Carnegie UK Trust

Enterprising Libraries: Northamptonshire Libraries

Shared Intelligence
Northamptonshire Libraries knowledge and skills transfer

As part of the Carnegie UK Trust’s work on the Future of Libraries in the UK and Ireland, the Trust wanted to explore the innovative ways in which public libraries can contribute economic wellbeing by supporting access to education, training and employment, and enabling people to fulfil their potential and enhance their quality of life.

This programme of work, ‘Enterprising Libraries’, involved the Trust giving £3,000 to Northamptonshire Libraries towards a project that had already started to explore creative ways of encouraging enterprise and digital skills development. The Trust commissioned Shared Intelligence to conduct an independent evaluation of the activities run at Northamptonshire Libraries to ensure that lessons and experience from the projects were captured and could be shared with public library professionals and policymakers.

The Project

Northamptonshire Libraries’ Enterprise Hubs are a joint endeavour between Northamptonshire Libraries and Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership (one of the 39 local enterprise partnerships across England). The enterprise partnership provides some funding and business expertise whilst the programme is led by Northamptonshire Library service’s Principal Librarian for Information, Advice and Digital Services.

The title Enterprise Hubs is used as branding for business support events and workshops held in libraries. The focus of the Enterprise Hubs is helping people start and grow their own business or become self-employed. They offer informal advice, workshops about the pros and cons of starting your own business, and essential knowledge and skills (eg tax and record keeping, business planning, and website design). The hubs also actively support library members to access subscription resources including COBRA business information, Keynote market reports, and the Kompass business directory. These are paid for by the library in order for members to use them for free. Activities are led by staff from the library and from the enterprise partnership who have been trained by regional experts in business and social enterprise.

The project supported by the Carnegie UK Trust in Northamptonshire was not about Enterprise Hubs per se, but about testing whether the Enterprise Hub service model developed in Northamptonshire was scalable and transferable and therefore replicable in other library services.

The initiative was designed to be delivered through two different forms of knowledge transfer: inviting other library services to take part in on-site shadowing of Enterprise Hub activities; and secondments of Northamptonshire library staff to other authorities to help implement similar approaches.

The idea of sharing the Enterprise Hub model with other local authorities, with a view to propagating it, was a natural progression from the programme of knowledge sharing conferences that Northamptonshire libraries have run for several years. The conferences are product of the strong culture of learning and innovation which exists throughout the library service, and came about because library staff felt knowledge sharing opportunities outside London were limited. Or, as the project leader explained: ‘We thought – why pay someone else to go to their seminar, when we can run our own one here, create exactly the content we are all interested in, and then invite other local authorities in order to share the cost?’
Aims

The aim of the initiative was to test two different modes of knowledge transfer which Northamptonshire Libraries believed might appeal to different needs:

- On-site shadowing was to enable staff from other library services to come and acquire knowledge by seeing first-hand how Enterprise Hubs work, and to consider how to apply that knowledge in their own services. This was aimed at other services which had the resources to implement the approach and simply needed to learn how it worked.

- Secondments from Northamptonshire to interested local authorities – and staff development sessions – were aimed at library services that wanted not just the knowledge, but access to the actual expertise (in the form of the Northamptonshire Libraries staff).

As a result of the shadowing or secondments, it was hoped that other authorities would formally decide to adopt the Enterprise Hubs model as part of their range of services, and that this would happen as a result of mid-level managers (the target audience for the knowledge transfer activities) putting proposals to their senior managers to implement Enterprise Hubs.

What happened and what role did support from the Trust play?

In June 2013, an Enterprise Hubs workshop was held. It was attended by staff from 10 separate library authorities, and in subsequent discussions three expressed interest in learning about Enterprise Hubs in more detail through shadowing or secondments. Leicestershire and Nottingham City were interested in returning to Northamptonshire for an in-depth shadowing day with the possibility of further support at a later stage. Kent asked Northamptonshire to come to Kent to deliver a 1.5-day staff development session for a group of their staff, with the cost being met by Kent with some funding from the Trust.

During September and October, Northamptonshire developed a programme for a shadowing day for Leicestershire and Nottingham which took place in February 2014 while two colleagues from each authority spent a day with Northamptonshire staff. They were briefed on Northamptonshire’s overall library strategy and then observed an ‘Is it for me?’ enterprise workshop delivered by Northamptonshire library staff as part of the Enterprise Hub.

The Kent training session was also developed during the autumn of 2013 and took place over two days in March 2014 for 16 members of Kent’s library staff. The workshop was delivered by one of the Northamptonshire Libraries team and a colleague from the local enterprise partnership. The training was commissioned by Kent’s Information Services Manager with half the participants coming from her enquiries team, and the rest coming from the library service’s community engagement team.

At the same time as it received funding from the Trust, Northamptonshire Libraries made a successful bid to Arts Council England for additional funding to develop the Enterprise Hub model further. This meant they were able to develop an outpost of the British Library’s Business and IP Centre (due to launch in 2014) and other new services such as an ‘inventor in residence’ and an ‘entrepreneur in residence’. While this did not have a direct impact on the Carnegie UK Trust project, it has significantly enhanced Northamptonshire’s capacity to contribute to the support of enterprise.
Does the Northamptonshire example support enterprise and help people gain new skills, knowledge and experience?

Supporting enterprise

Looking at the impact of the knowledge transfer activity rather than the Enterprise Hubs themselves, Northamptonshire can be said to be directly supporting enterprise in two of the three local authorities, Leicestershire and Kent, which opted to learn more.

Leicestershire told us they: “Saw it, and were able to think how that would work for us . . . And from there we wrote a bid to the Leicestershire Regional Growth Fund to test it [a service similar to Enterprise Hubs] out as a pilot until November 1, 2014.”

In practice, Leicestershire is taking a two-stage approach. First, they made two successful bids for time-limited funding from the Regional Growth Fund and DWP’s Flexible Support Fund. Even though this funding only takes them through to November, 2014, it will enable them to prove the value of the new service, then make the case for long-term funding (as a second stage) from the county’s Local Enterprise Partnership.

With the short-term funding in place, they relaunched their weekly job club programme in November 2013. This consists of 2.5-hour drop-in sessions in six locations led by two library staff advisers. This was a well-developed model which they had run in the past but mothballed for two years due to lack of funding.

In parallel to this activity, Leicestershire began developing more enterprise content for the job club programme – this having been core to their funding bid. They also began a recruitment process for a third member of staff to support the enhanced job club and introduced a new screening question on the joining form asking: ‘are you interested in setting up a business?’.

Finally, they rebranded the job club from ‘Your Library Your Work Club’ to ‘Your Work Club Your Enterprise Hub’ reflecting the new emphasis.

The enhanced job club went live on April 1, 2014 in six locations and by week two of the new model (when we interviewed them), they had provided enterprise-specific support to 12 people.

The Leicestershire team are now planning to launch their own version of the ‘Is it for you?’ seminars which they will deliver themselves. They will also commission external providers to run additional seminars on business skills (such as how to manage tax and accountancy).

The Leicestershire team had not sought any further support from Northamptonshire following the shadowing day in February and although they have borrowed from the Northamptonshire model, they view their enterprise support as: ‘Definitely having synergy but not a carbon copy . . .’

In Kent, following the on-site training in March 2014, the library team made some significant enhancements to their businesses advice offer.

Kent staff had been particularly impressed by Northamptonshire’s approach to promoting take-up and reaching new users. After the March training, Kent developed new promotional materials, as well as running refresher training for branch staff. They also decided to open up access to the Mint business directory (which they subscribe to) making it available on public-access computers for all library members, rather than for library staff only.

The next development will be the launch of a six-month pilot of face-to-face ‘clinics’ for business advice, similar to Northamptonshire’s. In parallel, Kent commissioned business workshops for high needs areas (as identified by the Local Enterprise Partnership). These will be signposted from the clinics, and, similar to Enterprise Hubs, will offer mentoring, coaching and business basics (including tax, finance, and IP).

Finally, Kent Libraries are planning to launch online ‘chat surgeries’ as an extension of their web-based Ask a Kent Librarian. The difference is that questions will be fielded by guest experts from partner organisations including high street banks and local chambers of commerce rather than librarians.
New skills and knowledge?
In the case of Leicestershire, the re-launched ‘Your Work Club Your Enterprise Hub’ programme is already bringing new skills and knowledge to people coming to the job club. Between November 2013 and March 2014 over 600 individuals had attended the Your Library Your Work Club one or more times, and post-back cards and verbal feedback indicate around 16% of those who took part went on to find work.

We also heard Leicestershire are building up knowledge among the libraries team themselves. ‘It starts with us doing research to find out the contacts of people [who can provide] specific support. Also, [staff members are] doing Information Advice and Guidance Level 4 qualification. The new person has skills around enterprise support which she will bring too. That’s the reason we appointed her.’

Like the team in Leicestershire, the team in Kent seem to be influenced by the Northamptonshire model. They are now borrowing some elements directly from Enterprise Hubs (such as the clinics and workshops) and in other cases (such as promotion and take-up) it has been about re-thinking the approach and raising the bar.

Though Nottingham, has not taken any specific actions, the Northamptonshire model has provided an injection of fresh thinking. They told us: ‘We do want a higher profile about supporting the employability agenda . . . I do like the idea of working with other parts of the council too. We’re also looking at re-branding inspired by Northamptonshire’s Change Zone — the idea of calling it something. Our branding is very basic and 10 years old.’

How are Northamptonshire Libraries building reputation, stimulating debate, and supporting innovation?

Building reputation
Northamptonshire Libraries do seem to be building a reputation in regard to supporting enterprise in the county. Moreover, they are trying to ‘walk the talk’ by becoming more enterprising and entrepreneurial themselves through developing and delivering events and seminars for library professionals.

The fact they attracted managers from 10 library services across England to the initial June 2013, Enterprise Hubs workshop is an indication of both their enterprising nature and their reputation.
Whether this reputation translates into a new vision of the role of libraries beyond the county is harder to judge. The Carnegie UK Trust is interested in what these projects can do to widen the vision of the role of the library sector, and Northamptonshire is often cited as an example of an innovative service as a result of the kinds of activities being discussed here.

Supporting innovation
Northamptonshire seem to be supporting innovation on two levels. Their Enterprise Hubs, enhanced by their partnership with the British Library’s IP Centre and the ‘entrepreneurs in residence’ are providing increasingly valuable support to local start-ups and would-be business owners. They are also experimenting with the notion that an individual library service might be commissioned by other library services to provide external advice, something innovative and rare in the UK.

Does Northamptonshire’s project have lessons for other public libraries?

The Northamptonshire project suggests that there is real potential in one library service to provide leadership to others. However, this is a difficult and challenging terrain insofar as there is potential discrepancy between what the ‘provider’ and ‘client’ library interpreted the offer to be.

Leicestershire staff say they decided to put energy into seeking funding to re-launch a mothballed service because the Northamptonshire workshop and shadowing day helped them see the growing importance of supporting enterprise in addition to employment: ‘We went to the workshops. I was looking at the wider picture in Leicestershire and the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership priorities, and the City Deals, and now the Strategic Economic Plan. It doesn’t appear that getting people into work is the priority – it’s helping people set up enterprise that is the priority.’

Kent have also implemented some major enhancements to their service as a result of learning about the Northamptonshire model and many of these are clearly based on Enterprise Hubs, both in practical implementation and broader approach (eg linking to the Local Enterprise Partnership agenda, and working with enterprise experts).

For Nottingham, even though the Northamptonshire workshops and shadowing have not led to the launch of a new service, it has encouraged them to consider being more proactive around enterprise and updating their existing service. It has also enabled them to think about the potential their service has to develop, and the benefits of adopting approaches based on the experience of other local authorities.

Replicability

Can the Enterprise Hubs model be replicated in other library services through knowledge exchange, skills transfer and secondments?

Our view is that there is real scope (and a real need within the UK public library sector) for greater propagation of proven models. But there are significant hurdles to overcome which may require national leadership.

The replication of specific approaches from one library service to another is still very unusual in the UK context and where it does happen it tends to be very structured and centrally driven, for
instance World Book Night, Summer Reading Challenge, and BookStart.

What Northamptonshire is testing is the propagation of a broader package of services, using a peer-to-peer model rather than a top-down model of distributing a service. We heard several comments in relation to Enterprise Hubs which suggest more consensus is needed nationally about the benefits of one library service borrowing or copying from another, and about whether or not the increased consistency this would result in is a good thing. As one person outside Northamptonshire said: ‘*We really need a national shift in culture, a clear message that sharing [approaches] is now what everyone should be doing.*’

Secondly, while Northamptonshire hoped to initiate a structured process, other authorities saw this more as a chance to acquire knowledge in a casual way, with no commitment to adopting a structured sequence or process.

The final and biggest challenge we see in this model is the question of whether heads of library services and those they report to will buy into the notion of individual local authorities investing time and money in research and development and then seeking to share the financial cost of the intellectual property with others in the public library sector.

In our view all these hurdles could be overcome. Without more collaboration, however, it is difficult to see how public libraries across the nation can adapt at the pace required, while senior capacity at a local level is reduced.

Perhaps the first thing which is needed, however, is for one of the national bodies in the public libraries sphere to share the work of propagating Enterprise Hubs, so it becomes a collective sector-wide effort rather than one library service acting unilaterally. This could provide a first step towards a national ‘enterprise offer’.

If this happened there might be more incentive for other library services to invest in developing new services, knowing they might be able to share some of that cost rather than bear the cost on their own.

Northamptonshire’s original logic model

Shared Intelligence supported Northamptonshire Libraries to develop a logic model – a graphical representation of the logical relationships between the resources, activities, outcomes and impact of a programme. The aim was to enable Northamptonshire Libraries to consider and reflect upon how they planned to reach their desired goal.

**Inputs:** Workshops for other library authorities to explain the Enterprise Hubs model; and an offer from Northants to support library managers from other areas to import the model or develop something similar

**Processes:** Activities with a small number of interested authorities following-up the initial workshop

**Outcomes:** Other library authorities adopt the Enterprise Hubs model as a result of participation in the project, and recognition and awareness of the model increases at a national level

**Impacts:** Increased opportunity for economic wellbeing in participating library authorities and increased recognition of the role public libraries can play in promoting economic well-being

**Testing how the model is working:**

- Number of library authorities taking part and number who implement Enterprise Hubs
- Interview data on reasons why those who took part chose to do so
- Interview data on degree to which involvement with Northamptonshire helped other authorities decide whether or not to adopt the model
- Volume of additional requests for information or support from other authorities
- Balance of demand for information about Enterprise Hubs versus demand for hands-on support for implementation of the model