

Using Friends Groups to enhance library provision
A brief guide for library staff and Friends Group officials

Introduction

What is the purpose of this guidance?

Friends Groups have long been one of the ways that cultural organisations engage with their users and there are many functioning friends groups linked to library and information services (LAIS) throughout the UK. Many Friends Groups formed as a response to a particular need by a service – either a threat to its overall funding, or the need to purchase a particular resource. They remain, however, an under explored and under-utilised aspect of the LAIS landscape.

This guidance is aimed at those working in Lancashire Libraries and seeks to provide:

- An overview of how Friends Groups commonly operate
- An exploration of some areas that relate specifically to the ability of Friends Groups to fundraise effectively. In doing so, some issues relating more generally to the governance and operation of Friends Groups are touched upon where this is critical to improving fundraising capacity.

Context and Background

The *Strategy for Lancashire's libraries 2016-21* identifies Friends Groups as of key importance in moving forward as a library service, both as a way of funding additional events and activities, and as a way of engaging with the wider community. Therefore, Lancashire Libraries will work collaboratively with our Friends Groups to develop exciting and meaningful services for our communities, recognising the individual nature of each community and the resources available locally. In doing so we aim to remain relevant to our communities and deliver truly asset based services.

What are Friends Groups and what do they do?

Friends Groups are open to any individual who wants to get involved and support their library. Many groups have started with small numbers and have grown over time. Our experience is that a small group can still be very effective in making a positive difference.

Successful Friends Groups can help Lancashire Library staff to:

- Support and promote their local library and the services it offers
- Help to raise money and hold events and activities for people of all ages
- Enhance their local library by providing practical and financial assistance
- Represent and engage with their local community

How do Friends Groups fundraise?

The primary way Friends Groups raise funds to support services is through membership fees. Even with relatively low membership fees, Friends Groups are able to provide funding to services from their

membership income. In addition to membership fees, Friends Groups employ a range of approaches to generating additional income. The most common is through charges associated with events and visits, but it might also include profits from the sale of publications, donations, targeted fundraising linked to particular campaigns, applications to trusts or foundations, or income raised through successful community grants bids.

Key Characteristics

Trustees or committee members

A small number of friends will act as a committee to provide governance for the group. Where the group is formally constituted as a charity (see *Friends of Lancashire Libraries Constitution*), these friends will take on the formal role of Trustees. A member of the library service, usually the library manager, is encouraged to be part of the committee as an ex-officio member. This committee or board of trustees is normally around 4-10 members and represents the most active heart of the Friends Group. The Friends Group should electively appoint a Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary, as a minimum. These four roles are essential in terms of governing a constituted Friends Group, however other key roles may also be identified as of import, i.e. events co-ordinator and funding bid writer.

Aims and Purposes

The aims of a Friends Group tend to be articulated in quite a general way – referring to ‘supporting’ the library service and/or promoting or raising awareness of the library service or its specific activities. In practice Friends Groups most commonly have a role in fundraising and advocacy. Many groups also provide additional support with regards to specific events and activities. The identified aims of a Friends Group should be agreed in line with the *Strategy for Lancashire’s libraries 2016-21*, and should run parallel to current library initiatives, goals and objectives.

Membership Fees

Friends Groups tend to offer a fixed rate annual membership for individuals. Individual membership fees are set at £5 per annum. One off or ad-hoc donations may also be accepted by Friends Groups.

Maximising Effectiveness

This section identifies some areas that Friends Groups and Lancashire Libraries might seek to consider in order to maximise their effectiveness at fundraising. Some issues relate more generally to making the Friends Group an effective body, as this is critical to improving its fundraising capacity. The areas covered reflect some of the challenges identified with existing Friends Groups and offer solutions based on good practice.

Role of the Trustees

The Chair of the friends group is a critical role. This individual is most likely to be the main point of contact between the Friends and the library service and will need to lead and energise the group. They will need to feel comfortable in the role of fundraiser and ideally have the characteristics that would identify them as a good prospective donor. The trustees or committee members need to act as a high functioning team but also bring a range of skills and expertise to the role. In this respect a Friends Group is no different to any

other board or voluntary committee. It is strongly encouraged that the group's constitution incorporates the concept of fixed terms of office (e.g. 12 month term of office). This allows trustees the opportunity to focus their energies for a fixed time period and also makes it easier to remove from the trustees/officials individuals who are not taking an active role in leading the group. Ideally the Friends Group will create terms of reference for trustees and for particular offices (e.g. secretary, treasurer). This will provide those seeking to join the trustees, with a clear outline of what is expected of them as members and ensure that all necessary oversight activities are incorporated into roles of members. It is likely that trustees might also be involved in other local groups, perhaps in an active role. This connectedness can benefit the group, but it is important to avoid confusion over which 'hat' individuals are wearing, particularly if they are going to be involved in fundraising or advocacy work. This should be discussed and addressed by the trustees collectively.

Relationship with library staff

A good working relationship with the library service is critical to the success of the Friends Group and its fundraising. From the perspective of the library service, most consider the existence and aims of a Friends Group beneficial to them, however there can be concerns that too much staff time and other resources are needed to support the Friends Group. Ideally the Friends Group should have the capacity and skills to fundraise and operate without drawing directly on library staff – ultimately the purpose of the Friends Group is to support and promote a comprehensive and efficient library service, and not vice versa.

If a Friends Group does have the skills and capacity to increase its fundraising, there can be concerns over what they are fundraising for and how. Again, this is where a good working relationship is essential. Lancashire Libraries should work closely with the trustees/officials to ensure that the objectives of the library service and the fundraising of the Friends are complementary, and not in competition. However this shared understanding needs to go beyond an approach to fundraising. The Friends Group needs to have a good understanding of the needs of the library service and how it operates and this should, in turn, support openness to requests from the library service in prioritising its support or donations to the library service.

Charitable Status

It is encouraged that established Friends Groups should work towards charitable status. The benefits of this include the ability to apply to grants from funding sources where charitable status is a key criteria for eligibility (this is the case for many trusts and foundations). In general terms being able to publicise the group as a charity can give potential donors confidence in the legitimacy of the group. A charity has to register with the Charity Commission once its annual income is over £5,000 and that can provide further evidence and comfort that the charitable aims of the group are recognised and there is a certain level of oversight of its governance structures and financial procedures by the Charities Commission. A charity may also apply to HMRC for tax relief even if it earns under £5,000 (and it will receive an HMRC charity number). In addition charities can reclaim tax on the 'gross' equivalent of donations through Gift Aid. This currently means that for every £1 donated, charities can claim an extra 25 pence.

Advocacy

Friends Groups can be extremely beneficial when they take on an advocacy role. Advocacy work needs to be undertaken with due care so as not to impact the long-term relationship between the Friends Group and

Lancashire Libraries. Used appropriately Friends Groups have been successful in acting as key stakeholders in consultations about service development and budgeting issues. They can also be valuable support with third parties, for example providing letters of support for funding bids.

Donations

Lancashire Library Service welcomes and encourages donations of resources and or materials from Friends Groups to support its current and future service delivery. Donations of resources and or materials should be approved by the relevant Lancashire County Council officer prior to acceptance, in order to ensure the item meets the current council standards and specifications set out in the relevant policy and procedure. A 'Friends of Lancashire Libraries donation form' should be completed and kept securely, as a record of each accepted item.

Lancashire County Council premise use.

Lancashire Library Service welcomes and encourages additional events and activities provided by Friends Groups. Activities or events scheduled by the group to take place outside of usual premise opening hours will only proceed with prior agreement from the relevant Lancashire County Council officer. Lancashire County Council's Premise Use Policy should be consulted for further guidance on premise access, security and usage. All relevant forms relating to the Premise Use Policy must be completed by a nominated group representative at least 7 days prior to any event or activity taking place.

It is essential that anyone willing to participate in a Friends Group understands what is required of the group by law, and that the group has all the processes in place to ensure compliancy with any relevant legislation and regulation. Please note that this guidance is NOT legal advice and is drafted to provide a brief overview of how a Friends Group could become established and maintain itself. Becoming a trustee, fund raising or seeking charitable status for your organisation creates a number of legal obligations and potential liabilities and it is important that you fully understand all of the implications relating to charities, fundraising and governance. If you are at all uncertain as to the legal requirements and/or potential legal liabilities independent legal advice should be sought before engaging in any charitable activities within a Friends Group. Further independent advice can be sought from the following sources:

- NCVO Knowhow Non-profit offers advice and support for voluntary organisations. Learn from experts and your peers, and share your experiences with the community. Website – www.knowhownonprofit.org
- Charity Governance Code has produced a governance code intended for use by charities registered in England and Wales. Much of it will also apply to other not-for-profit organisations that deliver a public or community benefit and those with a social purpose. Website - www.charitygovernancecode.org/en
- The Charity Commission for England and Wales has produced a guidance document titled 'the essential trustee: what you need to know, what you need to do'. This document can be found at the following website - www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-what-you-need-to-do

For further independent information and advice, please contact your local Voluntary Sector Resource Centre (CVS).