

SCCL Chair's Report for AGM 29th June 2022

The Slow Return to Normal Operation

At last we have been able to return to some form of normality since the last AGM. However, our return to normal opening has been unfortunately delayed by a combination of factors. When about to reopen around a year ago, Covid-compliant, when other organisations were doing the same, we discovered the issue of poor ventilation. Then the rear shutter failed mid December. The Trustees unanimously agreed at a meeting on 3rd February that we would reopen, come what may, but of course not before the rear shutter was replaced because that is a vital emergency exit. We were informed on 25th March that the Council have approved the trunking and fan works to improve the ventilation, but there is no sign of its happening yet. On the previous day, 24th March, the rear shutter was replaced, and we moved with indecent haste to re-open, with the first shift taking place on 31st March. Things are not as before however, and various aspects are detailed below.

Membership

I will discuss our future and the lease situation at the end. In fairness to those with membership which has expired and having enjoying no benefits as we have been closed, we will extend free membership until our future is resolved. Any new members will be charged half fees to cover the same period, so until 30th November as from now. In the event that a new lease is granted, we will revert to normal operation.

Book Lending

As we have only just re-opened, there is nothing of significance to report on the book lending front. We are making extensive efforts to clear the large surplus of books upstairs, bringing some of the more attractive ones downstairs, and selling off others.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the organisation, without which we would not be able to operate at all. We have a few who have been with us for the complete journey to date; a period of about ten and a quarter years. The majority have joined somewhere along the way. Some have moved on, of course, perhaps moving away, or gaining paid employment, or just becoming inactive for one reason or another.

Until we actually re-opened, we did not know how many volunteers would be able to resume duties after a period of a little over two years. I estimate that we had about 44 active volunteers in March 2020, of whom about 20 have been able to return. Having lost just over half the workforce, meant

that we had to be selective in which shifts we could reopen, and when. Also it necessitated a recruitment drive for new volunteers, which is still ongoing. Paper adverts are out on noticeboards etc, and social media has also been employed. We have also just embarked, starting this Monday, on using the council's online process to tap into their pool of volunteers, known as Legends of the Forest. We set a limit of 20 on the number of volunteers we are seeking.

We currently have three new volunteers operating, and they all seem to be settling in well.

So far we have managed to get Thursday and Saturday morning shifts open, subsequently followed by Mondays and then Tuesdays. It is clear that we are currently over extended, with volunteers taking on more shifts than they might be comfortable with, and also switching from shift to shift to keep things running. The Trustees are extremely grateful for all this effort. It may be a little while before we have sufficient resources to re-open on Wednesdays and Saturday afternoons. We will certainly need to train up additional shift leaders.

Footfall

The footfall over such a short period has no meaningful pattern. Clearly the message that we have reopened is taking a long time to propagate through the local community. On most shifts new visitors come in, saying they did not know that we have reopened. So there are no steady numbers to report, as was the case when we last opened normally. For the record, up until 27th June, the average footfall on Saturday mornings was 16, with the best figure 27, corresponding figures for Tuesdays were 28 and 33, Thursdays 38 and 50, and Mondays 41 and 56. These figures reflect the state of the return of regular events. For example, no events have yet returned on Tuesdays, whereas Mondays have the French language class and the craft group, and English 1-2-1 tuition.

Funding

During the last period, a further £1500 grant was kindly awarded by United Way (Costco). This is intended to be put towards the purchase of air purifiers to improve the air quality in the building. A further £600 ward funding granted for the Twixmas event at the end of last year, which did not in fact take place because of Covid. Maybe this can be put towards a Twixmas event at the end of this year instead. Then just yesterday we received an offer from the Chingford Rotary Club to raise funds for us over the next year. Other financial details will appear in the Treasurer's report.

Partnerships and Events

Several of our regular weekly events were very keen to return, and so activities have reappeared quite rapidly. The current situation is indicated on the board behind reception. In brief, the French class and craft group have returned on Mondays plus 1-2-1 assistance with English. Tuesdays host the poetry-reading group and creative writing group on the first and last Tuesdays of each month respectively. We are also pleased that the Chase Lane

nursery children have resumed their lunchtime visits during term time, weather permitting. Thursday mornings see the return of “Knit and Natter”. Regular external events include the Valley Ward community police on selected Thursday afternoons, and the Valley Ward Councillor surgeries, on four Saturdays each month. We were very pleased also to host a joint Larkwood and Valley Ward forum meeting last evening. This is the first one after a break of several years.

We have two exciting new events to report. A commercial jewellery workshop has booked space for Tuesday mornings. This has attracted significant interest, and may also attract an audience. Then, from last Thursday, the council’s English conversation class relocated to SCCL in the 1pm to 2pm slot.

Numbers at some of these events have not returned to pre-pandemic levels as yet as, in many cases, previous members have not returned, and new members need to be attracted. It is pleasing to report that the numbers at the craft group this last Monday were significantly higher, following online promotion.

Trustees

South Chingford Community Library, as it has charitable status, is governed by a board of trustees. Our former Chair Roy Sutcliffe stood down quite recently. After a very difficult period in life we are very pleased that he has now found happiness again, and thank him for his many years of excellent service. We can report that we welcome Chris Cratchley to the board of Trustees following a recent Trustees’ meeting. She joins our secretary Greg Pope, Luke Kelly, Narinder Matharoo, and myself Richard Ashen as chair.

The Future

From the legal aspect, the council’s 15-year lease on this building expires on 15th July, just two and a half weeks hence. A new 10-year lease is on offer to enable us to carry on operating here as before. There is an absolute deadline of 30th November of this year for either this new lease to be negotiated, or else the council and ourselves to leave the premises for ever. It is my belief that we will carry on here until such time as this matter is resolved one way or the other.

As I see it, we are expecting a very significant financial investment from the council to ensure our medium term future. For our part, we need to demonstrate that we can continue to deliver the quality of service that we did until early 2020, and preferably to improve on it. The importance of SCCL to the local community is likely to increase in the current straitened times, particularly when we approach next Winter, when local residents in hardship may want to seek solace with us. Clearly on our part, our greatest need is more volunteers, maybe 15 or so to enable our return to full operation in a comfortable manner, and steps continue to try to recruit more, as previously stated.

I will conclude by saying that we are so pleased to be open to the public once more, after being absent from the high street for so long. On behalf of the Trustees, I express our thanks to all volunteers, members, local councillors, council members, and other library users without whose help, the library could not have prospered in the past in the way that it has, and we remain positive in the hope that SCCL will continue to flourish in the future.

Richard Ashen

Chair of SCCL Trustees

28th June 2022

SOUTH CHINGFORD COMMUNITY LIBRARY

Charity Registration Number 1153772

Financial Summary Accounting Year 2021 - 22

INCOME

Balance brought forward	16985.99
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Operating income

Membership fees	0.00
Internet use	0.00
Printing	0.00
Knitting Group	0.00
Book Sales	7.61
Language groups	0.00
Events	0.00
Donations	4.03
	11.64

Funding

Ward Funding	2267.00
Other Grants	1500.00

Rental Income

Sundry	0.00
LBWF	156.00
	156.00

Bank Interest	0.00
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20920.63

EXPENDITURE

Bank payments	2770.22
Petty Cash payments	180.26

17970.15

Bank Balance	17942.80
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Cash Balance	27.35
	17970.15

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Charity Registration Number 1153772

Financial Summary Accounting Year 2021 - 22

CASH EXPENDITURE

Stationery	13.00
Books	0.00
Newspapers	0.00
Cleaning Materials	13.77
Catering etc	15.24
Repairs etc	85.25
Furniture	0.00
IT Supplies	16.00
Postage	0.00
Sundry	37.00
Cash adjustment	0.00
	<u>180.26</u>

BANK EXPENDITURE

Telephone	986.20
Computers	79.99
Computer & Printer Supplies	0.00
Waste	595.92
Twxmas	0.00
Cleaning	0.00
Entertaining	0.00
Stationery	0.00
Insurance	574.11
Furniture	300.00
Sundry (aircon)	234.00
	<u>2770.22</u>