

# Leading Libraries Strategic Challenge Case Study

## Service: Cambridgeshire

### 1. Strategic Challenge Focus

To examine all aspects of the library service's recruitment and selection process in order to identify recommendations we could implement in order to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce that accurately represents the communities we serve.

### 2. Rationale and Context

Data from the [CILIP workforce mapping report](#) in 2014 showed that the composition of the library workforce nationally does not reflect the populations it serves, with 97% of the workforce being white (compared to 79% of the general population). 79% of library workers are women but there is a gender pay gap, with men overrepresented among the top earners. Additionally, a large proportion of the workforce is approaching the age of retirement.

In Cambridgeshire, the population of the county is 651k. Although the majority of the population identify as White British there is population diversity, of which the largest group (8.1% of the population) are from countries within the EU. 5.9% of the population in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are Asian/British Asian. Additionally, the library workforce in Cambridgeshire is two-thirds women and 50% of the total workforce is in the 50–64 age group. We therefore recognised the need to attract younger people to work for the library service and the need to attract people representing the diversity of the county population to ensure that service provision and development meets the needs of the population as a whole. We were also inspired by Brighton & Hove Libraries' presentation at the Libraries Connected ["Diversity in the Library Workforce" event](#) in January 2020.

### 3. Approach and Activity

#### *Getting buy-in and generating options*

The team worked with partners within Cambridgeshire County Council, including the Transformation Team and colleagues in HR, to identify different recruitment methods to trial. These proposals were then presented to the Library Leadership Team by our two Powerful Talents, which generated internal support and buy-in. At a later stage we also presented the project to the library service's recruiting managers at one of our "away days" for Area Library Managers.

#### *Piloting new approaches to recruitment*

Three pilots were undertaken with three vacancies at different levels within the service: a District Library Manager position, a District Library Assistant position, and an entry-level Community Library Assistant position. Activities included:

- Holding an in-person recruitment open day, which allowed potential applicants to visit the library, meet the wider library team, and ask questions about working for Cambridge libraries before applying.
- During lockdown, holding a Zoom open session that worked along similar lines.
- Giving more focus to the application process through 3 weighted shortlisted criteria, which were highlighted as questions in the text of the advert.
- Trialling an entry-level position with CV applications.
- Creating a series of recruitment videos, inspired by Kirklees colleagues, showing staff working at different levels across the service discussing their roles and sharing their experience of working for Cambridgeshire libraries. This gives candidates a better sense of the feel and culture of the organisation, humanises the role, and combats stereotypes about library jobs. These were presented alongside the regular job adverts.
- Proactively reaching out to local communities and grass root groups to publicise vacancies and to reach people through those who are already engaging with the community.



### ***Running staff focus groups***

The team facilitated focus groups with recent recruits to the library service. This has helped to identify any barriers in the current recruitment system and opportunities to overcome those barriers. It has also helped to raising awareness of this project amongst staff.

### ***Developing Apprenticeships and Kickstart***

The service has embarked on adding apprenticeships and Kickstart employees to the workforce. Our hope these schemes would help us to attract diverse applicants; we have found both schemes have helped us to do this and, in many ways, exceeded our expectations.

Our first apprentice joined us in 2020 and as a service we have seen how valuable apprentice opportunities can be and we aim to increase our apprentice offer. Our first apprentice has described the opportunity as the “best decision of her life”, which illustrates how important these opportunities are.

We have recruited multiple Kickstart applicants across the county, all working together but within separate teams to gain an insight into library work. We are incredibly proud to confirm one such applicant has gone on to apply for a permanent library position and was successful.

We feel these schemes not only attract different applicants but help to break down the misconceptions around what working in a library is all about. Instead, replacing these with passion and enthusiasm for the services we provide for every member of our community.

#### 4. Examples of outcomes and impact to date

The strategic challenge has resulted in wider impacts, including:

- The library service now having an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion action plan
- Apprentices have excelled in their placements, helping shape and grow the service and challenge how things are done:

*“One apprentice has recently been awarded highly commended within our apprenticeship awards. So we're incredibly proud of our apprenticeship team. In addition to this, existing team members have now also come forward wanting to pursue apprenticeship qualifications themselves”.*

- Kickstart staff are now applying for vacancies within the service, helping to retain talented people.

*“Kickstart opportunities and apprenticeship qualifications are now not only attracting new people into libraries, but also upskilling existing staff and setting them on a path where they feel more valued as professionals”.*

- The library service is now more firmly embedded within the wider organisational conversation around both Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and recruitment, with representation at corporate working groups and workstreams.

#### 5. Next Steps

The work of the strategic challenge will be continued on an ongoing basis as part of the slow process of changing the culture of a large organisation.

*“All of this is ongoing work and by no means finished, and we as Cambridgeshire libraries just look forward to continuing this work”.*

Our emerging leader with colleagues across the county as part of one of four workstreams re-examining all aspects of recruitment within the wider organisation. Later in the year, the council will launch a new recruitment platform and deliver training on new processes and approaches, all of which are closely aligned with the goals and approach of our project.

Additionally, the team are preparing a short report reflecting the results of the focus groups with new recruits. This will be aimed at recruiting managers within the library service and we hope it will help identify both strengths and barriers and contribute to embedded cultural change.

#### 6. Lessons learned

The strategic challenge has enabled the library service to learn valuable lessons. These include:

*That sustainable change really takes time, and the work is by no means finished*

*We've also learned that we needed to be persistent, and we really needed to be patient as organisational change takes time.*

*We are now really embedded within the wider organisational conversation. This took some time initially, but it's really paid off for us because it's allowed us to be at the centre of this cultural change within Cambridgeshire County Council.*

## **7. How the Leading Libraries Programme contributed to the delivery of the Strategic Challenge**

The Leading Libraries Programme has contributed to delivering the Strategic Challenge in a number of ways including:

- Allowing us to develop our skills and confidence in presenting the project to a wide range of audience, including the Library Leadership Team, colleagues from HR, the Area Library Manager Away Day, and other library services as part of the programme, including at the final conference in March.
- Giving the project structure and focus, which made it possible for us to put time aside the progress it even amidst the challenges of the pandemic.
- Creating collaborative relationships within the project team, with the benefit of our different perspectives, skills, and areas of reach within the service.

Contact information

[Ana.Silva@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:Ana.Silva@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)