



Kensington Library, Liverpool



Location

Liverpool

Founded

Due to be taken over by KFCA in June 2019

Legal structure

Registered charity

Description of activity

Library

Key assets

Library

Staff and volunteers

One business manager (full-time) and one librarian (part-time). Trained volunteers will support the running of the library.

Overview

Kensington Fields Community Association (KFCA) is a registered charity which currently owns a community centre (including a children’s education room, computer lab, function room / hall with a fully equipped bar and kitchen, and a garden) and a car park. The community centre was bought by a group of local residents in 1999, and provides a range of free or low-cost activities and classes for the local community, with a particular focus on children, young people and older people. KFCA works with children from six upwards, providing activities in the evenings and play schemes in the school holidays. It also runs activities for older people to reduce social isolation, including a lunch club, a local history class, language classes and knitting groups. Other activities include a job club (run by a local housing company) and feeding the homeless of the community one day a week.

“We decided we could not allow a library in a community like this to go. It had to stay. So we went along to our local councillor and said ‘how can we keep this library open?’ and that we were interested. And believe me, we were not going to let that library close.”

Kensington Library is currently in the process of being transferred to KFCA from Liverpool City Council, and will be owned and managed by KFCA from June 2019. KFCA approached the council about taking over the library as the council was considering closing it. The council agreed to transfer ownership of the library to KFCA. The asset transfer has taken around two years and has been a slow and sometimes difficult process. However, Capacity Lab, an organisation who advises and supports community organisations, has helped KFCA with negotiations with Liverpool City Council for the transfer of the library.

This included support with securing a financial package and ensuring it received the support and infrastructure needed to make the library manageable and financially sustainable.

What difference community ownership makes

The benefits of community ownership of the library will be the maintenance and improvement of the service for the local community, who did not want the library to be closed. KFCA plans to increase and improve the services and activities available at the library to encourage greater usage (as it currently has the lowest access rates of all the libraries across Liverpool). It is particularly keen to ensure the library is a welcoming and inclusive environment for children and families from the community. It also plans to open a nursery in the library in the next two to three years, which will provide a valuable service to the local community and bring families into the library.

“I would love the library to be a library that children can use. I would love activities going on to entice them to come to that library. It’s got to be somewhere where they want to go.”

More widely, KFCA provides benefits for the local community through their services which are set up, supported and run by local people. The residents are very proud of the community centre and passionate about providing services to meet the needs of the community, e.g. providing hot meals for children during summer play schemes.

“We haven’t got a lot, but what we’ve got we’re proud of.”

Volunteers are crucial in supporting KFCA to provide these services, and the community is very supportive. Whilst KFCA are reliant on volunteers, they are very grateful for their support and there are mutual benefits as volunteers have often been able to develop new skills, helping them to gain paid employment in the future. KFCA finds that voluntary-run programmes work particularly well as they are able to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of the community.

Although the community has changed over time, KFCA has remained a hub of the community, as a result of listening to and moving with the community to ensure they are meeting their needs. It is trusted within the local community and has good relationships with the local school and church. The community-focused ethos of KFCA, and its long-standing commitment to the people of Kensington, is likely to be a key benefit and success factor of community ownership of the library.

“One of the things about this centre here, people just come. If somebody needs advice or help or doesn’t know where to get something from, it’s that door they knock on.”

Financial health

As an organisation KFCA currently faces financial challenges as a result of reduced funding opportunities. However, these are mitigated by regular income from the car park and support from external sources (in the form of community grants and business support). For Kensington Library, a financial package as part of the asset transfer from Liverpool City Council will support the running of the asset in the short-term. Long-term, rent from the at-home library service and the opening of a nursery will provide predictable income.

Reduced funding opportunities

The main challenge for KFCA as an organisation is in accessing funding. When the community centre was originally set up it was able to access funding through a number of local funding grants. However, austerity meant that funding opportunities were reduced which meant that it had to cut back on some services. The main expenditures for the organisation are staffing and maintenance. Expenditures tend to be relatively predictable. Whilst unexpected costs can arise and create difficulties, KFCA is generally able to manage these and fund ongoing maintenance and improvement.

KFCA owns a car park which provides its main source of income. It also currently receives community grants from Liverpool City Council and play scheme grants. Additionally, Capacity Lab is providing ongoing business support to KFCA, including advising on financial and governance matters, and sustainability planning to secure the future of the organisation. This has included mapping a fairly conservative five-year business plan which aims to help the organisation become more sustainable and adaptable and less reliant on grant funding to ensure it is still able to deliver what the community needs:

“There will always be a need in Kensington that will not be met by the state, sadly. It should be met by grant funders, but even so we’re trying to map around, so even if [grant funding] is not possible, how can we deliver a service that actually does meet that need?”



Plans for the library

As part of the asset transfer agreement, Liverpool City Council will give KFCA £75,000 per year for at least two years to support the running of the library. KFCA will also aim to secure grant funding (e.g. from the Steve Morgan foundation) to sustain the library financially in the short-term.

KFCA will also receive a consistent income of £12,000 a year in rent from Liverpool’s at-home library service who are based in the building. KFCA are aiming to improve the long-term sustainability of the library by opening a nursery within the building. This will require some initial investment (for modifications and a small extension) which it hopes to secure grant funding for, but will provide a significant source of income in the future as well as providing a valuable service for the local community.

Financial information

The following table provides an overview of KFCA’s income, expenditure and assets for the year ending 31st March 2018.

Income	£60,045
Expenditure	£79,565
Difference between income and expenditure	£19,520
Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	£19,277
Annual income from grant or subsidy	Not available
Fixed assets	£237
Current assets (Debtors; cash at bank and in hand)	£11,503
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	Not available
Total	Not available
Net assets	£3,313