

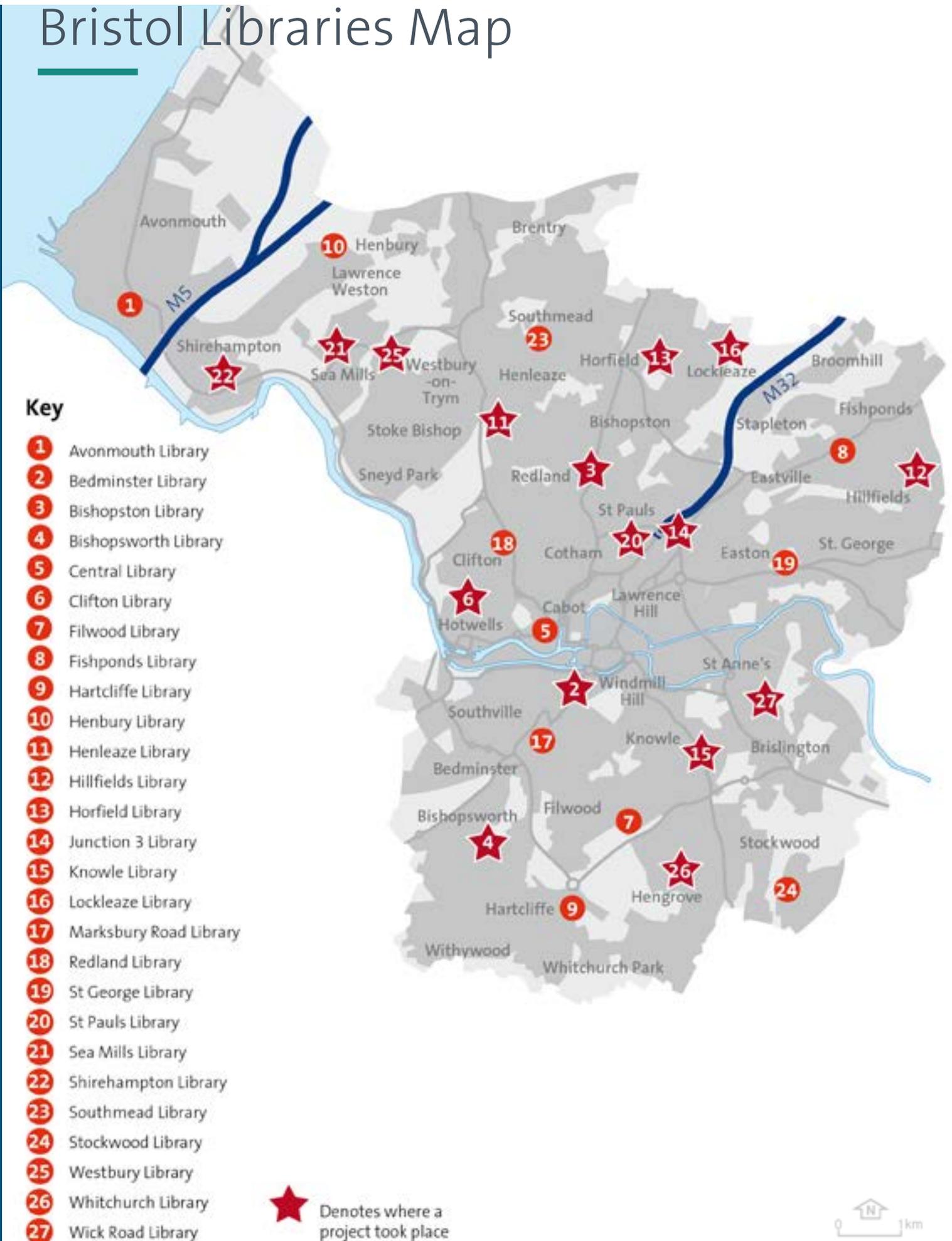


Bristol City Council Innovation Fund Project, Bristol Libraries

www.bristol.gov.uk/libraries



Bristol Libraries Map



Appreciation

We would like to start with a thank you to all those involved in the Innovation Fund project - this report reflects the extraordinary resilience, responsiveness, and adaptability by Bristol communities, which we recognise through the projects detailed here.

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Introduction

Overview of Report

This report summarises the development and delivery of the Bristol Libraries Innovation Fund from 2019 until 2022. The report will outline the background to the fund, the application process and the community and library service learning from the whole project. It will also consider if and how the aims of creation of the Innovation Fund were met.

The evaluation, in the form of case studies and summaries, will be on the 'open fund,' a fund of £3,000 per library for any community group to apply for. The outcomes of each project and any learning were recorded. The report will then review the learning by staff and project group. The final section will consider conclusions and learning to take forward.

This report has been supported and funded by Bristol Library Service. The work recounts an incredibly challenging period from the launch of the fund in October 2019 and during an unprecedented time of the Covid 19 pandemic which saw the closure of all libraries in Bristol during three national lockdowns and restrictions across the whole country. The disruption to libraries, their communities, and to the projects is evident in not only the length of time the overall project has taken to conclude, but also in the scale of the projects that could be delivered, and the number that are still not finished.

The projects could not have been delivered without the assistance of the library managers and supervisors, library development officers and frontline staff who supported every iteration of community plans to accommodate the everchanging landscape dictated by Covid guidelines. And of course, this would not have been possible without the friends and supporters of the library service who came forward with project ideas and engaged throughout the process.

Background to the creation of the Innovation Fund

Bristol has 27 public libraries offering a statutory service across the city. The service is managed by Bristol City Council. The library service has been part of two citywide public consultations about reductions to the library service budget since 2014. These consultations encouraged a period of intense debate about the number of libraries and the services they offered.

In 2019, after the last budget savings proposal was halted, the service embarked on a citywide engagement programme led by anchor community organisations to have more positive conversations about libraries with residents and communities. This led to the development of the Library Strategy 2020–2024. One of the primary aims of the Strategy was to work together with communities to animate the library buildings; buildings that are assets for communities in neighbourhoods, but mainly unused when the library itself was shut. Also, the engagement generated a wealth of ideas for activity in each library and we wanted to bring these ideas to fruition. This aspiration led to the creation of the Innovation Fund, which was a seed fund for Friends Groups and community groups to apply for and then fund activity or ideas to promote their local library.

Innovation Fund – aims

The Innovation Fund had two main aims. The first is detailed above, to provide seed funding for community groups to support and promote their local library. The second was for the library service to test greater community collaboration (more detail below). All Bristol Libraries are managed by Bristol City Council and the service is delivered by officers. There are no community-managed, or volunteer-run libraries. Greater collaboration was part of Theme 1 in the Library Strategy - Bristol's libraries empower and care although the work delivered met a broad range of measures across all 4 aims.

There was a recognised need in the service for better engagement with Bristol's communities to develop an extended offer to the service which better reflected the communities of the 27 libraries they served. This could create a more sustainable, vibrant, and connected library service in the future, more able to meet the needs of the communities it served by engaging and involving groups and individuals to develop and implement additional offers to the statutory core offer.

Aims of the project for the Library Service

- To successfully deliver a grant fund to communities for the first time
- To work more closely/collaboratively with the community
- To rebuild trust after a period of uncertainty
- To experiment with community-led projects
- To challenge the service to respond to community-led ideas
- To support communities in their ideas and priorities for their local library
- To guide communities through the complex council processes to achieve their aims
- To find out how the service could adapt to a more blurred delivery of community as well as local authority activity
- To test how residents responded to a blurred offer

Additional information

Information contained in this report is taken from the Innovation Fund evaluation reports and summaries from the projects as part of the Innovation Fund funding agreement.

Data for visits and issues in libraries is from pre-Covid 2019-20.



Library Background – 2017 to 2019

Project Funding Background

Libraries are not immune from the challenges facing local government and many councils are looking at efficiency savings across all services. Councils know they need to ensure they provide a “comprehensive and efficient service” and listen to and reflect the changing needs of their communities. (Libraries shaping the future Toolkit) ¹.

The Libraries Innovation Fund invited applications for awards of small grants to try out new and creative community-led ideas of working with libraries that would benefit local people, as well as provide learning and good practice that could be shared across Bristol.

The development of the Innovation Fund project was one strand that contributed to the general service direction outlined in the 2019 citywide engagement to connect the service more closely with the community.

A project team was recruited through the council to work over a period of a year to develop, implement and deliver a series of funded projects. The team worked with the library management team (LMT) and library development officers (LDOs) to bridge corporate requirements and community relationships.

The project was initiated by engaging all 27 communities to fully understand and document the community aspirations for their local library and through a variety of library and online events collected 1200 ideas about the library service that were published online.

The 7 outcome measures of the Libraries Shaping the Future research were elements of the Bristol Libraries Innovation Fund project that were embedded into the design of the application process and assessment criteria.

The application was also designed to capture elements of the One City Plan that envisioned

a city for the future sharing themed goals of physical and social possibility. Within this the 27 Bristol Libraries were recognised as key partners positioned in their communities that could support this (Bristol One City Plan) ².

The innovation fund offered a total fund of £108,000 across the 27 libraries in the City, divided into two separate streams;

Stream 1: The Friends Fund offering £1,000 to support Friends of libraries to establish and engage community support for their library with the aims to;

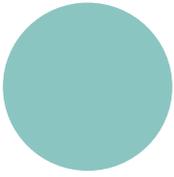
- Provide support and encouragement for the set up and development of Friends Groups in each of the libraries
- Help fast-track ideas already captured through the conversation process that has been in place since the start of the 2019

Applications for the Friends Fund would be assessed monthly at the Library Ideas Project Board or, later-on, on an ongoing ad hoc basis. This report will not detail the Friends fund but instead focus on Stream 2.

Stream 2: The second funding stream offered an allocation of £3,000 for open applications to support ideas which could impact in one or more of the following ways: i) Bring the library and communities together ii) Improve the space within library buildings iii) Improve how the library service is delivered and would be assessed against **4 criteria** that could meet the four strategic themes of the Library Strategy for Bristol;

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/libraries-shaping-the-future-report-and-case-studies>

² <https://www.bristolonecity.com/about-the-one-city-plan/>



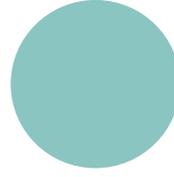
Bristol's libraries empower and care

- Libraries contribute to the empowerment of individuals, local communities and city partners



Bristol's libraries help connect people in communities

- Libraries help connect people to people and to opportunity, locally, citywide, nationally and internationally



Bristol's libraries are fair and inclusive

- Libraries contribute to economic inclusion, social mobility and democracy through the provision of services, learning opportunities and the development of skills, and public space for gatherings

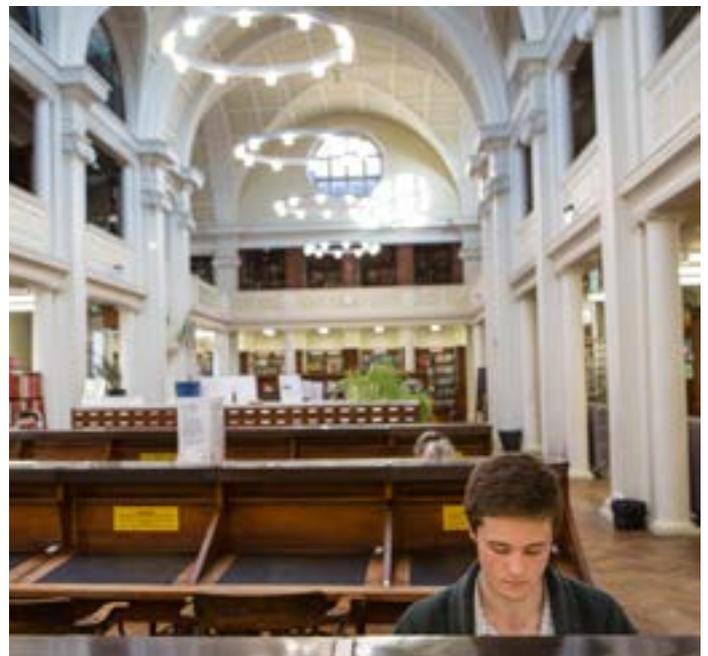


Bristol's libraries support and enable wellbeing

- Libraries promote mental and physical wellbeing by connecting people with knowledge, opportunities, services and with each other

The successful projects being required to show how they would support the fulfilment of the strategy aims, and evidence of being embedded in their local community and able to reflect the needs of that.

There was a deadline for the applications with the decisions to be made by a cross council project management board.



Launch of the Fund

The first, and as originally intended only, round of applications for funding were open from November 2019 and ran until October 2020, with all the projects originally intended to be completed by December 2020.

The open fund was a competitive, assessed process, with a deadline for applications, though support was available to help those less familiar with such application processes to apply.

The final applications were due by mid-January 2020 with decisions being announced by the end of that month.

The project team worked closely with the Libraries Reader Engagement Team – Library Development Officers and the Council’s Community Development Team to ensure maximum engagement and promotion to community projects.

Promotion was through mailing to community contacts, library posters and screen savers across the library estate computer network. A press release supported by Cllr Asher Craig was also shared.

“This is a new funding opportunity for friends’ groups and community organisations to work in partnership to make improvements to their local library.

“The fund will enable communities to take the lead on putting their ideas into action.”

(Cllr Asher Craig, Deputy Mayor)

In total we received 56 applications across all 27 libraries, and 2 Citywide projects. The projects ranged from buying furniture or equipment to funding activities such as creative writing workshops.

In January 2020, the Library Service and Innovation Fund Project Board made Innovation

Fund awards to 30 successful projects across 24 libraries including 1 citywide project, with a cumulative total of £66,000 of £81,000 funds awarded. Across the 24 libraries, 8 of the successful groups were Friends of Libraries from the 16 Friends Groups across the city.

Work began to develop the ideas and feasibility of delivery across the libraries. Discussions around partnership agreements, bank accounts and due diligence arrangements started. At this stage awards had been made but no funding transferred.

At the point where the funding was to be transferred and project launches were to take place, the global pandemic led to all libraries closing in the first national lockdown. The projects were paused amidst a general uncertainty about what the future held.

The Impact of Covid

It cannot be underestimated how considerable the impact of the Covid pandemic and closure of libraries was on the projects. Recognition of this highlights two salient points; firstly, the process of the delivery of the projects and any evaluation could no longer be linear and neither could it be measurable against pre-covid data or statistics; and secondly, the library service and communities that work alongside it are resilient, adaptive, and creative. This last point is perhaps a keynote for consideration and learning – that a library service can deliver in a variety of ways and adapt to the most extreme of circumstances.

Covid and the lockdowns did, unfortunately, result in the loss of some Friends groups including three of the best established and longer running groups. Some groups, however, took the opportunity to engage online through Zoom and Facebook to establish a new, dynamic, and energetic group who recognised even more keenly the importance of a library community to

people as a connection, to overcome loneliness, and to offer support.

There were other difficulties for the open funded projects and of the 30 originally awarded, 8 were unable to continue the offer. The majority were friends groups who had personal changes in circumstances with Covid but there was also the effect of library restrictions that made running open events impossible, and one instance where a group had to refocus their activity on mobilising community participation to tackle Covid (Designing a new social reality - Research on the impact of covid-19 on Bristol's VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) sector and what the future should be – Black South West Network 2020).³



Another critical element impacting the projects was libraries being closed, several times, then being opened in a restricted set up (call and collect, limited items on bookcases to allow for space between library users). All these measures were contrary to one of the original aims of the fund which was to increase numbers and diversity of users to the library.

The library service itself was able to be adaptive to this situation and take events and activities online with considerable success. This was due to having the resources (cost of running zoom, staff were trained and with capacity to source events and host them). However, as our Friends groups and other community groups are in the main run by volunteers giving their own time and dealing with their own personal issues, their capacity to adapt and commit to changing needs is more limited. Some of the projects were able to adjust – these can be seen in Henleaze who ran the writing workshop initially online, and to Imayla who took their project to the park and Bishopston who used Eventbrite to manage numbers.

Friend's groups and hosting of events in libraries invariably includes a drop in facility, offer of hot drinks and snacks. All of this had to change. There was also a cultural change in that over time people were no longer in the habit of going out to an event – and there were more 'no shows' than attendees.

³ https://static1.squarespace.com/static/594948a7414fb5804d2b4395/t/61f830af0af627036998df3a/1643655369988/Covid19_Report.pdf

Timeline of Innovation Fund and Covid lockdowns

Round 2 and 3 applications to award remaining fund of £22,000 across 12 libraries

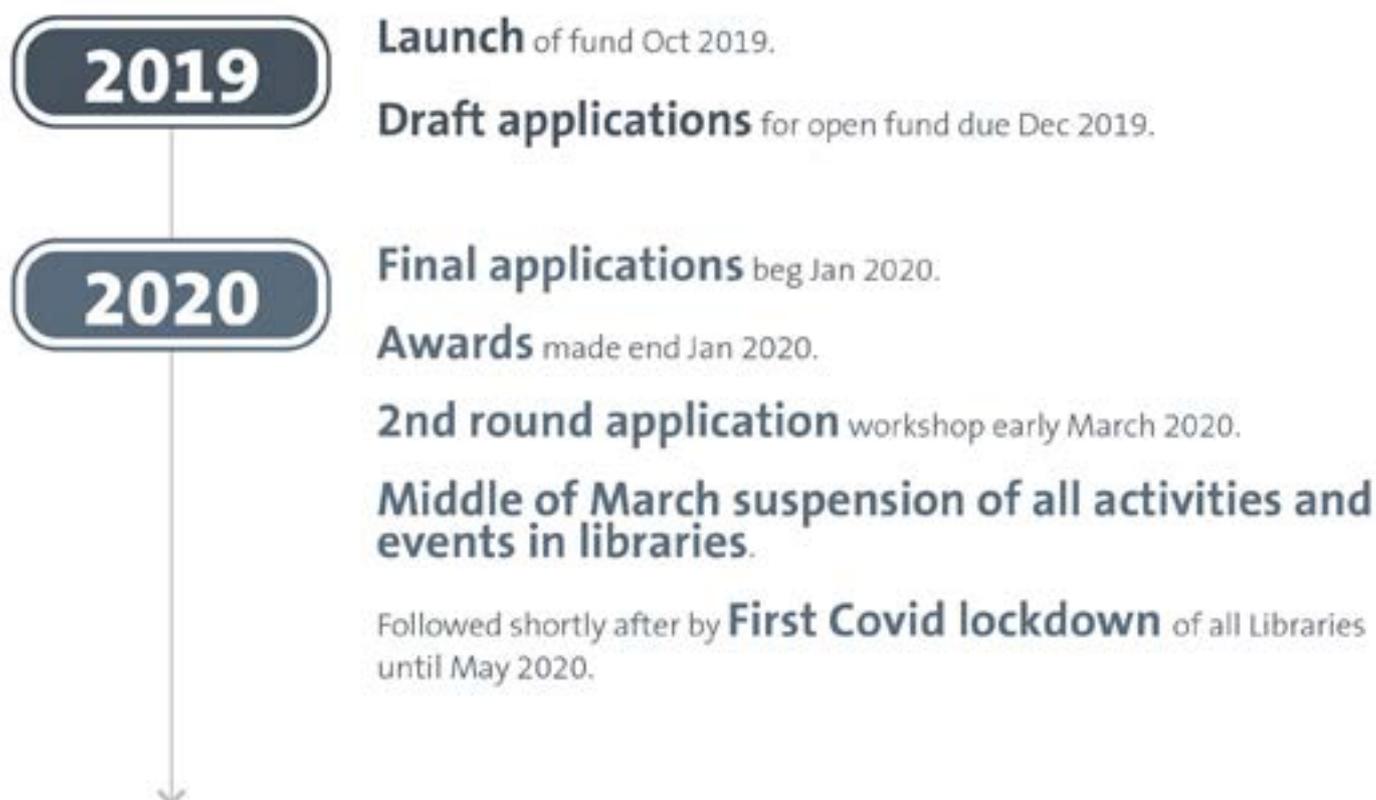
Second Round Open applications – June 2021

A second round of applications was offered in June 2021 with the remaining fund not previously allocated across 12 libraries. Even with promotion and press releases there was little uptake, and with many libraries still restricted in their opening, this may not have been surprising.

In total for this second round there were 5 applications across 4 libraries with 4 awards made. This left several libraries still without any funded projects or with money remaining.

Round 3

In February 2022, a third round of money was offered by engaging through a different process, considering that the appetite for library projects had not been high amongst community groups and that there was limited time left to deliver on the fund. A decision was made via the project board and with councillor agreement, that any final remaining money would be offered up to the community through the original ideas of 2019. A series of library based open events were held with the opportunity for the community to have their say on which ideas they would most like delivered. This has seen a Nook purchased for Henbury Library, activities at Hillfields Library for families and new accessible furniture in Avonmouth.



Final applications beg Jan 2020.

Awards made end Jan 2020.

2nd round application workshop early March 2020.

Middle of March suspension of all activities and events in libraries.

Followed shortly after by **First Covid lockdown** of all Libraries until May 2020.

Innovation Fund project paused until further notice.

2021

Beginning Jan 2021 **further lockdown announced.**

Feb 2021 **libraries remain closed.**

Beginning March 2021 **libraries start to open up** with a limited service of Call and Collect and extending the deadlines for the Innovation Fund projects delivered up to the end of January 2022, with the evaluation and learning to be compiled and completed by the end of March 2022.

Aug 2021 – **majority of libraries reopen in Bristol** with limited service – events and activities restricted to outside opening hours and limited number of attendees registered before the event.

2022

Beginning April 2022 – **libraries resume normal service for events and activities**, no longer need pre-booking or running outside opening hours.

June 2022 – **deadline for projects to be completed extended** until end August 2022.

Capturing evidence

At the outset, the fund was an opportunity to collect data that could be measured against library statistics to see which events and activities were bringing in new audiences and users of the library service. It was never intended to produce exact measurable outcomes or quantitative evaluation as the project team did not establish baseline data or specific collection tools.

The main idea was to give the communities in Bristol an opportunity to engage with their local library service in a way they may not have previously had the opportunity to and evaluate what happened in the most relevant way – this might be through stories, photos or collecting participant data. The original criteria to be awarded funding was based on the 4 aims of the Bristol library strategy, and recognition as to how a group may evaluate their project was part of this, with direction offered on how to capture it. An evaluation workshop was held on Zoom and offered to all award beneficiaries with only a small number of attendees.

The reality and a key point of learning for the library service became clear in that the groups who developed out of grassroots activity to support and enhance the offer of their local library were not established enough to run a project as well as produce a framework that collected and analysed data. In addition, there was not enough capacity in the library core staff to support this either. The impact of Covid and numerous lock downs and closures of libraries, with openings then restricted on number and opening times, meant that the focus fell more on writing risk assessments and keeping people safe as opposed to measuring numbers attending or assessing impact.

The body of information that has been collected is therefore variable in quality and affects any overall picture. What became clear through the process of running the programme is that rather than evidencing how projects could for instance increase the number and diversity of users of the library, it showed the challenges that both the library service – staff, buildings, facilities – and the project groups had to work together and communicate to reach a positive result. This was recognised by the projects and the library service and is picked up in the feedback section of the report.

There are two elements to the conclusion of the report:

- the impact that the projects had on libraries and the communities they serve;
- and the impact the process had on the library service working in partnership with a range of agencies and groups with varying levels of experience in delivering services alongside its core offer.

The Projects – what was delivered?

Bedminster Library

Main themes: Theme 3 - Connecting people in communities

Friends group (£3,000) - Projector and screen, chairs, community and interior design, community, and family events

This project is currently still running as the group had to re-establish after Covid and started up again in the summer of 2022



Case Study One

Bishopston Library

Main themes: Theme 2 - Inclusive and Fair, Young People

Group involved - Friends of Bishopston Library

A Series of Talented Events awarded £3,000

Project - Engaging young people in wider library activities

Bishopston Library is a modern build located on a busy shopping street in an area of high student population. The library has facilities for study in an upstairs mezzanine level. The library is well used with a recorded 123,918 items issued and 91,821 visits in 2019-20 the third highest ranking across the library estate. The Bristol Quality of Life survey ([QoL \(Quality of life in Bristol\)](#)) ranks satisfaction with the library at 66.5%.

The Friends of Bishopston Library (FOBL) were an established library friends group successful in the first round of open fund and awarded £3,000 in January 2020.

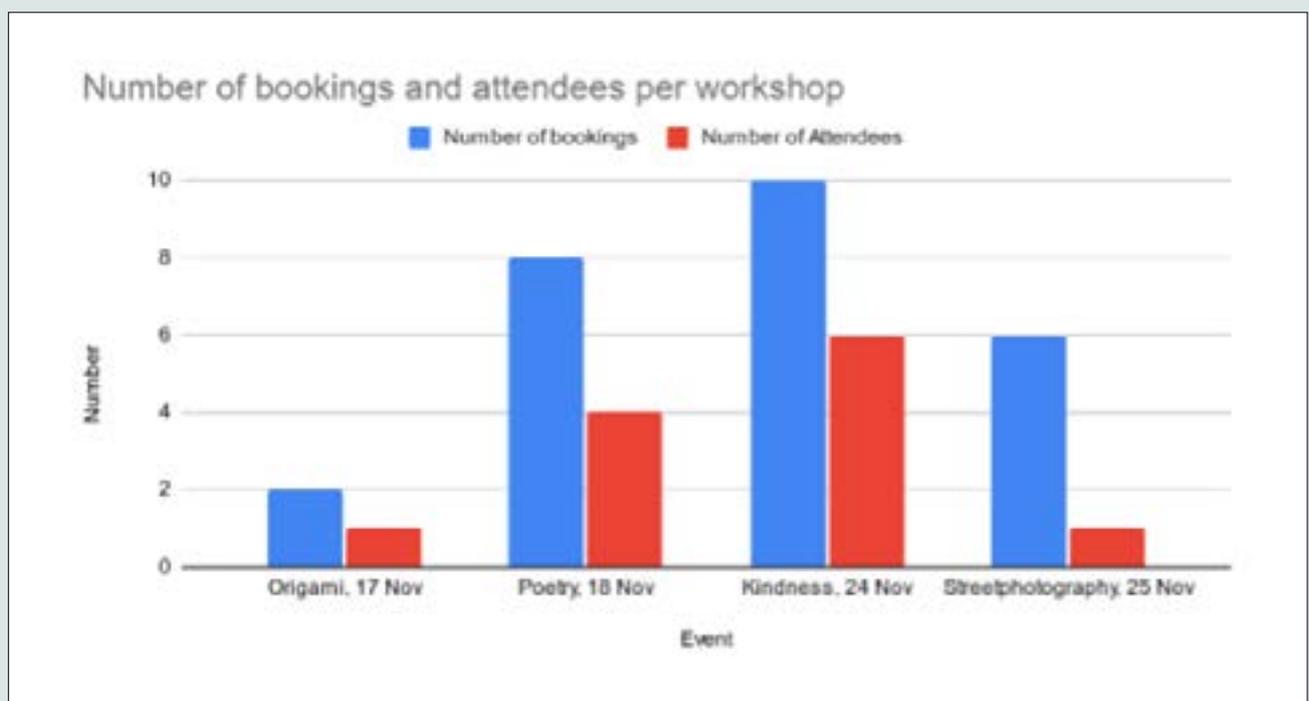
The aim of the project was to engage the age group 18-23 in activities in the library through appointment of a coordinator and following a launch event, put on up to 10 workshops across a range of themes such as creativity, science, and technology, culminating in a showcase event.



It was recognised that this age group used the library space for study but did not sign up to any of the extra events that the friends arranged in the library such as poetry reading and book talks and evening activity. There was also no younger representation in the FOBL group and offering them the chance to participate in activities and display their skills, would enable them to find out more about what they would like to see happening in the longer term.

The project plan was developed following the findings of the Rising report funded by the library service to explore what young people wanted from libraries

[\(My Library My Space \)⁴](#)



The project was originally set to start in early 2020 but due to Covid and several revisions finally launched in September 2021 with the appointment of a Young Person Co-ordinator who would lead on recruiting young ambassadors to be involved in the planning and delivery of a series of workshops. The project was running to the deadline of completion by December 2021 and had a tight timetable to commit to.

Engagement

Due to the continuing restrictions placed on libraries to run events and activities the uptake for the project was low.

However, the feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive and did give an opportunity to ask the group what they wanted to see more of from the library service. Engagement primarily came from online interactions, through social media and by promotion through a local pizza company offering free pizza at the events.

Only 2 ambassadors were recruited and there were difficulties in them being available to commit to all aspects of the project.

What Worked and Lessons Learnt

- Dedicated contact** The project had a committed member of the FOBL who saw the project through to completion including revisions of the plan and timeline for delivery. Their ability to communicate regularly with the library team to consider all iterations of the developing plan was key to the successful outcome. The time that was given by this individual might not be replicable across other friends groups.
- Recruiting a coordinator to run the project** being able to fund an experienced coordinator to manage the project where a friends group may not have had the capacity to do so in a voluntary capacity.
- Project Management and report writing** the project was able to recruit a coordinator to support the running of the project and the friends group representative was experienced in writing evaluation reports.
- Managing organisational requirements,** The original plan was aiming to engage 17–23-year-olds but due to the additional processes required to meet safeguarding legislation the age range was amended to 18. The young person coordinator and FOBL representative both required an enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check which the library service had to assist with as the group was not otherwise connected to a listed umbrella organisation.
- Use of social media to engage young people** the most engagement came through use of Instagram to promote events. This had a positive knock-on effect as a pizza company saw the events and offered free pizza for those attending on the night.
- Young people's knowledge of library services** the young people who engaged in the workshops did not know about the services available to them particularly this could be better advertised to students temporarily resident in Bristol to study.
- Recruiting young people ambassadors,** one of the report recommendations from the project was to produce a model for young person ambassadors that was more flexible and adapted to the busy lives of young people. This might take the form of sounding boards around development of new ideas.
- Flexible opening times of the library** the young people discussed the need for more opening hours including later evening openings.
- Legacy work** the project was dependent on a key individual within the friends group, consideration of how learning can continue and be built upon in their absence and how it is embedded within library service planning.

Case Study
Two

Bishopsworth Library

Main themes: Theme 3
- Connecting people in
communities, Creative writing

Group involved - Brave Bold Drama CIC (Community Interest Company) awarded £3,000

Project - To provide free entry-level creative writing workshops for people living in BS13. To build participants' confidence as writers by highlighting their work as stylishly and professionally as possible. To let the group negotiate the content and pace of the delivery.

Bishopsworth Library is located in a residential suburb in South Bristol. Satisfaction with Bishopsworth library in the QoL Survey 2019 indicated a higher-than-average rate for Bristol. During the year 2019-20 there were 19241 visits and 31648 items issued which ranks 18th and 15th respectively across 27 libraries.

Due to the impact of Covid and closure of libraries during this period, Brave Bold Drama revised their plans from working with young people to working with adults as very few young people attended the initial sessions, and they had found it difficult to get the content right across the age groups. During these initial online meetings (funded by John James Fund [Home - John James Bristol Foundation](https://www.johnjames.org.uk/))⁵ they built a committed group.

With the Innovation Funding they developed a regular Creative Writing Group at the library Mondays 7pm-8.30pm for people aged 18+ living in BS13. The group used local history as a focus for the group's writing. Local historians were brought in to speak and inspire the group. Five people became a core group who attended regularly. A further 4 joined just for some of the courses.

The group produced a wide range of creative writing in a range of forms and styles, including the children's book "Hop Aboard" A fully illustrated paperback storybook for children aged 3-6 which is now a published book people can buy. The book will be available in the library catalogue. There is also an animated version of the story www.bravebolddrama.co.uk/community/creative-writing-anthology.html#hopaboard

The group grew in confidence as writers, and as the weeks went on, participants were more ready to share work in progress, give each other encouragement and supportive feedback. A wider outcome came from the service curating their work online and sharing it on social media and this challenged the misconception, prevalent in some sections of the Bristol community that the BS13 area was a cultural cold spot.

"Coming to the group makes me feel better. It is so hard to find time to be creative. This group helps me carve out time for my creative writing. Since joining the group, I am on my phone less in the evenings and I am writing more. I feel loads better for that. I have made new friends in this group as well as feeling more confident about my writing. It is great too that we can borrow books from the library while we are at Creative Writing Group."

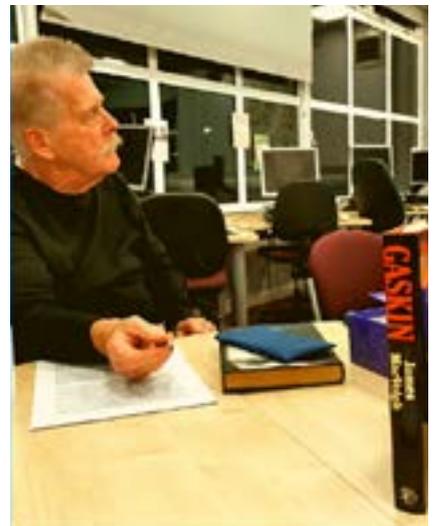
The positive outcomes from the project attracted further funding from Arts Council England to continue the work into 2023 and Brave Bold Drama are continuing to successfully run the group at Campus Pool Skatepark Cafe in Bishopsworth.

Excerpts of the writing can be found at www.bravebolddrama.co.uk/community/creative-writing-anthology.html

⁵ <https://www.johnjames.org.uk/>

What Worked and Lessons Learnt

- Brave Bold Drama (BBD) as an established CIC who were already engaged in the community were able to adapt their plans to work within Covid restrictions. The numbers who attended were low however they evidenced success and were able to go on to be awarded further funding from Arts Council England to continue running the group. It is unclear whether problems with accessing or managing the library space contributed to the group being moved to a new location.
- There were some issues with communication and lack of a single point of contact for any problems arising for BBD with the library service. The group were not able to access Wi-fi and the project team were not made aware of this initially. This was a considerable frustration for the facilitators as the sessions were a hybrid offer to be inclusive to those with caring responsibilities who could not attend in person.
- The library staff did not have an opportunity to establish a relationship with the group as they met in the evening when the library was closed. The staff felt that they would have benefitted from having more knowledge about what the group was doing and how they could have promoted it in the library. Similarly, BBD were keen to have more promotion from the library using their social media channels and contacts.
- During the running of the Innovation Fund there were a few staff changes in the Library Development Officer role in this area of the city which impacted in the liaison between project and library staff.
- BBD reported that working with an established organisation that holds legitimacy and reputation such as the library service was significant to their reputation as a grass roots organisation who felt they had to overcome barriers of privilege to get visibility and representation in the arts sector.



Some visiting writers: (left to right) Jack Drewry - lyricist, Jane Duffus - history writer and James MacVeigh - true crime writer.

Number of packs placed in libraries by mid-January:

Inner City and East			South		North	
St George	Fishponds	Hillfields	Filwood	Redland	Westbury	Southmead
0	8 (some taken from Hillfields)	20	32	0	11	26

Included in the packs was an evaluation form that could be completed and handed in to staff at the library who could then send the original or a scan or photo to the CASS team. The evaluation took the form of 4 questions with a simple smiley, sad, neutral faces to tick – and one question asking the reason for taking the pack.

Of all the packs collected only 1 evaluation form was returned to the project team. The form was completed with a negative response.

Feedback collected from library staff was more positive.

We had many positive comments from customers about how good the packs were and that they were a good idea – Redland Library

...there was a group of young adults who attended the library before Christmas who seemed particularly interested in the packs and genuinely engaged with them – Southmead Library

What Worked and Lessons Learnt

- Libraries in areas of higher deprivation – Southmead, Hillfields, and Filwood also had lower uptake of packs.
- Future consideration might include where the packs were placed and how they were promoted by staff in the library.
- It may have been useful to have compared footfall for each of the libraries compared to number of packs taken.
- Clearer distinction was needed between an adult and children’s pack as there was some confusion.
- Future ideas for continuing the packs with volunteers and CASS staff onsite to promote and advise.
- Better communication and understanding of named contacts for the project at CASS and the Library service to deal with issues such as distribution of packs and collection of evaluation forms.
- Have some clear incentive for evaluation forms to be completed and returned. The scheme was dealing with a sensitive area of health that has stigma attached and so to gain any understanding of impact without intruding in any way was problematic.

Case Study Four

Clifton Library

Main themes: Theme 3,
- Connecting people in
communities

Group involved - Friends of Clifton Centre and Library (FoCCal) awarded £3,000.

Project - Installation of an AV system to run film events at the library

Clifton Library is situated in a Grade 2 listed building in an affluent area of Bristol. The library is in the centre of Clifton Village on a pedestrianised road alongside several shops and cafes. In the most recent Quality of Life survey ([Quality of life in Bristol](#)) the area rated in the highest ranking for satisfaction with the library service 63%. In the year 2019-20 there were 53124 visits (7th highest) recorded and 30169 issues (ranked 16th out of 27).

The Friends of Clifton Library were established in 2015 and had successfully run as a group hosting self-funded events and activities in the library. They were well placed to submit an application for the Innovation Fund that would buy AV equipment to enhance the programme of activity they were already running but also to make the events more accessible and open to a wider audience.

Due to Covid closures and then issues effecting the supply chain, the equipment was installed later in 2021. The evaluation for the project reported:

The system has been used for 28 events ranging from films, PowerPoint presentations, illustrated talks and amplified talks. In addition to FoCCal events we have supported community talks ranging from West Bristol Climate Action and local author book events.



FoCCal ran a series of free events during the 2022 National Libraries Never Stop Learning Week.

Over the 28 events we have put on since the equipment was installed, we estimate 560 people attended.

Due to being an established group they had already put in place requirements around film licencing and had an alcohol licence. They worked well with the Library Development Officer and gave him regular updates on progress.

What Worked and Lessons Learnt

- The impact of Covid and Brexit affected the supply chain for equipment being purchased which lengthened the time to install. Although this was not something that could have been predicted in a risk register, it is worth considering in future how any impacts might affect pricing and supply on a small scale/funded project
- Discussions between internal departments in the council to decide on the installation complicated the group's ability to engage a contractor. The library service would benefit from having clear contacts and relationships to make timely decisions – this again was impacted by Covid as staff were redeployed or furloughed and return to BAU (Business as Usual) was lengthy.
- The group benefitted from being established and well supported and were more resilient and adaptable to the changing environment that Covid brought. The equipment purchased enhanced what was already in place so did not have to develop an audience or establish a foothold. A point for learning would be for the group to collect data and evaluation of those attending that could help the library service in their understanding of library users, but also so that events could be promoted and targeted to those who may not be engaging to encourage a more diverse audience.
- There is considerable councillor support and involvement in the group. Future evaluation exploring this relationship to a group's success may be useful learning.

Case Study Five

Henleaze Library

Main themes: Theme 4 - Support and enable wellbeing, Theme 3 - Connecting people in communities

Group involved - Friends of Henleaze Library awarded £3,000.

Project - The Happy Place – What Is Good in Our Lives. To run a series of creative workshops to improve participants wellbeing.

Henleaze library is in an affluent area of Bristol that ranks in the highest level of the least deprived in the National Deprivation Deciles (2019). It is the busiest branch library in Bristol with 124,464 visits in 2019-20 and 187,749 issues.

The Friends of Henleaze Library were an established Friend's group who had the benefit of a project manager on their committee who ably steered them through the process of application, award, and delivery of their ideas.

The friend's group had also developed a good relationship with the library staff and long-standing supervisor at the branch who supported the activity run by the group and had a good working relationship with the project team.

The project was intended to be a series of in person creative workshops and drop-in sessions with writers in a space designated in the library 'The Happy Place' with additional funding secured through Literature Works ([The home for creative writers in the South West - Literature Works](#))⁶. Due to the closure of the library and Covid, the project eventually ran between Oct 2021 and June 2022 in a hybrid series of online and then in person workshops.



The project secured two high profile writers; Mab Jones, who would be the writer in residence, and the Bristol City poet Caleb Parkin. As there could not be an ongoing presence in the library, a website was established to highlight the writing and share information about the ongoing work of the project ([thehappyplaceproject.com](#)) as well as providing a legacy for any future developments.

There were 4 online workshops held on the same day each week to provide consistency but were run one in the morning and one in the evening. All the workshops were free and delivered through Eventbrite. The promotion was through social media channels by the project and then reposted by Bristol Libraries and Literature Works. There was also promotion through posters and leafleting in the local area and to local FE (Further Education) colleges and LGBTQ+ networks.

⁶ <https://literatureworks.org.uk/>

Attendance at the workshops:

Online workshop	26th Oct 21 Young People	2nd Nov 21 General	9th Nov 21 General	16th Nov 21 LGBTQ+	Totals
Sign-ups	11	13	13	15	52
Attending	9	7	7	6	29

Most of the online attendees were from the USA (n.20) with only 4 from Bristol. The project reported that although this was good promotion for the library it did not contribute to the aim of increasing numbers attending and joining the library. There was an added element of work to running sessions online and learning for those involved in how to manage the Eventbrite and Zoom platforms. Safeguarding requirements for running a young person event also had to be considered and created another unanticipated element to the project.

This differed to the sessions held in the library which took place during May and June 2022 and attracted participants all from the local area and the majority were drop ins. This was promising and hopeful for a return to the previous level of engagement with the library community both those new to the library and returning visitors.

There were 8 sessions held with a mix of weekend and weekday, all were free to participate and delivered in the library facilitated by Mab and Caleb.

Drop-in Sessions – How Heard:

	Number	%
Approached in the library	27	75%
Poster outside library	3	8%
Flyer through door	1	3%
Henleaze Society Newsletter	1	3%
Via poet (Mab)	1	3%
Repeat attender	3	8%

Age	Number	%
Under 16	24	39%
16-24	1	2%
25-60	25	40%
Over 60	12	19%



All the sessions had positive feedback and there was the intergenerational element to the workshops that had not been previously considered.

“This free, so accessible session was a most enjoyable and interesting experience and was a practical demonstration of the best of creativity that one could hope for at one’s local library.”

The workshop evaluation highlighted how valuable a safe and reflective space within in the library was to people. The ‘Happy Place’ at Henleaze library set up in the mezzanine level of the library offered the perfect setting. The area has been popular with students and the wellbeing sessions have been run alongside individuals studying. This has not been problematic but for the evaluation has raised a point about use of and booking space in the library along with the universal offer that opens it to all.

What Worked and Lessons Learnt

- The project was successfully delivered against numerous challenges and met all the aims. There was positive feedback on having a place to come together as a community in a safe and welcoming space, to consider mental wellbeing. There is potential to join up learning from other projects to enhance any offer; the Library Service run wellbeing sessions online and in person across other libraries, and there is the partnership with CASS (see case study 3) to provide additional signposting and resources.
- The project benefitted from the services of an experienced project manager who oversaw the project and supported it through several iterations due to Covid and library closures.
- Practical issues about ensuring the space was booked through library staff.
- The online sessions provided a challenge for the group in using web platforms and the time and commitment to host and run them, as well as setting up a website. We hope to share this learning with other Friends groups in future citywide Friends’ meetings.
- Online sessions attracted participants from across the world, which was not the original intention behind the project, which was to provide a space for wellbeing in the local community. This may have been due to the high profile of Caleb Parkin. The wider issue of access to the internet and confidence to use it particularly among an older age group was reflected upon in the project report and for future planning.
- Working with young people involved an additional process for safeguarding which had not been anticipated.
- Possible further development of sessions targeting different age groups, or family groups, as well as intergenerational workshops.
- The sessions held in the library space attracted more participants than anticipated. All those who attended were already using the library services.
- There had been considerable promotion of the event through social media and flyers/posters which did not seem to increase new users of the library, and this is found across several the projects in libraries.
- The Friends group is dependent on individuals giving their time and energy to continue the work started by the project. The learning contained in the report was to be used for a next steps session but has been paused due to individuals leaving the group.

Hillfields Library

Project - First Aid Course for families

East Bristol Children's Centre were awarded £800 to deliver a four-week first aid course for parents and their children linking to the theme of 'We're going on a Bear Hunt' so that families could learn everyday practical first aid. Through using a story base both adults and children learnt new skills to keep themselves safe whilst developing community contacts and awareness of the library service.

Feedback from staff reported people who attended the workshop, who had not known about the library then joined to borrow books and started using other services for example Baby Bounce and Rhyme, and Storytime.

Although there is not a full evaluation available for this project there are points to note:

- Small one-off events can bring in new users to the library service and raise awareness of services available.
- The value in working with partner agencies to engage a wider audience to the library. East Bristol Children's Centre is located in Hillfields Library building, so exploring further links and evaluating the outcome more fully would be helpful to future planning.
- Better communication between the project team and event holders regarding booking the library space and requirements i.e., risk assessments would better help the library staff onsite and adhere to council policies.

Case Study Six

Horfield Library

Main theme: Theme 3
- Connecting People in Communities

Group involved - Friends of Horfield Library were awarded £1250 for 'Open Up' and £1750 for 'New Leaf'. This case study will focus on 'New Leaf.'

Project - 'NEW LEAF' To open up the unused land by the library as a garden.

Horfield Library sits in a residential area on a busy main road that runs from Bristol to Gloucestershire. There is a mix of residents including a student population from the University of the West of England. There are several local shops with a high proportion of late night take aways and off licences. There is a strong connection with the Friends of the library and the Ebenezer church located

across the road. The most recent ward profile data reports Horfield as having pockets of both high levels of deprivation (decile 2 where 1 is most deprived), and low levels of deprivation (decile 8 where 10 is least deprived) [Ward profile data \(bristol.gov.uk\)](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/council-and-mayor/statistics-census-information/ward-profile-data).⁷

Horfield library is ranked 17th of 27 in Bristol with 19,363 visits between 2019-20 and ranked 12th for number of issues at 31,917 for the year.

The project bid took account of the local need for a green shared space that would be a community focus and provide an area to engage in activities to grow plants and vegetables, to host events and where residents could come and sit. The library site offered this as the building had an adjoining unused green space that was fenced off from the road but that attracted fly tipping as a regular occurrence

⁷ <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/council-and-mayor/statistics-census-information/ward-profile-data>

In conversation with the library management team, it was decided that the Friends group would need to include fencing off the access to the staff car park to the back of the library in their planning. There was an additional issue of large waste bin units and charity clothes banks sitting in front of the fenced garden area that created an obstacle for planning any improvement works. The front fence was not removed after discussion with Parks due to safety concerns.

The original award for the project was made to the Ebenezer Church until there could be enough support to set up a Friends group. Incredibly, and due to the commitment and tenacity of the individuals involved, a Friend's group was established for the library during the first period of Covid and over the following lockdowns and library closures. The group successfully navigated Zoom meetings to establish a committee and write their constitution to become a fully-fledged group by September 2020. The group however was to face a series of what could potentially have been setbacks but were tackled with enthusiasm and never-ending determination.

The first obstacle was with setting up a bank account as banks were not taking on new charity accounts. The group, not to be deterred, took the issue to the media ([Money Box - The end of furlough - BBC Sounds](#)) and then went on to set up an account.

The next issue was to make the garden area safe and remove the bins. Due to significant staff shortages in the council through furloughing of staff and illness in this period, the process was extremely protracted and communication difficult to establish. However, with the waste and clothes bins gone, the fence was finally installed in April 2021 at the same time as water butts and hanging basket frames. The graffiti covered adjoining wall was painted and a community event to celebrate a milestone in the project

saw the decorating of the fencing with knitted and crocheted articles that appeared in a BBC news article ([Your pictures on the theme of 'fences' - BBC News](#))



(Photos courtesy of Horfield Friends Group)

The issue of bin removal would not usually form part of the evaluation of this project; however, it was significant to the group being able to move forward with the activity and proved a very lengthy and convoluted process to resolve, including legal advice, discussion with the planning department, intervention by Heads of Service as well as Bristol Waste over 18 months.



Inaugural opening September 2021

In September 2021, the Friends of Horfield Library held their inaugural event in the garden, with over 50 people attending. This was the first in several events that have included Christmas Carols in the garden, an

Easter event, as well as summer fairs. The group raised funding to pay for a bench that will provide the desired place to sit and read outside. There has been planting of trees and designs to have a mural on the wall. The group carried out a survey in the community to find out what was most hoped for in the space which is being used to plan for future activity. They made links with the council parks department to discuss ways they could work in partnership on the Greener Spaces initiative.

They were successful in securing a grant from the government's Welcome Back Fund distributed through local councils to run events to encourage people back to the high street, which was held in the garden space. The Friends group continue to fundraise through library events that support the wellbeing and social connections for people in the community.

The friends are however reliant on several key individuals to maintain the energy of the group and have benefitted from having a landscape designer on board to help shape their plans. Evaluation of the events and activities has highlighted the difficulty of the group being able to collect and evaluate any data from those attending, as well as run the event, ask for photo permissions and the other elements that are required.



Christmas 2021

What Worked and Lessons learnt

- The determination and resilience of the group to overcome obstacles was relative to the success in seeing the project through.
- Communication between different council departments to get issues resolved was problematic and held up the project.
- Covid impacted library staffing and supply chains that was unforeseen and even affected setting up a bank account for the group.
- There were complexities to the use of the space and accessing both the library building and garden for the Friends group which involved conversations with BCC (Bristol City Council) property and parks as certain aspects sat outside the authority of the library service. What appeared straightforward often required a series of compromises.
- The group developed a dialogue directly with the parks department to agree how to manage the space which gave them autonomy and ownership away from requiring the project team liaison. This developed out of a meeting between the heads of both parks and libraries to take forward.
- Demonstrated the public's assumption that the library service was also managing the building and green space around the library when both are corporate assets managed by different council departments.
- High Streets funding also highlighted Filton Avenue and this led to a joint project to consider the space in front of the garden for further landscaping.

Junction 3 Library

Group involved - Eastside Community Trust awarded £1,162 June 2021 to deliver Vinyl Connect.

Project - Vinyl Connect. The project developed from the peer-to-peer support programme 'Call to Connect' with people over 55 in the Easton and Lawrence Hill area, that looked to increase connections through self-organised activities. The project hoped to engage people from ethnic minority backgrounds with the aim on focusing on the spoken word and music from various cultures. Monthly evening sessions at the library were planned to give people the opportunity to share their vinyl collections and talk about why particular music was important to them, similar to BBC Radio 4's Desert Island Discs. The funding paid for the equipment to play and listen to vinyl records.

The project ran for a period of six months, from April until August 2022. Over that time and during the later stages of the project 4 people attended.

What Worked and Lessons learnt

- Extensive advertising across local bulletin boards, in the Up Our Street local magazine, and on local radio stations did not have the outcome hoped for, and numbers at the sessions were consistently very low. The project coordinator felt that if the project could have continued with a committed local volunteer to run the group, then it had the potential to build on the positive feedback from those who did attend. Junction 3 library does not currently have a Friends group.
- The group had good relationships with the library supervisor and library development officer (LDO), however the LDO retired and there was not the staffing capacity to then pick this up and continue to support.
- There was certainly the impact of Covid on the return to using libraries and uncertainty amongst the public about if and which libraries were open again. The project timeline was delayed by the closure of libraries and then the restriction on holding public events.
- There were issues around licencing for the use of music in a public venue that had not been anticipated in the original bid and after exploring various BCC departments and legal services advice there was not a clear position on where the library stood. A one-off licence agreement was purchased to enable the project to go ahead but this added to the further delays already felt through Covid.

Knowle Library

Group involved - Friends of Knowle Library were awarded £3,000 in Jan 2020.

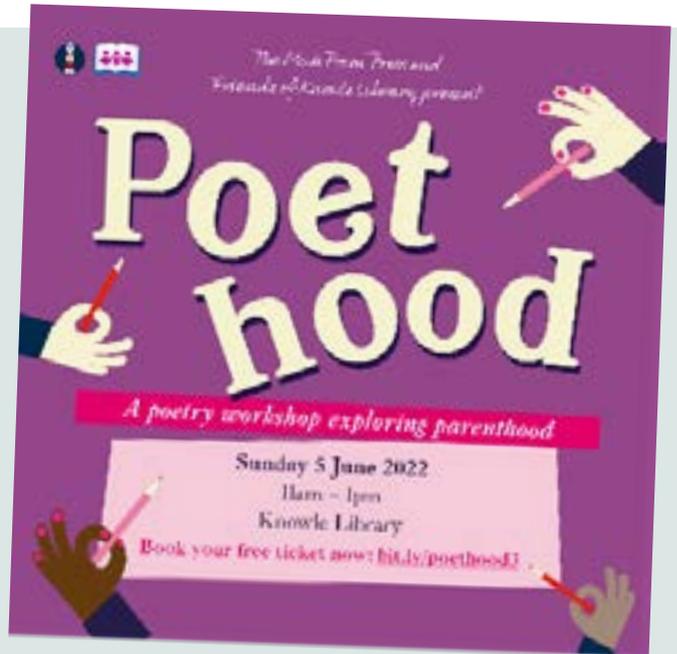
Project - A Library for all Ages: Intergenerational activities at Knowle Library to promote literacy, creativity and social interaction.

Friends of Knowle Library held their first event at the Redcatch community garden in August 2020. The library was closed at this time, and they were keen to put on activities for children, funded through their award. The local community space was an opportunity to do so in a Covid safe way.

A storyteller was engaged from Wild of the Worlds and tickets and promotion were through Facebook.

Thirty people attended and there was incredibly positive feedback, the majority who engaged with the library stand at the event were already members, and many were keen to hear when the library would reopen.

The Friends group have continued to host events and activities to raise awareness of the library and promote the Friends group including information and publicity stands at summer events, within the Broadwalk shopping centre, and in conjunction with the Friends of Jubilee Pool. They have worked with Mum Poem Press to run a series of poetry workshops for parents. There was a small attendance, in June 2022 there were 4 participants, however the feedback is overwhelmingly positive. The events have given the friends an opportunity to take responsibility for the library outside opening hours, liaising with the supervisor.



The group have shown how working in partnership with others, such as the Friends of Jubilee Pool, has increased their access to new audiences, and broadened their experience of running different types of events, such as using archive resources.



Stories in Redcatch park (photo courtesy of Friends of Knowle Library)

Lockleaze Library

Group involved - Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust (LNT) awarded £3,000 to run a series of community engagement activities including creative artwork.

Project - The original plan for Lockleaze Library was to employ a coordinator to run a project which engaged members of the community in the library and setting up of a Friends group.

Due to the period of lockdown closures, LNT needed to revise their plans. They realised that attendance at meetings was low, but residents did get involved if there were activities to do. A constituted Friends group was not necessarily realistic, but involving people through organising local activities was.



Case Study Seven

St Pauls Library

Main theme: Theme 2
- Bristol's libraries are fair and inclusive

Group involved - Imayla CIC awarded £3,000

Project - 'Book Jam'

To deliver a series of workshops with young people from the St Pauls area to encourage a wider engagement with reading and develop stronger relationships with the library.

The area of St Pauls is in an inner-city suburb in Bristol within the Ashley Ward. The geographic area encompasses households living in the ranges from those who are in the most affluent, to the street directly next to the library which is in one of the lowest deciles of the Lower Super Output Areas for deprivation.⁸

The library itself is situated within a community learning centre and is the smallest of the city's library spaces. The

public computers are located within the community areas and not the physical library. The ward area reports a higher-than-average satisfaction with libraries (2021-22 QoL)⁹

The number of visitors to the library during 2019-20 was recorded at 8909, the second from lowest in Bristol.

There were 8159 issues 2019-20 falling within the lowest numbers across Bristol libraries.

Imayla delivered a series of workshops in St Pauls library called "Book Jam." The original plan was for 4 seasonal spoken word workshops, or themed talks, throughout the year, run by local poets/spoken word artists, with the final one being a celebration event, hosted by the young people themselves. With the library closed during the first lockdown, Imayla revised their plan to ensure they were able to offer some engagement activity to young people in the local area.

⁸ <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/council-and-mayor/statistics-census-information/ward-profile-data>

⁹ <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/council-and-mayor/statistics-census-information/quality-of-life-in-bristol>



Discussing stories in the park

All the children the project worked with had family experience of poverty, or of parents with mental health challenges, and families who had little spoken English or parents in the prison system.

Some of the children struggled in school with behavioural or additional learning needs.

The project ran from August 2020 starting with a small group in the local park using examples in history of young people, such as Anne Frank, who had written diaries and of how the young people themselves had a story about their own experience of living through a pandemic and being in lock down. The theme continued with making time capsules. All the activities had an investigative element, with the children practicing reading clues and extracts from books. There was a lot of creativity - making clay figures and creating stories around the landmarks in the park. Some children loved to dance and were also keen on cartoons, they made pop art 'word balloons' and used film and photography to capture their ideas.

Drama also proved to be very popular with the group, and they created their own murder mystery film and spoof news show. They also made shadow puppets and time capsules, enabling the children to explore their memories and feelings around the lockdown experience.

The sessions then moved into the St Pauls Learning Centre as the library was not open at any time during the project. The Library Development Officer was able to attend several of the sessions both at the park and in the Learning Centre, to promote the library and sign up the children along with their accompanying family members for library membership. None of the young people who attended were members of the library before the project started.

The project, although on a small scale, was of significant benefit to the children who attended and Imayla, recognising this, applied for additional external funding to continue running the project in after school sessions.

“K loves Book ‘club’ and always wants to come. K and KZ talked about paying for Book Jam so that it could keep going and their friends could keep coming too.” Staff feedback

“what I like about Book Jam is, everyone, confidence and creativity”

What Worked and Lessons Learnt

- Imayla as an established organisation working within the St Pauls community was able to adapt their plans to accommodate Covid restrictions and deliver the project recognising the need of a group of young people who were particularly affected by not having access to structured activities outside of the family home. The staff were very experienced in engaging the young people and introduced the library as a place of creativity and learning through fun and stimulating activities.
- The LDO being at each of the sessions helped link the idea of the library and highlight the books and resources the children were able to access. Books to borrow were taken to each of the sessions.
- For the library service it would have been useful to have had a contingency budget to support some of the additional expenses that came to the group through the adaptations they had to make – for example hiring of a room space at the Learning Centre because the library was not open.
- For future project planning, it would be useful to consider over a longer period how the legacy impact could be measured i.e. Who continued to use the library, what other measures of value – young people inspired to read, involvement in drama, improvement in schooling etc.

“What I enjoyed most about Book Jam was all the art stuff. I would like to come more and more”

“I enjoyed time capsule and self-portrait and doing lots of acting with my friends who are the best. Next year I want to do more acting. I want to be in the main story”

- Jill the workshop sessional leader for Imayla was part of a library podcast where she talks further about the positive impact of the project for the children of the area shelplifebristol.podbean.com



Photo of the 'Time Capsule' artwork

Sea Mills Library

Project - Sea Mills '100 project'

Oral History Project awarded £720.

Sea Mills 100 (seamills100.co.uk/) is a centenary project that explores and celebrates the suburb's social history.

The project was awarded money through the Innovation Fund to further explore the history of the area by interviewing local people and capturing the rich oral history since the estate was built post World War 1.

12 people were interviewed either individually or as part of family groups, including one via zoom from Canada. Residents of retirement age as well as a couple of younger families and children were involved in the project. Most of the interviews were conducted in Sea Mills Library. The numbers were small due to Covid restrictions however there is scope within the project to continue

capturing further interviews with the purchased equipment.

One of the volunteers made an audio player by placing a professional unit, paid for by the project inside the shell of a 1950's radio. This has clips from the project and is in Sea Mills Library as a lasting legacy of the project and can be used for other projects.

Recordings are also placed in the Sea Mills phone box museum on the Square and deposited with the local studies section of Bristol Libraries where they will be preserved for future use and research.

Mary Milton who ran the project spoke on the Bristol Libraries podcast about the work and you can listen to it here

<https://shelflifebristol.podbean.com/e/18-sea-mills-100-with-mary-milton/>

Shirehampton Library

Main theme: Theme 1- Bristol's Libraries Empower and Care

Group involved - Friends of Shirehampton awarded £2995.

Project - Shire Community Living Room Project. Combining ideas and suggestions from the library conversations and the 5-Year Shirehampton Community Plan, the Friends of Shirehampton Library set up a Community Living Room that would provide a space for the people of Shirehampton to use at times when the library wasn't staffed.

The Innovation Fund award was specifically to buy computer equipment that could be used by the community at the living room drop-in sessions, and to run an IT literacy

course. The aim was to give people without a personal computer the opportunity to learn skills that would benefit their access to activities and information, including what is available through the library offer. There is an ancestry/family history group that runs monthly.

The attendance at events across the Community Living Room sessions are small in number but are regularly attended and have a dedicated number of volunteers hosting the sessions.

The Friends group have reported a positive working relationship with the library and staff and good communication helped with the project delivery.

Westbury Library

Main theme: Theme 3 - Connecting People in Communities

Group involved - Friends of Westbury Library awarded £2,700.

Project - Friends of Westbury Library were awarded money in the second round of bidding to create a space within the library for the community to use outside of staffed opening hours. The money was used to buy a storage space and chairs so that larger events

could be held. Regular coffee mornings are hosted by the Friends group, a number of small events, and the larger Community Forum. These have attracted new library members.

The Friends group have developed positive working relationships with the library staff which have helped them to put in place the necessary paperwork to run events outside of staffed hours.

Whitchurch Library

Main theme: Theme 3 - Connecting People in Communities

Group involved - Friends of Whitchurch Library awarded £3,000

Project - Friends of Whitchurch Library were awarded Innovation Funding to raise awareness of the library presence within a shopping precinct by creating book themed benches, signs and planting flowers in the empty spaces in front of the library building. The group were also successful in a CIL fund award to improve this area.



The Book Bench outside Whitchurch Library

A Library Garden Gang was formed to work on planting up the beds in time for the Bench Inauguration Event in November 2022. Local community groups such as the Whitchurch

Wombles helped prepare the area. The event included music and activities for all ages.

Friends of Whitchurch Library persisted with their project through a number of challenges including Covid and the lengthy periods of closure of the library. The project required considerable liaison with Asda who lease the land outside the library, but who were keen to work in partnership to improve the shared area. Although the first batch of flowers planted were all stolen the group have not been deterred and are trying different, less immediately attractive varieties to plant. Although they felt that their project was not as spectacular as they had hoped, they report positive feedback and encouragement from the community about the visual improvement. Future events held in the precinct are planned to continue to engage residents and raise awareness of the library.



The flower bed in front of the library

Case Study
Eight

Wick Road Library

Main theme: Theme 3
- Connecting People in
Communities

Group involved - Friends of St Anne's Park awarded £1111 in June 2021.

Project - Wick Road Library & St Anne's Park Story Circle.

Wick Road Library is situated in the East Brislington suburb of Bristol. The area has pockets of high deprivation. The Quality-of-Life survey (2019-20) showed a below average satisfaction with libraries in the ward data. The library ranked 12th across the city for number of visits (27807), and 10th for number of issues (55656).



Photo courtesy of Friends of St Anne's Park

The aim of the project was to put both the library and park at the heart of the community so that people from the local area could feel encouraged to be active members of both the library and Friends of St Anne's Park group. They felt that by taking library resources outside the library and bringing them to life through organised events they would promote the valuable work of the library and encourage people to use it who might not otherwise. The project linked with Bricks Bristol, an arts space in St Anne's and with the Bristol Refugee Festival.

The project worked with Bristol City Council parks department to install the wooden story circle and put-up signage on one of the



Photo courtesy of Friends of St Anne's Park

surrounding trees directing people to the library.

An initial event was held in October 2021 to engage people in thinking about how they wanted to create the story space and why the library and park were important to them. The session was led by 2 artists from Bricks ([**Bricks - St Annes House & Public Art in Bristol \(bricksbristol.org\)**](http://Bricks - St Annes House & Public Art in Bristol (bricksbristol.org))) and attracted 30 people, including representatives from the local asylum seeker community. A member of the library service signed up 2 new people for membership.

To launch the story circle, they gathered together the local community as well the Children's Librarian from Bristol Libraries, to read stories, do some crafts and enjoy some campfire snacks. Over 42 adults and children attended including members of the local community of asylum seekers informally sharing stories and home cooked food after the event had finished.

Over the summer of 2022 a local storyteller, Ava Maggins, ran a regular event to tell imaginative stories and open up new ways of enjoying the circle. The sessions proved popular – in July 25 adults and children attended, August - 18 adults and children and in September - 70 adults and children (this was linked up to a local 'Big Green Week' series of activities).

The Story Circle has continued to attract local activity and events and the group are hopeful to engage one of the Bristol Library book bikes at events in the future.

What Worked and Lessons Learnt

- Friends of parks groups have a similar set up as Friends of libraries as both require similar due diligence to work in partnership with Bristol City Council.
- The group already had established links with other council departments such as parks which meant that they did not have to ask the library service to liaise on their behalf but were just able to get on with the project.
- There were some initial challenges with communication between the group, the library staff and project team. The LDO for this library had several changes in personnel and this potentially impacted on the liaison between these parties.
- The group was keen to host the Libraries book bike to their launch event but unfortunately the bike was not yet operational. However, the set-up is ideal and just the sort of venue the bikes are aimed at.
- The project was able to engage families successfully as the Friends of St Anne's Park group was part of the local community with strong links to the local schools as well as both the park and library which they recognised as important to their own as well as other families with young children in the area.



Photo courtesy of Friends of St Anne's Park



Photo courtesy of Friends of St Anne's Park

What was learnt?

The Innovation Fund had two main aims. The first, to provide seed funding for community groups to realise some of the ideas that had developed from the engagement in 2019 that would support and promote their local library. The second was for the library service to test greater community collaboration to inform and improve future work with communities.

The lessons learnt from the project will be detailed in this report in two sections:

- i. Lessons learnt by the Library Service Management
- ii. Lessons learnt from the award beneficiaries

The learning will then inform a final section on taking forward recommendations.

Lessons learnt from the library service management

Aims of the project for the Library Service

- **To successfully deliver a grant fund to communities for the first time – *achieved*.** The mechanism for awarding grants and ensuring fairness and accountability was complex to set up and we were grateful for help from the Arts Team, Audit and Finance. Even with a straightforward process and application form, it was challenging for some communities who had no experience of funding applications or how to match their aims with funding aims.
- **To work more closely/collaboratively with the community – *achieved*.** Projects developed through the Innovation Fund meant much closer working with library frontline teams and the service as a whole. It was not without challenges as the library service is a large hierarchical service, but points of contact were established with Library Development Officers.
- **To rebuild trust after a period of uncertainty – *achieved*.** The last two citywide public consultations had been solely about reduction in the number of libraries and this meant there was hostility and mistrust from groups on the behalf of their communities. This work, however, ultimately led to more understanding between the library service, Friends Groups and residents.
- **To experiment with community-led projects – *achieved*.** We were keen to let the community lead on projects that they felt were important to their local library. This varied enormously as detailed above and some are still ongoing. The groups learnt from each other and adapted throughout the Covid years.
- **To challenge the service to respond to community-led ideas – *achieved*.** It was a challenge to move from a local authority service led approach to one of co-production and relinquishing control to residents not employed by the service. It challenged our processes and procedures and how we communicate. It uncovered aspects we had not anticipated in how bureaucratic the service and council can be and how this creates barriers. Sometimes those processes are for safety of all residents, but we do not explain that as well as we could.
- **To support communities in their ideas and priorities for their local library – *achieved*.** As detailed by the case studies above.
- **To guide communities through the complex council processes to achieve their aims – *partly achieved*.** This was quite difficult where naturally residents assume the library building, surrounding land and pavement were all under the control of the library service, and where in actuality a multitude of different council departments can often be involved.

- **To find out how the service could adapt to a more blurred delivery of community as well as local authority activity – *partly achieved*.** Shirehampton Living Room and Hillfields and Clifton Welcoming Spaces tested this model as they opened the library doors on usually closed days, inviting residents to use the space. The next step would be using the library services, not just spaces, on those days.
- **To test how residents responded to a blurred offer – *partly achieved*.** The service had concerns about quality of different activities and the response of communities and customers who may assume that everything done in a local library was overseen or delivered by the service. This perception did not result in any complaints or complexity. However, we maintained a watching brief on publicity and communications to ensure it was clear where the service were involved and where the community of Friends were the lead.

Lessons learnt from the award beneficiaries

1. Covid

For all the projects awarded, the impact of the Covid pandemic cannot be underestimated. The resilience and adaptability of any small scale, grant funded organisation or project can be tested by change, and there were huge challenges presented by such an unprecedented and unpredictable set of circumstances. For the library service there was a need to revise and adapt timelines and accept changes to project plans. There were also changes in staffing responsibilities and in personnel throughout the extended duration of the project. Contact throughout the pandemic was conducted online and via conference video calls. Due to this library staff had to be far more available to support operationally – including supervisors, managers, LDOs and specialist leads such as the Reader Engagement Team Safeguarding Lead.





There was no system to baseline data for comparison with previous library usage figures to quantify the impact of the projects.

For the projects the covid disruptions were relevant to the timeline of all the projects. There was a constant element of revising and reconsidering what could be done depending on Government and local Health and Safety advice and the changing situation with library closures and restrictions. For the community run agencies there were issues with recruitment of staff and funding cycles which meant that the project had to be delivered within a certain timeframe and could not be indefinitely postponed. Community projects were often funded to particular timescales with many staff on time limited contracts. This created challenges as libraries were not open to run the projects and the project deadlines were extended to take account of this. Some of the projects were able to revise their original plan to work within Covid restrictions whereas some of the projects had to be completely reworked as the plans had become unfeasible with new stricter requirements.

One organisation had to turn down their award as the demands on their services in relation to supporting community activity meant that they no longer had the capacity to deliver.

Many projects resulted in small numbers of attendees for events and activities, scaled down due to Covid restrictions such as social distancing and having to change to a more structured set up rather than what had

originally been intended at the outset which was to increase engagement through innovative approaches. The data collected through the projects was therefore a snapshot rather than a comparative measure.

2. Evaluation

All the projects were asked to produce an outline of how they would evaluate their project as part of the application process. We offered a suggested template for recording and reporting on the project – as well as how to evaluate the impact. We were not prescriptive as we tried to be as ‘hands off’ as possible and let the groups direct the way they felt best suited to run their project. We offered an evaluation workshop online during June 2021 of which only a small number attended and of those the majority were well versed in how to carry out evaluation.

For the groups that were newly set up and not experienced in delivering a project, there was evidence that some found the additional pressure of collecting evaluation data or survey information on top of organising and running an event, as well as asking for permission to take photos to use for project reporting, too much to coordinate. The importance of dedicating their time to actually organising and running the event was as much as some groups were able to do.



3. Communication with the library service

The library staff during this period were mainly furloughed, and some redeployed. Regular updates were sent from the Library Service Development Manager to keep award beneficiaries and friends groups connected and citywide friends meeting were well attended.

There needed to be more clarity about communication channels as the Innovation Fund team sat outside normal service delivery and so the operational issues did not always get through to the delivery team and vice versa. This created issues for some projects to get answers or clarity in a timely manner.

Their ability to communicate regularly with the library team to consider all iterations of the developing plan was key to the successful outcome. It was also very apparent that the advantages of groups employing the use of a single point of contact or even a project manager in some cases was a great benefit in helping mitigate this issue. However, as most groups are run by volunteers giving up their own time as and when they can fit it around other responsibilities and social requirements, it has to be recognised that this isn't generally possible so more time has to be allowed for planning and communication.



4. Navigating Council departments

There were varying difficulties in facilitating communication between council departments and getting sign off to put in place structures or changes e.g., Horfield fence, Clifton projector and music licencing. This was particularly difficult where there were staff redeployed during Covid, or when staff were furloughed or off work.

It was apparent that the complexities of dealing with multiple services and departments, and indeed, even that they would need to be involved at all, with groups assuming that the library service had more say in certain areas than they do, was not well understood and so not taken into account with project plans and timescales.

Groups that already had established links with other service areas were much better placed to navigate these complexities but without these contacts considerable time and capacity were needed to navigate council departments, procedures, and policies and in many cases library staff were needed to enable this.

5. Being adaptable

Several of the projects had to change their aims to suit the community – particularly the age range of their audience, partly due to the additional requirements for safeguarding and in light of who was initially engaged.. Organisations such as Imayla, an established agency working with young people, already had the necessary procedures and DBS clearance in place for staff to work with under 18s. The young person project at Bishopston took into account the additional time to set up for working with under 18s and opted not to. One of the projects (Knowle Friends of) worked with other established organisations who came in to deliver elements of the project with young people. Henleaze reported an additional unexpected element to the project running a young person workshop that required additional safeguarding checks to be in place.

Those groups able to adapt to changing circumstances have been able to complete their projects successfully.

6. Legacy

A lack of legacy preparation, in that Rising Arts ¹⁰, Vinyl Connect, Imayla, Bishopsworth, Henleaze, all had the potential to continue but as there was not enough support built into the Innovation Fund project for this at the end of their projects from the libraries team due to their own capacity issues (re-opening after Covid) and budget to support continued work, unfortunately the majority of projects have ended with few plans in place to continue the activities.

Although the legacy work is still to be developed from the libraries side, there was a continuation of the Imayla project (where they funded it), and the Brave Bold Drama project (Arts council funded). Horfield Friends did secure the government High Street funds from post Covid to use the garden space for attracting people back onto the high street. Whitchurch friends successfully bid for CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funds to build benches on the area outside library to make a more welcoming space.

7. Friends Groups and Community Groups

The Friends groups were often dependent on key members to mobilise activity, many of whom, have free time to devote to the group and projects. The library friend's membership have often, but not always, struggled to engage a younger or more diverse membership.

Friend's of Bristol Libraries groups develop from a group of individuals who come together often with many viewpoints and ideas which may not be compatible but which they do not know until they start. The community groups that were awarded funds were established and coherent with a single vision for the project.

Working in partnership with a local pizza company offering free pizza at events was

a great success in one case, demonstrating a particularly effective way of engaging young people.

The advantage of having a Project manager or at least a committed person with capacity to oversee a project which, as Friends groups are volunteers is not always possible has been very apparent.

The value of community or Friends groups having a connection to an established organisation such as the library service, to increase their visibility in the sector and add an element of credibility is a great advantage in seeking further partnerships or applying for further grants.

The CASS project would have benefitted from personal intervention. Leaving packs for people to take with no personal discussion meant there was little take-up. Further activity such as this would need to take place with actual physical and personal intervention of some kind.



¹⁰ This was one of our Pilot projects run concurrently

There is often an assumption amongst many community groups/friends that the library service has more within its 'gift' whereas in fact they do not have the power to make decisions about land around the library or to the fabric of building.

Communication, setting parameters, expectations and clear responsibilities need defining early on.

As well as understanding the role of the library and it's priorities, there was on occasion a clash in aims when the library service has a universal and statutory responsibility and as a council department has to comply with council guidelines.

8. Young People

How do we communicate better with young people as it's apparent many do not know what is on offer at libraries.

How do we involve young people in the development of our services and provide the spaces they would like to engage in (see also <https://rising.org.uk/reimagine>)



What next - recommendations

The Bristol Libraries Innovation Fund Project has produced a number of learning points for the service and the communities of Bristol which will support the development and thinking of a new Library Strategy that will follow from 2024.

The recommendations include:

- Consideration of how Bristol Libraries will facilitate more coherent communication between the areas of the service and council departments that work with communities.
- Continued conversations with local groups and library friends to create opportunities to maximise use of library spaces outside of staffed hours.
- Continued consideration of how we can make access easier for groups, for both buildings and through our hire processes.
- Collection of data that can support community groups and friends to evidence impact of activity.
- Improved collection of data for the library service to evidence use by all our communities.
- Focused engagement of young people to be active participants following up on the recommendations from the Rising Report and learning from Bishopston Library Friends.
- Events/Activities do not need to be traditionally 'library relevant', in fact things not generally within service scope can draw in different audiences.
- Continued focus on working with Friends and community groups to animate libraries as neighbourhood spaces.





If you would like this information in another language, Braille, audio, large print, easy English, BSL video or plain text please contact **0117 903 7370** or email **bristol.library.service@bristol.gov.uk**

