



Alt Valley Community Trust

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| Type of asset: | Various (sports centre, residential care home, library books) |
| Legal model: | Company limited by guarantee (trust) |
| Type of community enterprise: | Cross-subsidiser |
| Year of transfer: | Various |
| Type of transfer: | 30-Year leasehold, freehold |
| Full-time staff: | 70 |

Overview:

In September 2014, Liverpool began consultations on closing 11 of their remaining 18 libraries to make savings in line cuts in funding. Alt Valley Community Trust were invited to make an expression of interest for two of the libraries, based upon their previous successes locally, such as their ‘Communiversity’ for adult education, a project which is cross-subsidised partly through membership fees of the sports centre they were transferred leasehold for in 2010. Breck Road Library, and the site’s non-fixed assets (books, computers, fixtures and fittings), were legally transferred to the trust, receiving 10,000 books for free, with a legal covenant that if they failed to deliver the service in the future, all the books could be bought back for £1.

Overview

During summer and autumn 2014, Liverpool City Council held a series of public and stakeholder consultation meetings on proposed changes to their public libraries. The proposals consulted on included eleven of Liverpool’s eighteen community libraries being at risk of closure unless alternative arrangements could be found. This was in relation to severe budget pressures on Liverpool City Council with all service areas required to make savings due to a 58% cut in funding from central government. Alt Valley Community Trust, a Company limited by Guarantee, was set up in 1983 by the local community to oppose the closure of a school. Alt Valley Community Trust submitted expressions of interest for two of the eleven libraries, based upon their experience as a commissioned provider of library services in Croxteth. Alt Valley were commissioned to deliver the Croxteth Library service in November 2010, simultaneously taking on sports centre management under a 30 years lease at a peppercorn rent. The library at Croxteth is integrated with a community café and other learning facilities previously owned by the council. Due to the successful delivery of Croxteth Library for several years, Alt Valley were viewed as a potential solution which could help to prevent the closure of both

Dovecot and Breck Road Libraries following the most recent round of city council budget cuts.

Dovecot Library is situated in the Dovecot Multi-Activity Centre (MAC) which Alt Valley was already in the process of acquiring from Liverpool City Council. Breck Road Library is situated in a shopping mall in a building that is leased by Liverpool City Council. Dovecot MAC was subsequently taken over by Alt Valley and arrangements were put in place for Alt Valley to take on a sub-lease for the Breck Road Library site. In both cases, all of the libraries’ non-building related assets, including the books, computers, fixtures and furniture, were legally transferred to Alt Valley. A legal agreement was also put in place stating that if Alt Valley failed to deliver the library service in the future, all of the library assets (books, computers, fixtures and fittings) could be bought back by the council for £1.

People

Alt Valley support and advocate municipal ownership of library services. However, they recognise that the council face formidable financial pressures which mean services could be lost. Building on their experience of salvaging local public services and delivering changes



or improvements tailored to the community, they had expressed an interest in Dovecot and Breck Road libraries to help prevent their closure. Despite taking a reactive approach to asset acquisition, they have added significant value to their previous service takeovers, by tailoring the service to the community and actively engaging users in processes of service design. With over a thousand people a week using their services, they maintain an open dialogue with service users about improvements, and through frequent contact with library members are able to signpost them to other services, ensuring that no one 'falls through the cracks'. The trust are made up of local people, community engagement events happen weekly, and the annual general meeting each year is open for all of the community to attend. The ability of Alt Valley to tailor this service to the needs of their community has resulted in a 500% increase in book lending in their first library takeover at Croxteth library.

The relationship between the community and local councillors was described as being critical to the success of the project. Further, Liverpool has a strong history of community activism, and a well-established voluntary sector. The council recognise that changes in provision of their library service could mean the loss of expertise accrued over years by their in-house workforce. In turn, the City Council's Library Service continue to offer ongoing training and support for staff working for Alt Valley Community Trust who are now providing local library services.

Rules

Even as a relatively established organisation, Alt Valley Trust report that it would have been impossible for them to take on the burden of TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment). However, dealing with these rules was not necessary for the take-on of either Breck Road, or Dovecot Libraries. This was due to the fact that Liverpool Libraries staff are not contracted to specific buildings, rather they are contracted to work across the service. Alt Valley Community Trust have a series of their own rules surrounding employment. Firstly, they do not rely on volunteers to deliver their service. Secondly, staff should be chosen from the local community. To enable this to work over time, staff are supported to progress up the career ladder. This supports their ambition to create local jobs for local people. However, in general the organisation seeks to avoid making any other rules which might prevent staff from being able

to take 'real decisions' and make changes in line with community needs. The trust feel that this cooperative, flexible approach which allows employees to make change is part of their improved offer.

Resources

Partnership

Alt Valley Community Trust have a close relationship with the city council. Membership of all three libraries will be maintained under a single membership scheme which allows users to issue and return books consistently across the whole of Liverpool. Croxteth Library as a commissioned service has an allocated annual bookfund for purchasing additional books. However, Breck Road and Dovecot Libraries are independent from Liverpool City Council and Alt Valley Community Trust have sole responsibility for replenishing their own books at those sites.

Asset/finance

In Croxteth, the site was designated as requiring statutory library provision, demanding it stay in municipal ownership. The Breck Road Library building is not owned by the council. They hold the main lease, which they now sub-let to Alt Valley. Therefore the transfer in this instance was of books and fixtures only. The trust are currently looking to buy an alternative and larger property to deliver the service from in order to deliver additional community services.

Aside from the commissioned services by the council, Alt Valley generates revenue through membership of their sports centres. They also receive some funding from hiring out rooms for conference events, and have a steady turnover of around £2.5m a year. They have received national funding, under the Future Jobs Programme, and European Social Funding (ESF) for their education services. They have been one of the key recipients of ESF, and ERDF (European Regional Development Funding) for capital projects. There are concerns about whether this funding will be replaced by the Government following Brexit.