

Suffolk Libraries

Annual Review

2014/15



Thank you to the following organisations for their support:





Chairman's introduction

Establishing the Gold Standard

This Annual Review describes a year of exceptional achievement.

At our last AGM, William Sieghart – who was leading an independent review of library services for the government – described Suffolk Libraries as ‘remarkable,’ and ‘the future.’ When his report was published in December 2014 he confirmed on the BBC’s Today programme that Suffolk represents the ‘gold standard’ of library services. Over 90% of our customers say our service is as good as – or better than – before we changed our structure. This success has been achieved at the same time as saving over 25% of the pre-transfer budget.

During the year we describe here the organisation was still working through some of the major challenges that were triggered by our move to Mutual status in 2012/13.

Managers and staff in the branches were adjusting to new ways of working and new ways of interacting with customers, Friends groups and the central support services. New systems were being established for finance, Human Resources and IT, all of which created unforeseen work (and frustration!) for customers, frontline staff and the small team of specialists charged with implementing the new systems.

The fact that the new systems are now embedded and most of the aggravating problems have been overcome is a tribute to the patience and motivation of frontline staff and to the quality and resilience of our central team, led by our General Manager, Alison Wheeler.

The other development I would like to draw attention to is the growing importance and influence of our Community (or Friends) groups. These local, voluntary supporters are providing energy and experience right across the county, and I would like to thank them all for the key role they play in ensuring the service is increasingly rooted in the communities we serve.

Tony Brown, Chair of Suffolk Libraries Board.

Suffolk Libraries Board Members 2014-15

Tony Brown – Chair

Sylvia Knights – Vice Chair

Jonathan Ogden – Honorary Secretary

Sue Buck

Anne Mallalieu

Peter Callaghan

Colin Rockall

Alison Wheeler (General Manager and ex officio board member)

A year of Innovation



Over the past year we have introduced several key developments as we seek to be a forward thinking and modern library service.

We have developed an Enterprise and Innovation Hub at Ipswich County Library (see photo above). Named 'The Carnegie Room', this space is a dedicated centre supporting local entrepreneurs, start-ups, business owners and creative minds. It includes a makerspace area known as 'The Lab' featuring 3D printers, digital sewing machines and Raspberry Pi computers.

We continued to develop our digital offers, expanding the number of eBooks and eAudio books available and increasing our free music lending service. Every year we are seeing visits to our website and digital loans increasing significantly.

In May 2014 we launched a pilot project to lend eReader devices at Thurston Library. The pilot was one of the first of its kind in England and aimed to encourage the use of library eBooks by lending a small number of devices for people to try. Some other libraries have since launched projects to lend eReaders and other devices.

The end of the year also saw the completion of the programme to replace and update the public IT service with a series of modern and flexible options for customers including new pcs and Google Chromebooks which can be borrowed by customers and used in any part of the library to take advantage of the free Wi-Fi which all our libraries now offer.

We opened a post office in Stradbroke Library in October 2014 and since its opening we've seen library visits increase significantly and the post office has been very popular with local people who previously had to travel several miles to find a post office or a facility to withdraw money.

Beccles Library became the first of our libraries to get its own solar panels and start producing its own electricity.

The launch of eReaders at Thurston Library.



Suffolk Libraries Presents...

Libraries are offering an increasing range of events.

We've been developing our programme of recorded live performances which we'll be screening in seven of the county's libraries from autumn 2015. This project has been funded by Arts Council England's 'Grants for the Arts' scheme to support events to engage people in creative arts activities.

We've teamed up with Creative Arts East who will be helping us deliver the project which aims to bring communities into contact with high quality arts experiences in a familiar and accessible local venue.

March 2015 saw the launch of the first ever 'Suffolk Libraries Bookfest'; a programme of around 20 events featuring a range of authors visiting some of our libraries and other local venues to give talks about their work with additional workshops.

The aim was to organise a book festival which was a bit different - something accessible and enjoyable for everyone with a mix of popular, local and up and coming authors. The programme included Simon Scarrow – best known for his Roman military fiction, Suffolk-based author Erica James and best-selling international author Harriet Evans.

The summer of 2014 saw the second Slaughter in Southwold crime writers' festival which after its successful first year had official support from the Crime Writers' Association.

Rhythms of the Night Library at Ipswich County Library featured three excellent bands bringing an evening of quality world and folk music in October 2014.

Thanks to the help of a local bookshop, a series of well-known personalities appeared at Beccles Library in the autumn of 2014 including actor and comedian Nigel Planer, successful historical novelist Alison Weir, and priest, 80s pop star, writer and broadcaster Richard Coles.



Charlotte Clark, Manager of Southwold Library and organiser of our crime writers' festival.



Swan Lake is one of many recorded performances being screened through our Arts project.



Alison Weir and Kate Williams at Beccles Library for Bookfest.

Suffolk Libraries

The highlights of 2014-2015

April 2014

- Customers gained free access to over 1.5 million published academic articles through the newly launched Access to Research service.
- Our libraries hosted a wide range of World Book Night events involving authors, our community groups and a range of activities for children and adults to encourage an interest in reading.



Children's author Nick Butterworth, author of Percy the Park Keeper and Q Pootle 5 at Capel St Mary Library for World Book Night.

- National Poetry Day founder William Sieghart came to Ipswich County Library as part of his national 'Poetry on Prescription' tour and also spoke at our AGM in September.

May 2014

- Brand new Suffolk Libraries membership cards were launched for adults and children. We were grateful to local author Rebecca Elliott who allowed us to use an illustration from her book 'Just Because' for the children's cards (see photo on front cover).
- Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds libraries took part in the 'Summer Reads' programme.

June 2014

- A new baby café was launched at Kessingland Library in partnership with the local Sure Start Children's Centre.
- The Aldeburgh Library Foundation won 'Learning Project of the Year' at the Suffolk Adult Learners Awards 2014.
- Elmswell Library Friends (ELF) launched a fundraising campaign to refurbish the library and create a more modern and flexible space. Fundraising included the now annual sponsored cycle ride and passed the £10,000 target in April 2015.





July 2014

- Gainsborough Community Library ran an arts project for young people which was funded by The Starbucks Youth Action programme (see photo above).
- Suffolk Libraries celebrated 25 years of Michael Rosen's popular book 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' with many libraries organising events for children and also helping to raise money for the RNIB.
- Sudbury and Great Cornard libraries played a key role in a children's literary festival in Sudbury to mark the town's role in the well-loved children's story 101 Dalmatians.
- Kesgrave Library held a Teddy Bear's picnic to celebrate the opening of their improved children's library which was funded by the Communities Enabling Grant.
- Mildenhall Library hosted an education animal encounter event with a chance for children to meet and hold various exotic reptiles.

August 2014

- Suffolk Libraries celebrated its second birthday in August with the announcement that all our 44 libraries had their own Community or 'Friends' groups.
- World renowned Norwich Puppet Theatre brought its version of 'The Pied Piper' to Hadleigh supported by Hadleigh Library Friends group and Creative Arts East.
- Staff from Bury St Edmunds Library took to the local Abbey Gardens to provide Baby Bounce and Tot Rock sessions during the summer.

September 2014

- Ipswich County Library celebrated its 90th birthday in September.
- Lowestoft Library held its second annual literary festival which was marketed as the country's 'most easterly' literary festival.
- St John Ambulance teamed up with Suffolk Libraries to run a series of first aid awareness sessions in libraries as part of its annual 'Save a Life September' Campaign.
- The Aldeburgh Library Foundation launched a new loyalty card which provides discounts in many local businesses (see photo below).



October 2014

- Local crime author Alison Bruce launched a new reading group at Newmarket library.

November 2014

- Thanks to the activities and support of the Bungay Community Library group we were able to redecorate and refurbish the library and install a new counter.
- The Friends of Lakenheath Library launched a Winter Writing short story competition for customers.
- The winners of Westbourne (now called Broomhill) Library's 'Shine a Light on North West Ipswich' photography competition were announced with several images of local scenes now on display in the library.

■ James Campbell, author of the popular Boyface books, held fun and interactive workshops for children at Haverhill Library in November and Stowmarket Library in January (see photo).



February 2015

- Several libraries held special events for the first ever Harry Potter night and as always we marked National Libraries Day with events to engage with customers.
- A partnership between Suffolk Coastal District Council and Suffolk Libraries saw new services and improved opening hours introduced to Felixstowe Library with council staff now based in the library and opening hours extended to include Mondays (see photo below).

December 2014

- There were many successful festive events in libraries including Christmas fairs, carol singing and Felixstowe Library held a festive fundraising event with the theme of Disney's 'Frozen'.
- National public library statistics published by The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) for 2013/14 showed an increase in children's book borrowing and eBook borrowing in Suffolk.



January 2015

- From the start of 2015, Suffolk customers were able to borrow items from any library in Cambridgeshire and return library loans to any Suffolk or Cambridge library.
- Two Ipswich libraries began offering 'lively library' sports activities in January in partnership with ActivIpswich. New age kurling sessions were launched at Ipswich Library for over 45s and Chantry Library started new age kurling, bocchia and table tennis sessions (see photo right).



March 2015

- Stowmarket Library and Wickham Market Library both amended their opening hours after consultations with customers. Both libraries are open for the same number of hours but open and close a bit earlier on certain days to meet local need. In May 2015, Kesgrave Library also increased its opening hours by one hour a week.
- In March we held an 'Opportunity and Independence' all day conference to share our experiences with cabinet members, directors and policy officers from across the country who were interested in hearing more detail about what we've learned along our journey.

Education

The Summer Reading Challenge in 2014 was our most successful ever. Nearly 8,100 children took part during the summer and 1,339 joined the library to do so. The number of children's books issued over the summer holidays was a staggering 246,647!

Comments from a parent: "This challenge has definitely made a difference to my girls reading. They can't wait to get to the library every few days. At last my children are enjoying books!"

Of course, the summer reading challenge is just one part of the ongoing programme of educational and learning opportunities we provide throughout the year.

In 2014 we were successful in obtaining a grant from the Foyle Foundation to fund a literacy project. This will see a new Literacy Ambassador join Suffolk Libraries in 2015/16 who will work with schools in the next year to ensure all 11 year olds in Suffolk get a library card.

In 2014/15 we also began a review of our Schools Library Service leading to a relaunch in the autumn of 2015 of the new Literacy, Books and Reading Team for Schools. The service will focus on reading for pleasure and will form part of the wider services we offer to children, families and schools, and will work more closely with the wider library service.



Staff

It goes without saying that our staff are a huge factor in the success and popularity of our libraries. We have introduced the Living Wage over the past year and have carried out staff surveys in 2014 and 2015 which are helping us to identify areas where we can develop and support them further. These surveys have given us some very positive and valuable feedback and in 2015, 93% of our staff said they were proud to work for us and 94% felt Suffolk Libraries makes a positive difference to their community. Comments from staff members:

"It remains a privilege to work as part of this service and to serve the local community."

"I enjoy my job, and I have opportunities to be more creative, give my manager ideas for income generation and increasing footfall into library and they are all taken seriously."



Mental health and wellbeing

Our Mental Health and Wellbeing Information Service has continued to offer opportunities and information for customers through the library network and has further strengthened partnerships with voluntary and statutory organisations.

On extending our contract to run this service until April 2016, Mental Health Commissioner Jason Joseph commented: "The networks you have created and the additional effort you put into this process of supporting the mental health agenda is to be commended."

Suffolk Libraries was one of the first voluntary organisations in Suffolk to be accredited with the Suffolk Information Standard in 2014, reflecting that the health-related information we provide to customers is up-to-date and credible.

We have helped the Mental Health Trust to develop new 'Open Space' workshops in Ipswich County Library which are being attended by over 20 people every week.

Over 100 people attended Action for Happiness workshops which targeted people who find it difficult to attend courses during the day.



A Dementia Awareness event at Ipswich County Library

Mobile Libraries

The three mobile libraries continued to deliver a much valued service to many customers throughout Suffolk who live in rurally isolated areas.

Suffolk Libraries worked with the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust to offer additional information to people through the mobile library service. These projects were successful for both services as it gave them a means of accessing people in rural communities they may not have been able to otherwise reach.



Prison Libraries

Suffolk Libraries continue to provide a lending and information service to three male adult prisons at Highpoint, Hollesley Bay and Warren Hill. These services are funded by the Ministry of Justice.

In addition to supporting the recreational, vocational and educational needs of prisoners, the libraries deliver successful initiatives to encourage men to maintain and strengthen family ties.

Facts and figures

This chart shows how our budget was spent in 2014/15

1,270
CUSTOMERS

Our Home Library Service delivered a service to 1,270 older and disabled customers in 2014/15

102
THOUSAND
ITEMS

The mobile library service lent over 102,000 items during the course of the year.

14
HUNDRED
VOLUNTEERS

Suffolk Libraries has 1,400 volunteers who help us with the Home Library Service, library and fundraising activities and through the community group network. We estimate that they give approximately 80,000 hours of service.

UP
31.5 HOURS

As of September 2015 following the increase in Glemsford Library's opening hours, our 44 libraries will be open for 1,686.25 hours per week. This is 31.5 hours a week more than in 2012 when Suffolk Libraries took over the service.



Supplies
6%

Property
9%

Support Services
11%

IT Support
8%

Book stock
16%

Insurance/
legal costs
0.5%

Frontline staff
49.5%

General Manager's Message



It was an honour and a pleasure for us to be described as the gold standard (see P2). However, this is much more than an accolade.

It's about the hard work, skills, passion and expertise of our excellent staff who ensure our services are well used by customers who are made to feel welcome and given an ever increasing range of opportunities, every day and every week.

It's about the people in all 44 community groups who share their knowledge, experience and give their time so generously. It's reinforced by our leadership which dares to take risks, listens and focuses on our future using wisdom and the courage to try new things.

Above all, it's about the trust you have all placed in us all to keep Suffolk's library service relevant, strong and sustainable.

Over the next few years there will be further pressure on public spending and we will have to face up to the impact this will have on us. We've been proud, and rightly so, that so far that we've increased and extended services, while saving 30% from the pre-2011 budget.

Positioning ourselves as the solution to a number of problems will help and we will use every opportunity to show how much more we can do and still look to further develop and improve what we have.

Over the next year we will be strengthening our literacy, books and reading offer, with a newly revitalised service to schools and a one year project with a dedicated Literacy Ambassador to boost library membership with 11 year olds.

We will hold another book festival in 2016 and we will still lend millions of books to Suffolk library customers – both digital and printed.

We'll look to support skills in science, computing and maths through new opportunities for families to explore coding and computing in libraries, helping them to experiment and learn away from the classroom.

We will be offering more music gigs and events, our music and drama service is being relaunched later in 2015 and we will be looking at how we can help local authors to be published on our eBook platform.

So our future may be challenging, but I am confident that we will be still innovating, informing, entertaining and delivering the gold standard library service you all deserve next year and beyond.

Alison Wheeler, General Manager, Suffolk Libraries

“Above all, it's about the trust you have all placed in us all to keep Suffolk's library service relevant, strong and sustainable.”

Suffolk Libraries

"It never ceases to amaze me how wonderful our Suffolk library service is!"

"I take pleasure in visiting the library and I use it regularly. I find the staff there are so helpful and always smiling."

"As an enthusiastic user of the library service, I am SO impressed with the way that it all works, not the least because all the staff are so friendly and helpful. I use Woodbridge Library and the staff are so 'nice' ... it makes the facility a real pleasure to use!"

"Beccles Library is really super-duper. The staff are impressively knowledgeable....Top marks to everybody at Beccles Library."



Suffolk Libraries

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