

Case Study: Asset Transfer

Grappenhall Library, Warrington

What is Grappenhall Library? As part of efforts to find budget savings Warrington Borough Council carried out a review of library provision in 2010. Amongst other things, the 2010 review identified two libraries for closure: Great Sankey and Grappenhall. These libraries were identified based on usage, proximity to another library and the likely social impact of closure.

Once the libraries were identified for closure expressions of interest were sought from organisations that wished to take over the library buildings. In relation to Grappenhall (a small library with a single main room, a small staff room and small toilet) there was no pre-existing group to take over the building. Over the course of several public meetings a group of nine like-minded people (including a lawyer, a librarian, a retired director of social services, a retired GP, and a local government officer with understanding of health and safety issues) came together and a steering group was formed to take over the running of Grappenhall Library. Furthermore, an accountant offered his services to help set up and maintain the library's financial records so that it would comply with the requirements of Companies House and the Charity Commission; and the parish council gave access to the parish clerk's time, in order to help identify funding for the venture. This led to the creation of The Friends of Grappenhall Library in 2011.

What did they do? From June 2011, the group held monthly meetings with council officers in order to work out how an asset transfer of the library could take place. Council support included the provision of specimen policies for such issues as data protection and health and safety; as well as support on the transfer of the building, based on work already carried out to support the transfer of youth clubs to community organisations.

The aim of the Friends of Grappenhall Library is to 'advance education and to provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation and leisure time occupation with the objective of improving the conditions of life for residents.' The library building was formally transferred in December 2011 (via a licence pending finalisation of the lease) and the library was launched in early February 2012.

The library is operated and supported by the community. As of August 2012, the library had around 50 active volunteers (including four board members, a 12-person strong library team overseen by a librarian and 15 volunteers who support community activities, eg preparing refreshments for drop-in sessions for older people). Where necessary, volunteers receive training and support from a professional librarian with experience of setting up new library services. Furthermore, three young people on Duke of Edinburgh community placements have worked with the library.

To date, many books have been donated to the library; and as of August 2012 it had nearly 5,500 books in stock. The Library sells surplus (duplicate) stock in the library and at local events, in order to raise money. The Library has received a number of donations and grants to help support it and Warrington Borough Council covered 50% of the costs in its first year of operation and 25% in its second year.

What is the impact? When the Library was part of Warrington Borough Council's Library Service, the branch had around 1,200 active members. In its short period of operation, the Library has attracted 1,000 borrowers (over one-third of these are under-16s); In October 2013 the library issued its 10,000th book (around half of which were to under-16s). The Library currently has around 135 Friends, each paying £10 a year.

