



Commissioning case study

Fresh Horizons Ltd: a commissioned library
and information service

The headlines

- Kirklees Council has commissioned social enterprise Fresh Horizons Ltd to deliver a library and information centre from a multi-agency community centre located in an area of deprivation.
- The library and information centre is managed by customer information advisors within the centre thus enabling the library service to be delivered without the need for a dedicated librarian.
- Ongoing assistance is provided by a development librarian from Kirklees Council who supports staff and local volunteers in delivering a high-quality service to the local community.

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What is the context?

Fresh Horizons Ltd is a social enterprise based in the Deighton community in Huddersfield. The organisation was established in 2002 and has grown from employing two staff to now employing over 70 local people. The organisation delivers a range of services across Kirklees and beyond with a turnover of £1.25 million. The key role of the organisation is to provide sustainable employment for people in areas of deprivation through contracting to deliver a range of services. The organisation works in close partnership with the local council, other voluntary and community sector organisations and the private sector.

Fresh Horizons has managed the Chestnut Centre since it was opened in 2005. This multi-agency community resource centre hosts a range of services including:

- a Sure Start children's centre run by Kirklees Council;
- a 60-place nursery run by Fresh Horizons Ltd;
- a co-located a team of NHS midwives and health visitors within the Sure Start area run by Locala (a spin-out social enterprise from the primary care trust);
- an office for Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing, the arms-length management organisation, which manages 23,000 council properties across Kirklees; and
- the children and adolescent mental health service run by South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Before the development of the library and information centre within the Chestnut Centre there was no library within the Deighton community, with local residents required to travel to a neighbouring community to gain access to library services.

What commissioning and delivery model has been adopted?

Kirklees Council wanted to locate a library and information centre within the Chestnut Centre and in 2007 the premises were extended using regeneration funding to create space for a small local library. Responsibility for its management was incorporated into Fresh Horizon Ltd's existing service level agreement with Kirklees Council as the social enterprise was already the managing agent for the centre and this approach provided the most cost-effective solution.

The library and information centre is currently open 66 hours per week. It is not operated as a discrete service within the centre but is managed by the existing front-of-house team (customer information advisors). This ensures that the local community can gain access to a range of library and information services without the need for a member of staff solely dedicated to operating the library. The centre was the first Kirklees Council library and information centre to pilot self-issue of books and also took on the delivery of credit union services on behalf of the local credit union. The front-of-house team receives regular support from a development librarian and is managed by the council's library service.

The revised service level agreement covering the management of the library and information centre commenced in January 2007 for an initial five-year period following which Kirklees Council planned to transfer the Chestnut Centre to Fresh Horizons Ltd as part of a wider asset transfer strategy. This transfer was originally scheduled for March 2013 but has been delayed owing to capacity issues within the property and legal departments within the council. The asset transfer is now scheduled for March 2015.

To date this is the only model of a social enterprise taking over the management and delivery of a library in Kirklees Council. However a further review of library services is under way with a requirement to contribute further budget savings for the council. A number of other communities are therefore looking to take over delivery of their libraries but using volunteers as opposed to paid members of staff.

In anticipation of a likely reduction in the funding provided by Kirklees Council to manage the library service, Fresh Horizons Ltd has explored options to maintain the library and information centre service. Part of the existing library space within the Chestnut Centre has been earmarked for the installation of a community pharmacy. Subject to receiving the planning consent the pharmacy will provide an additional revenue stream for the centre which can help to subsidise the library service while at the same time generating additional footfall.

Who are the key partners?

Fresh Horizon Ltd has 10 years' experience of working in partnership with Kirklees Council to support effective delivery of the Chestnut Centre. There is a relatively complex financial relationship between the council and Fresh Horizons Ltd given that the social enterprise is the managing agent of the building and both a tenant of and service provider to the council.

As managing agent Fresh Horizons Ltd pays for all costs relating to the running of the building (management, maintenance, cleaning, security and front of house). These costs are reimbursed to Fresh Horizons Ltd from the council on a quarterly basis. A management fee of 10 per cent of all service charges, rents and sessional income generated by the building is also paid to Fresh Horizons annually in arrears.

Fresh Horizons are paid a fee for the delivery of the library and information centre from the council's library service budget. A portion of this fee is paid back to the council to cover the rent and service charge for the library space, the support provided by the development librarian, a management fee for managing the library service and a contribution towards the front-of-house staff at the centre.

Quarterly service level agreement meetings between Fresh Horizons and Kirklees Council have been effective in maintaining good working relations and reviewing the performance against agreed service standards and targets. A data sharing agreement has been established to govern staff access to and management of confidential client information incorporated within library management system.

What has been the impact?

The approach of commissioning Fresh Horizons Ltd to deliver a library and information centre at the Chestnut Centre has improved access to a range of library and information services for the Deighton community.

While the library service is not dependent on volunteers the centre does provide volunteering opportunities for local people in order to improve their skills and employability. Local volunteers have been able to work alongside the customer information advisors to support some elements of the service and provide additional capacity for various reading activities and events. This model has proven successful in supporting volunteers into work or further training. The use of paid customer information advisors has provided a number of advantages over a volunteer-led library model, namely the ability to maintain service continuity, to reduce the management time required from the library service and to ensure high customer service standards.

The use of volunteers and staff drawn from the local area has helped to engage the local community and encourage residents to take up existing services and support. The customer information advisors and centre volunteers are aware of all of the services available at the centre and are therefore able to direct customers to the services that they need, including signposting to the Sure Start centre and the NHS midwives and health visitors team. Staff and volunteers at the centre knowing the local children and young people using the library and information services has helped to manage behaviour and there has been very little vandalism or antisocial behaviour.



Integrating the library and information centre with the existing front-of-house function and the use of self-service kiosks has meant that a library service is open for use whenever the Chestnut Centre is open and can be delivered at much lower costs when compared with having a dedicated librarian. By running the library and information centre through a not-for-profit organisation the library service is also able to benefit from discretionary business rates relief of 80 per cent.

The library and information centre is well used in terms of footfall and information technology use but struggles with book loans. There was not much of a reading culture in the Deighton community before the opening of the centre and staff and volunteers have had to work hard to engage the community in order to increase book lending. A range of reader development activities have been delivered with a particular focus

- having staff and volunteers drawn from the local area who have proved effective in encouraging the local community to use services at the Chestnut Centre and in reaching hard-to-reach groups; and
- ensuring that the service level agreement is not too prescriptive but is able to accommodate necessary changes in the service and amend agreed performance targets accordingly

The partnership working between Kirklees Council and Fresh Horizons Ltd has been maintained despite the inevitable difficulties and conflicts of interest arising during the course of a further review of the library service and likely reductions in library staff. The library and information centre provision is managed by the centre's existing front-of-house staff and so the approach has not had to address any issues relating to the replacement of professional librarians as they have never been based on site.

What have been the key elements of success?

The key success factors for the delivery of a new library and information centre as part of a commissioned service include:

- regular communication between Kirklees Council and Fresh Horizons Ltd and established trust based on a track record of delivering commissioned services;
- enthusiasm of staff on both sides and a willingness to work flexibly and to tailor services to meet the needs of the community;
- receiving the support of elected members from the local ward;
- effective management and support of the customer information advisors through the council's library service, ensuring that they feel part of a wider team with access to training and regular staff meetings;

What has been learnt?

While the model of commissioning an external provider to deliver a library and information centre has been successful in Deighton, the approach is heavily dependent on having a well-established and locally-based organisation that has both a track record of delivering services and strong links to the local community.

When commissioning an external provider to deliver a service that is part of a wider council department it is important to build in a period of shadowing. This can help to ensure that the service level agreement accurately reflects the service parameters and standards as well as highlighting any specific staff training and support needs.

In hindsight the service level agreement should have included a greater focus on reader development, in particular given the lack of a reading culture within the area and a need to proactively engage the community in order to boost book issues and use of the centre.

Who can I contact?

Mike McCusker, Managing Director at Fresh Horizons Ltd,
email mikemccusker@freshhorizons.org.uk,
telephone **01484 551520**, Twitter **@FreshHorizonsHD**

Other useful information

<http://www.freshhorizons.org.uk/>

<http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/index.aspx>