

Community Libraries Briefing

Background

Alongside the Mobile Libraries consultation, a pilot project investigated the viability of community-run libraries as an alternative to mobile library stops for some communities. The pilot was co-ordinated by Essex Libraries' Community Hubs Team and tested two different models.

The pilot ran from 6 July to 30 September 2017 at three sites in Tendring district: Ramsey War Memorial Hall, Beaumont Village Hall and Bradfield Community Centre. Essex Libraries provided a stock of books to each setting, refreshed it on a timely basis and provided training for volunteers and guidance to the group in how to run the library effectively and comply with the law.

At Beaumont and Ramsey the community groups were responsible for setting up and running the library, using their own volunteers. They decided opening times and ran their own membership and loans systems. They were also responsible for advertising the library and organising any events or activities. Library users were able to request genres of books or particular titles but were not automatically members of Essex Libraries.

At Bradfield a different model was tested, where the community provided the venue and an Essex Libraries staff member ran the library one half-day a week. If community volunteers were interested in opening the library at other times, they were encouraged to do so.

The outcome was that community libraries were a viable concept using the Ramsey and Beaumont models. In both cases, an established community group with a suitable venue and willing volunteers ran the library and publicised it. Both libraries continued to operate after the pilot period ended.

The pilot and feedback from key stakeholders within Essex Libraries identified the essential minimum requirements for a Community Library to start operating successfully:

What is needed to start a Community Library

What	Why
Expression of interest submitted, with the contact details of the applicant(s).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure that the Essex Library Service can contact the applicant in relation to the set-up and running of the Community Library. Having the applicant's contact details will assist with successful partnership working with Essex Libraries.
Information on location of venue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The venue must be accessible and useable for all members of the community i.e. wheelchair accessible, safe to travel to, parking spaces.
Information about how the space will be used and who else uses it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on the proposed space can help Essex Libraries to assess if the space is fit for purpose for all groups within the community. By understanding which groups use the space, the Community Library can link into these groups.
The applicant must be able to provide sufficient volunteers who have the commitment to run the community library.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By having enough committed volunteers, the Community Library can be relied upon to deliver a consistent and sustainable service to the community.

What is needed for a Community Library to 'go live'

What	Why
ECC loaned stock must be in a display space, which can either be packed or rolled away if needs be.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This ensures that ECC-owned stock is displayed appropriately and safely for members of the community. • It also ensures that stock can be set up and taken down with ease, maximising the time that the Community Library can be opened, and safely stored when appropriate.
ECC stock must be kept safe and secure within the venue when the Community Library is not open.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This reduces the risk of ECC-owned stock going missing or being accidentally damaged.
Confirm dates of stock rotation with Essex Libraries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having clear stock rotation dates for refreshed books will ensure a continued and varied library service, which will meet the needs of all groups within the community.
Stock reserved by Essex Libraries members must be collected from the ECC partner library by a Community Library representative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Library Members can have access to books other than the stock supplied.
Personal customer information must be stored securely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal information held on customers must be kept securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Regulation (from 25 May 2018).
Strong engagement between Community Library and ECC partner library.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To agree a start date for the Community Library and ensure that book stock, furniture (if applicable), website and promotion are in place. • To monitor the Community Library's loans and visits, successes and challenges. • To strengthen & develop partnerships between Essex Libraries and the local community.

The above factors are the core essentials required for the set-up and running of a Community Library. However, further questions will be asked as part of the set-up process; roles and responsibilities for both Essex Libraries and the Community Libraries will be explained and internet connection will also be discussed as this will enable the Community Library to make online reservations. The Community Library will be subject to a six months trial to assess the viability of continued service and potential removal of mobile library stop.