

Libraries Scrutiny Review

Findings from Visits to Libraries on 8 January 2013.

Libraries Visited: Tang Hall, Strensall, Clifton & Acomb Explore.

All the staff were very enthusiastic and there was good evidence of a lot of community library work. All the libraries have open access computers, children's sections and self issuing machines (which are becoming more accepted by customers).

Acomb Explore

This purpose built library was expanded and rebranded in 2005 and footfall has increased from 180 per week to 600+. The building is an open and accessible space, built on one level with no barriers to access. There is a widely used Changing Places facility and a very popular Cafe.

The library itself is in one room with the children's library differentiated. Bookshelves are moveable. There are 4 meeting rooms (one the Learning Centre with computers) plus the cafe area. The rooms are available for hire up until 9pm. They received a 'Good Place to Come' Award from the Children's Society for being an inclusive and accessible building with facilities for all. Housing Benefits direct line for advice but HB staff no longer hold advice sessions. There are 12 staff, with 4 working at any one time.

Community links- Fostered close links with the visually impaired gardening group 'Green Shoots' and the local Rotary Club to create the garden. Has an excellent relationship with local schools, regular back and forth visits; including strong links with local special needs school. Fast response ambulance housed on site.

Activities - Flexible Learning Centre with Adult Ed tutors offering English and Maths; Range of bespoke courses based on demand, i.e. laptops, digital cameras, eBook; basic computer offer that: 1-1 Sessions, Computer Essentials and Online Basics ran by Library Staff; classes in Spanish, Italian, French, Watercolours, Lip Reading and Pilates.

Councillor surgeries; Police surgery and links with local PCSOs; Westfield Ward meetings; Allotment group meetings; Display space for local issues; Annual Craft Fair; Weekly Craft Club; Children's Reading Group; Two reading groups that meet in the Library and three others that meet outside; Local History Sessions.

Volunteers - They have a number of volunteers who do shelving and also offer work experience.

Development ideas - This is already a very busy library with lots of community activity. This does restrict the time available for staff to go out into the community and that is something that they think can be developed.

Tang Hall Library

This is full time, purpose built library on 2 floors. The library is on the ground floor with the adult library in one room and the children's library in another. Upstairs, with lift access, are the Adult Education room/I.T. centre (12 computers) and a meeting room (big enough for 12 people). There is also a small office/staff room with hot desks that are used by other Council employees. The main adult library has movable furniture to make a larger space for activities.

Community links - Staff visit all the local schools, children's centres and playgroups and these groups also visit and borrow materials for projects. There is a good relationship with the clinic situated on the site, and the library offers services to mothers taking children to the clinic. They support the Home Book service and visit new customers to understand their interests.

Activities - Children's Friday book group (not too popular so looking to change days); adult book group (does better in better weather); story times for babies, toddlers and children; craft group; social media drop in; flexible learning courses; drop in 121 computer support; help with homework (a homework club folded for lack of support/funding?). However, pupils still come in to do homework - they still print homework for free. Used to have some troublemakers but this has been sorted out; crèche on Wednesday to support Adult Ed courses.

Volunteers - 2 who do story telling and 4 who do shelving.

Development ideas - There has been an approach from JRF who are looking at ways to support community services to the residents of Derwenthorpe. Might there be some funding available from them?

There is scope for more events in the library, particularly for children. This does need some funding but there is scope to hire out the meeting room and use any profits specifically to reinvest in this library.

There is space to increase information on Council and partner services.

There is a meeting room that could be used for surgeries.

They would love a cafe!

Strensall Library

This is a half time library with one member of staff. It is situated in a converted shop in the centre of the village at the heart of the community. Library is on a bus route with a bus stop outside. Children's library is in a separate space. 2 PCs are available for public use. If bookshelves were movable it would be possible to open up the space. There is no separate meeting room and it always closes by 5pm.

Community links - There is a proactive relationship with local schools and playgroups. All children from the local primary school visit at least once a year and the librarian visits to the school relate to the work they are doing. Librarian also goes out to visit community groups such as Brownies. Runs stalls at summer fairs. There are strong links with the Army base. The library also serves Sheriff Hutton. Information displayed on council or charity events. Staff can redirect queries on services.

Activities - Well established book group (full); homework support; story time; support for CYC reading challenges; drop in 121 computer support; visits to community groups and village events; craft events. Local PCSO drops in.

Volunteers - 1 who does story time 3 times a week.

Development ideas - Scope to use the building outside library hours with any income used to improve library stock that would be Strensall specific. Staff would also like some equipment to use at events.

There are basic information leaflets available but there is little scope to develop this or use the library for surgeries because of the lack of a separate room and the single staffing aspect. Would also love a cafe!

Clifton Library

This is a purpose built, half time library. There is one big room with the children's library differentiated. There is a separate room (staff area) used by Adult Ed as a Learning Centre. The bookshelves are not moveable so it is difficult to make the most what could be a large space. No private meeting rooms. They have 5 part time staff but there are only ever 2 on at a time. Occasionally they will single staff but only if there is someone in the Learning Centre. Some anti social behaviour after dark from play park next door.

Community links - There is links with 5 primary schools, 18 nurseries and the children's centre, and support is given to the family groups at Burton Green School. The Staff tend to go out as the location of the library is poor and difficult to access by bus.

When the Central Library was closed they picked up a lot of customers who liked the fact there is parking, and some have stayed. They also get customers who work in the area so find it convenient. They have a number of regular elderly users.

Activities - 3 reading groups; Adult Ed classes in library; 121 computer support; story times - popular, up to 30 at a time; after school club; police surgeries; activities for children in holidays; support for Home Book service; Runs classes when library closed; play group visits.

Volunteers - 1 who does story time and 3 who do shelving. Could use more but only if they can commit to a regular weekly slot.

Development ideas - Could develop reading groups if there were more resources. People do come in to ask about other council services. If building is being used when library not open, public still come in to try and take out books. Shelving system is v inflexible. If the shelves were moveable there would be more scope to use the building out of library hours, but with no separate room there is little that could be done when it is open. There are no facilities' to make even basic refreshments.

There are basic information leaflets available but there is little scope to develop this or use the building for surgeries because of the lack of a separate room.

The Manager does not feel that a cafe would be successful partly because of the poor location. Not on public transport route. Long way from schools. "If we were starting from scratch we would not put a library here!"