were either already operating or planned was over 425, which was approximately 12 per cent of all public libraries in England. The Arts Council's view was that, given that some authorities were still reviewing their library services, this number was likely to increase.

The government now have a web page dedicated to helping the community to develop community libraries.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/create-a-community-library>

Below are four different examples, one local, a county, borough and city.

- The Hampshire Model of Community Libraries which is on our door step
- Warwickshire, (county council)
- Lewisham (Borough)
- Sheffield (City Council)

Hampshire County Council

There are currently five community run libraries in Hampshire, as an example Lowford is a modern library located in a purpose built community building that was opened in April 2014. The community library is well used with around 10,000 items issued per year, there are 750 active users, which are those who use the library at least once per year. The library is open 6 days per week and is based in a larger community centre with a doctor surgery. The community association pay for all the building running costs and any repairs and maintenance. The Library fines and charges are paid back to the community association once per year to help with these costs. The library is kept open with volunteers over the 24 hours per week that it is open. Although HCC library staff do visit once per week to provide support and guidance. Hampshire County Council provides the books, a self-service kiosk, a public IT terminal and free Wi-Fi. The library provides a range of free family and adult activities such as baby rhyme time, knit and natter, etc.

<http://www.bursledon-pc.gov.uk/w/lowford-library/>

Warwickshire

Warwickshire County Council had to make £70 million savings by the end of 2015; the Library Service had to play its part with its budget being reduced by £2 million.

Of its network of 34 libraries, 16 accounted for only 10% of total user ship. The council could no longer afford to manage these but did not want to lose a library service in these areas. 13 libraries were transferred to community organisations and are now operating independently. The council supplies the book stock, the library management system, training and networking opportunities and specialist advice. There are around 450 volunteers at the 13 community libraries which are open for 241 hours per week which equates to over 4% increase in opening hours.

<http://thepeerawards.com/pa13-049>

Lewisham

As part of the Council's £88million savings programme, Lewisham Council decided to close five libraries, to pursue the option of transferring those library buildings to the community and to reorganise the remaining service.

By transferring buildings to the community and reorganising the service, the Council has saved money on upkeep and maintenance and on salary costs.

This approach created an opportunity for community groups and organisations to acquire the former library buildings for alternative uses at minimal or no rent, as long as they committed to maintaining the building and keeping them open to the community. Crofton Park, Grove Park and Sydenham library buildings are now run by a social enterprise called [Eco Communities](#). Eco Communities also run a computer recycling business from the buildings, which funds the upkeep of the building and the community activities delivered from it. Lewisham Council library services provide the book stock and also self-issue terminals which give access to information about other council services and to a stock of five million books across the London Libraries Consortium.

[http://www.ecocom.org.uk/index.htm /](http://www.ecocom.org.uk/index.htm/)

<http://www.ecocom.org.uk/CommunityProjects.htm>

Sheffield

Sheffield City Council has 10 community run libraries most of which started to operate over a year ago. These have full repairing and insuring leases guaranteed for 5 years and should they need longer they can request a 25 year lease (which is usually required when funding bids are made to trusts and foundations.)

Sheffield has provided some financial support in the early years of the community libraries but has required that they buy back services including the provision of the library management system. They produced business plans to show they will become sustainable without any support within 3 years which we assessed.

Sheffield provide support through a Volunteer Co-ordinator post, who organises training, over 600 volunteers have been trained to date. This training has included, how to run a library, health and safety and property related training.

<http://www.greenhill-library.org/>