

# Notes from community group meeting, July 2021

## Update from Bruce Leeke, Chief Executive

Suffolk Libraries were able to quickly respond to the challenges of the pandemic:

- Beefed up digital content on the website with between 100% and 300% increases in usage of services like Pressreader, eBooks and film streaming
- 5.5k online live streamed sessions delivered to replace activities in libraries. Averaged 2.3k engagements every day for 3 months
- Over 11k calls made by the Suffolk Lifeline service which was designed to help elderly and vulnerable people. The legacy of this service is 'Phone a Friend' which is a volunteer driven telephone befriending service/

A number of new initiatives have evolved as a result of our response:

- Me, Myself and Baby perinatal service
- Laptop Loans scheme where you can borrow a laptop and 4g dongle from your library for a week
- Jobseekers guidance and support telephone line

Other significant achievements include:

- Being one of the first organisations in the UK to take on Kickstart apprenticeships as part of a new government programme – 8 of Suffolk Libraries first 10 Kickstarters have found work within the organisation
- Developing some strong video case studies to showcase some of our work in the community
- Several new libraries have or are on the verge of opening: Mildenhall Hub and Saxmundham open now. Needham Market and Southwold over the coming months. A brand new library at Moreton Hall is scheduled to open in September
- The launch of the Safe Spaces campaign to support those suffering from domestic abuse in partnership with Suffolk County Council

Upcoming initiatives include:

- The Big Catch Up reopening campaign from 19<sup>th</sup> July
- Suffolk Libraries Book Journey in September
- Libraries as the First Place lobbying campaign of SCC and national government

A huge thank you to all volunteers and staff members who have worked tirelessly to support the organisation during the challenging time.

## Volunteering update from Diane Moore, Volunteer Engagement Manager

Henry Bown, one of the staff recruited through the 'Kickstarter' scheme is working with Diane on various projects. The kickstart scheme is a government initiative and provides funding to create 6-month jobs for 16 to 24 years-olds on Universal credit who are at risk of long-term unemployment.

Henry is working with Diane to set up long service awards to acknowledge the service provided by our volunteers. As our volunteer system was only set up in the last two years, we don't have a record of when people started volunteering with us. Henry is currently collating this information and updating the system.

We are currently recruiting volunteers for our Summer Reading Challenge and have 466 people registered to support us in this role.

Three volunteer 'thank you' events have been scheduled, two of which have now already taken place (at Hadleigh and Great Cornard) and one more to come at Beccles Library on 20th August at 2.30pm

These are informal events to say 'thank you' to our volunteers. All volunteers are welcome - just let Diane know if you can make it to Beccles. Tea, coffee (proper coffee!) and cake will be available.

For the first time, we have been able to offer out the opportunity of volunteering at Latitude. The response to this was great and we, unfortunately, had to disappoint some of those that applied.

We are currently working with a charity called Combat2Coffee which is staffed by veterans and has recently opened in Chantry Library as well as a shop in Ipswich. The company was started by a former soldier and prison officer Nigel Seaman in 2019 who wanted to raise money for the charity Combat Stress and give back to veterans and prisoners in need of help with their mental health. We are working with them to offer six-month voluntary placements with training in barista and food hygiene/safety.

We are also offering new volunteer roles with 'Me, myself, and baby' and the new book shop in Lowestoft Library.

## **Community group update from Daniel Harvey, Head of Community and Performance**

There have been a few community meetings covering specific topics relevant to community groups over the last few months and we felt it would be a good idea to summarise a few key things covered for the benefit of people here who weren't able to attend those meetings.

A lot of the information I cover here is on our recently launched members website which you will find at [www.slmembers.com](http://www.slmembers.com) – a source of lots of useful information.

### **Structure of Suffolk Libraries**

Suffolk Libraries was originally set up as an Industrial and Provident society in 2012, but that type of organisation ceased to exist in 2014, at which point we became a registered mutual society. This change had no impact on the operation of the organisation. Despite not being an IPS anymore, we are still called Suffolk Libraries IPS – the reason that didn't change is because changing the name of the organisation would have been a major piece of work – and it didn't really matter because we always just refer to ourselves as Suffolk Libraries.

So, each one of our library community groups signed up as a member of Suffolk Libraries when they were formed in 2012 / 2013 and paid £1 for a share in the organisation – which is the limit of their liability in Suffolk Libraries. Many of our community group trustees today may not be familiar with the membership requirements – there is a short document called 'membership criteria' which covers this and it's on the members website.

In terms of the structure of Suffolk Libraries, one of the main functions of our member groups is to provide and elect our board members. They are elected by the groups, from the groups. Also, if the board decides that they want to make a change to the Suffolk Libraries rules, the membership is required vote on it. This happened last year when the board added a clause to our rules to enable them to co-opt young board members to increase the diversity of the board.

### **The make-up of the board and how board members are appointed**

There are currently 7 elected board members. They are all members of library community groups.

At each AGM, one third of the elected board members have to stand down – which, with 7 elected board members, equates to 2 – and it is the 2 board members who've been in post the longest. They can stand again – although they are not allowed to stand beyond their 9<sup>th</sup> AGM.

**Who can stand for the board?** A person who is a member of a library community group can stand for the board, although they have to be nominated by a community group in order to stand. Each group can nominate one person.

So, prior to each AGM, we will appeal to our community groups for nominees to stand for the board – as we have done recently.

When it comes to the election, each group has one vote – and that vote can be for up to however many vacant positions there are. So, if there are two vacancies, each group can vote for two people. It is the responsibility of the secretary of each group to cast their vote – unless they inform us that another trustee is fulfilling that role.

Sometimes the number of nominees is the same or fewer than the number of vacancies, in which case there isn't a need for a vote.

### **Co-opted board members**

The elected board members are able to 'co-opt' additional trustees to the board, which they may do to plug a skills gap and to increase diversity on the board. There are currently several co-opted board members in addition to those who have been elected. They will remain on the board until the AGM, after which they automatically stand down. After the AGM, the new board will make a decision about co-optees for the following year, and it may be that some of those that were co-opted previously will be invited to return.

The number of co—opted board members will always be less than the number of elected board members – this ensures that the membership has overall control.

### **Communicating with groups about the AGM and the vote**

In the past we've written a letter to the Chair of each group about the AGM, appealing for nominees and explaining the voting process. This year we will communicate with all community group trustees about the process by email to streamline the process and ensure that everyone is aware of what's happening.

The first communication from in this process is the invitation to put forward nominees for the vacant board positions, which went out recently.

### **Having a membership scheme**

A key aspect of a library community groups is that they should have a membership scheme and the members should be invited to your AGM. Your trustees should be elected by the members, from the members.

In reality, I don't think there's ever been a situation where a group has needed to run an election to appoint their trustees, but it is important to have the mechanism in place to do so.

In terms of groups having membership schemes, many groups are well on top of this – some aren't – some are somewhere in between. There are some guidelines on our members website about how you can set up and run a membership scheme this and keep it as simple as possible, and we can advise you as well.

### **Community group constitutions and other relevant paperwork**

Your constitution is essentially a set of rules that outlines how the charity will operate.

With unincorporated charitable associations – which accounts for the vast majority of our groups - there are instances where the constitution hasn't been looked at since 2012 when the groups were formed. If that applies to your group, we suggest that the current trustees go through the process of re-adopting a constitution. You can do this at a meeting of the membership – such as the AGM if you have one looming, or a specially convened meeting - but if you don't have a membership set up, the trustees could just go through this process. We suggest circulating the proposed constitution to the members of the group if applicable – or just the trustees if there is no membership – and inviting them to the meeting to vote on adopting the constitution. Hopefully, it should be smooth and straightforward.

Those groups that are CIOs are less likely to have overlooked their constitution as there are certain processes that they have to follow as part of that structure.

There is a template constitution for unincorporated charitable associations on the members website which you can download and adapt to suit your group. You can find that here <https://slmembers.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/New-Small-Charities-constitution-template-2021.docx>.

Once you've done that, we suggest that the group gets into the habit of reviewing / agreeing the constitution at each AGM and ensuring that all new trustees have a copy of it and minute that they agree to it.

## **Ensuring Suffolk Libraries have up to date details of community group trustees**

We have been trying to obtain details of community group trustees through an online form that we've created, which is on our members website so we can communicate effectively with the correct people. We've only had eleven responses so far – if your group hasn't submitted this, please can you do so.

There is also an online amendment form so, if you've submitted your trustee's details and then there's a change, you can quickly and easily let us know.

Both forms are on the home page of our member's website.

## **The role of staff in community group**

With events and activities returning and community groups start to become more active, we thought I would be a good idea to outline the role of library manager's and staff in community groups.

Our library managers are all ex-officio members of our community groups – so they're on the group because they are the library manager. They have a pivotal role in helping to steer community groups to ensure that their work is aligned to what the library needs.

However, library managers – and other staff for that matter – don't have a great deal of capacity to get heavily involved in organising friends group events, activities, and initiatives as they have so many other things to do to run the library. Therefore, groups need to consider when planning something whether they have the capacity within their volunteers to make it happen. If a group feel that they need staff involvement to organise an event or initiative, then there is the option of paying for additional staff time and factoring that into their budget. A number of groups have done this.

It's also important to note that we don't have an expectation for our staff to volunteer at friends group events and activities. Staff are paid to work a certain number of hours and we can't then expect them to volunteer beyond that. It's a tricky message this because obviously it's great if staff engage with their community group activities and indeed many do go above and beyond and will volunteer their own time to help with stuff – but it's important that it doesn't become an expectation that staff are a guaranteed bank of volunteer manpower. Ultimately, groups should aim to run events and activities with their own volunteers as much as possible – if staff come forward to volunteer help as well – which many will - then that's an added bonus.

## **Attracting new volunteers to support the work of your community group**

A lot of community groups are struggling for active participants, including trustees, at the moment. We have created a postcard that we can tailor to your library to help you attract new people to your group – the idea is that library staff hand these out to library customers. Speak to your library manager if you're interested in us providing you with some of this.

We can also help you to try and recruit community group volunteers by creating a volunteering post which we can advertise on the Suffolk Libraries website and which you can link to on social media.

## **Help and support**

If you need any help, support, or guidance with anything outlined here, please email [daniel.harvey@suffolklibraries.co.uk](mailto:daniel.harvey@suffolklibraries.co.uk) or call Daniel on 07824 474739.