

Leading Libraries Strategic Challenge Case Study

Service: Surrey

1. Strategic Challenge Focus

Growing the number of events that the service was running in order to reach out to the community and increase income, through evaluation of our current events offer and a robust program of staff training to upskill library staff, allowing them to identify gaps, reach out to residents and plan events to meet community need.

2. Rationale and Context

There was an expectation that staff knew how to run events; however we did not provide formal training for staff to do so. The strategic challenge sought to address this as well as:

- To run events that met the needs of the community, to find out what the community wanted, and if there were gaps that could be filled in the ideal events programme.
- To discover how best to evaluate events and see what was most valuable
- To draw on quantitative as well as qualitative data.

The COVID 19 pandemic meant that it was difficult to run any events for a long period due to changing government restrictions. Whilst online activities were popular throughout the lockdown periods, face to face events were not really resumed until the Summer Reading Challenge in July 2021. As a result, the work on planning events and analysis of data to form that was largely hypothetical or was based on event data from 2019.

Additionally, Surrey Libraries went through a restructure between December 2020 and June 2021 with the new structure launching on in July 2021. As the staff were interviewing for new positions and learning their new responsibilities it was difficult to implement any new event activities.

3. Approach and Activity

Redhill Library was used as a case study. A year's worth of events in 2019 were analysed to see what audiences they were marketed towards, and what type of event they were under the Libraries Deliver categories of Community, Culture, Digital, Learning, Prosperity, Reading, and Wellbeing. A gap analysis was created to show which audiences and categories the library could provide more events for.

An ideal programme of events was created, accounting for the audiences that we may not have welcomed into branch yet. The dream programme covered which of these events could be run by volunteers or partners, as this would increase the reach of the library within the community.

A Microsoft form was created for each branch to complete, to briefly cover the topics such as which audiences they most catered for, why they ran their chosen events, what their biggest barriers were when running events, and any further feedback. This information was important as, among other things, it showed that we were not yet properly evaluating our

events and capitalising on the importance of qualitative feedback – most respondents relied on visitor and income figures to assess the success of their events.

4. Examples of outcomes and impact to date

The strategic challenge has resulted in a range of exciting outcomes. These include:

Library applications:

- The programming and audience development team created a Microsoft form to be completed after each event in each library. This collected quantitative data (number of attendees, number of new joiners, amount of income, etc.) as well as feedback from customers. This information is valuable in shaping future events.
- An internal communications platform called Jive was utilised. This is where staff share information about their event experiences, including evaluations for anyone who wants to recreate the event or run a similar event. The introduction of Jive means staff can comment on each other's posts and engage in a more immediate way. This immediacy is invaluable in allowing projects to blossom.
- A gap analysis template was created for branch managers. This vital part of the strategic challenge helped to understand the current offer in order to identify areas in which new event opportunities could be developed.

Recruitment.

A number of new staff have joined the service and brought with them new skills and ideas

Feedback.

Feedback from customers was gathered in order to feed into shaping future events.

5. Next Steps

The service is aiming to engage local communities through the process of co-design. Asking local communities what they want to see from us will bring in new audiences and a more diverse events programme.

Delivering training specifically on building staff confidence with running events has not yet been possible. Co-design training has encouraged staff to think differently about the events that have been run in the past and what will be good in the future. Building confidence in running events and reaching out to partners will allow libraries to become an invaluable resource to the community.

Discussions are underway with the Transformation Team about developing a service leadership programme that can help develop a much wider pool of talent within the service.

6. Lessons learned

One lesson learned is that there is more work to be done to increase the diversity of the events offer. The decision process for running an event has traditionally been based on staff

skills, or what we believe we can offer the community. Reaching out through the process of co-design will allow us to provide the service the community are looking for.

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:

Diversity

The leading language programme aimed to bring together people from diverse backgrounds and empower them with leadership skills, we have benefited enormously from being able to work with such a wide range of people and learn how the experience of visiting a library can differ around the country.

Networking

Working with our quad in Buckinghamshire and Dorset, as well as with the wider programme participants allowed us to develop our networking skills and share ideas among library professionals from all around the country.

Developing tools:

Providing the tools to enable our managers to create a local offer and to really take ownership and control of developing their business.

Reach and engagement

The local impact feeds into a more strategic impact with the recording of the event figures we were able to demonstrate our impact and reach.

The strategic challenge project has created the conditions to allow co design with residents, it's beginning to increase our use and impact

Impact on service

Information like this helps us to bid for commissions. Recently a £100k commission to deliver a digital welfare offer has been secured and the council are now looking to libraries to deliver a lot of their service offering

Last year we were in the top two authorities for library visits in the country.

Empowerment

Empowered our staff to grow the business and created a culture of ambition and really sown the seeds for that success.

For more information, please contact Rebecca.marjoram@surreycc.gov.uk or grace.woodger@surreycc.gov.uk